

3.4 OPERATION VITTLES



FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- How have individuals or groups worked together to help those in need?

STANDARD #2 TIME, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE.

LESSON OVERVIEW:

Students will review the division of Germany after WWII and learn about the Berlin Airlift, code name “Operation Vittles,” which was conducted as a result of the Soviet Blockade of Berlin during 1948-1949. Students will engage in an English/Language Arts listening and writing activity as the teacher reads the non-fiction picture book, *Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot*, by Margot Theis Raven.

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

After World War II (from 1945 through 1949), the Allies divided Germany into 4 occupation zones with each zone being controlled by one of the Allies (United States, Soviet Union, United Kingdom, and France). Since Berlin was the capital of Germany, the Allies decided to divide the city into four sectors and each of the Allies would control one sector, even though Berlin itself was physically within the Soviet zone. As a result of differing philosophies over the administration and the future of Germany, the communist Soviet government began to disagree with the democratic governments of the other Allies. Thus, the Soviets wanted the Western Allies to leave West Berlin as it was within their zone. The United States, United Kingdom, and France felt that if they left West Berlin it would come under the communist regime. It appeared that, even though the Allies were to eventually return Germany to German rule, the Soviets would not give up their control. To prevent the spread of communism, the Western Allies decided to remain in West Berlin. Neither the Soviets nor the Allies used their military power to remove the other. With the memory of WWII so fresh in their minds, no one wanted to start another war; hence the Cold



War began. Berlin became one of the so-called “battlegrounds” in this new kind of warfare.

The night of June 23, 1948, the Soviets blocked all of the railways, roads, and waterways to prevent supplies from entering West Berlin. However, the Soviets did not stop the Western Allies from using the airspace. The Western Allies decided to fly planes into Berlin with supplies; this is called the Berlin Airlift, which lasted until August 27, 1949, over three months after the Soviet Blockade had ended on May 12, 1949. The supply boxes containing such items as coal and food were flown to the awaiting West Berliners. Every 3 minutes a plane took off from Tempelhof Airport in West Berlin after having



dropped off the supplies. The code name for this military mission was “Operation Vittles.” Even American songwriter Irving Berlin wrote a song called “Operation Vittles” for this effort.

What about the children of Berlin? An American pilot, Lt. Gail Halvorsen, met some children along the fenced area of Tempelhof Airport and was touched by their politeness when he gave them some gum he had in his pocket. He told the small group of children that he would drop them some candy when he flew over the area the next day. He used handkerchiefs to make parachutes and attached gum and candy. He knew this was not following the rules, but he wanted to give the children some happiness. The small group of children grew to hundreds. Soon the Candy Bomber, Chocolate Pilot, Uncle Wiggly Wings, was discovered! His mission was allowed to continue and soon American candy companies and schools and other groups began to send candy to Berlin for the Chocolate Pilots to drop the candy bombs. This small act of kindness helped to create a foundation of respect and cooperation between the American and German people that extends to this day.

TIME:

3 (45-minute Class Periods)



INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES:

- 1 copy of *Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot*, a picture book by Margot Theis Raven
- Operation Vittles: The Berlin Airlift PowerPoint (**PowerPoint 3.4 A on Resource Disc**)
- *Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot* ELA/ SS Listening and Writing Activity (**Handout 3.4 B on Resource Disc**)

PROCEDURE:



DAY 1:

Anticipatory Set: To help students understand the significance of the airlift, the teacher will ask the students as a group to generate answers for the following scenarios by projecting Slide 1 from the Airlift PowerPoint (**PowerPoint 3.4 A on Resource Disc**). A brief script accompanies each slide to offer the teacher discussion points.

Slide 1: Title

Slide 2: Pretend that you are living in a castle, and the enemy is approaching. The drawbridge over the moat is raised just in time to prevent the knights from entering. Now what? What needs must be met for you to survive? e.g. food, water, heat. Your friends would like to help you without starting a battle. What can they do to help you? e.g. dig tunnels, use disguises like the enemy. How many days can you survive before surrendering?

Consider yourself in the same situation, but your friends have access to modern day technology. How might they be able to help you? e.g. use airplanes to drop off supplies

The teacher will continue to project the PowerPoint slides as follows. The following discussion points are suggested:

Slide 3: This 1945 map shows how the Allies divided Germany after WWII. Germany was divided into 4 zones with each zone being controlled by one of the Allies (United States, Soviet Union, United Kingdom, and France). Ask students: 1) Which countries control which zones 2) Why is Berlin noted? 3) Since Berlin is the capital, how do you think it was divided?

Slide 4: Since Berlin was the capital of Germany, it was decided that each of the Allies would control one sector of the city. Note that Berlin was within the Soviet zone. As time went on the Soviet government which was Communist began to disagree with the democratic governments of the other Allies. The Soviets want-

ed the Western Allies to leave West Berlin as it was within their zone. The United States, United Kingdom, and France felt that if they left West Berlin it would come under Communist rule. It appeared that even though the Allies were to eventually return Germany to German rule, the Soviets were not going to give up their control. To prevent the spread of Communism, the Western Allies decided to remain in West Berlin. This slide shows how Berlin was divided among the Allies, but remember, in what zone was the city?

Slide 5: Notice that the location of the capital city, Berlin, was within the Soviet controlled zone. What problems do you think arose when the United States, United Kingdom, and France did not do as the Soviets wanted?

Share with the students that the Soviets did not use their military power to remove the Western Allies, nor did the Western Allies use military force against the Soviets. Why? When a student recognizes that the countries were not interested in starting another war after WWII had just ended, discuss the term *Cold War*. Ask students what measures the Soviets might have taken without engaging in conflict. The Soviets “closed their arms,” blocked all of the railways and roads to prevent supplies from entering West Berlin and the Western Allies from entering or leaving the city by land or water. This action was called the Berlin Blockade. Based on this context, have the students define the term blockade. Remind the students of the Anticipatory Set activity that deals with a castle surrounded by an enemy. Go to the next slide and have students share their ideas as to what might have happened next.

Slide 6: What can the Allies do to prevent WW III? Allow students to brainstorm ideas.

Slide 7: Upon looking at the picture have students speculate what the Western Allies decided to do! Explain that the Western Allies’ decision to fly planes into Berlin with supplies is called the Berlin Airlift. Ask students: 1) How many months did the airlift last? (about 13 months). Explain to students that only air routes were still available to transport supplies. Discuss the complexities of the effort to do this, e.g. organization of available airports and collection and distribution of goods.

Slide 8: Every 3 minutes a plane took off from the Tempelhof Airport in West Berlin. The code name for this military mission was “Operation Vittles.” The teacher should define the word vittles and then ask the students why this term was a good choice.

Slide 9: What about the children of Berlin? Ask the students to examine the picture and share what they see. What must their lives have been like? What were their needs? What were their wants? Break students into groups of 3. Ask students to discuss these issues in small groups. One person should be designated the secretary for the group and on a sheet of paper list their thoughts into two columns labeled “Wants” and “Needs”. They should share their answers with the whole group.

Slide 10: What is the reaction of the children as they see the plane? Why might they react this way?

Slide 11: Ask the students, what might the tiny parachutes hold?

Slide 12: Here is an example of one of those tiny parachutes.

Slide 13: Stop the slideshow. Explain that during the next class they will find out what those tiny parachutes held for the children of Berlin. Ask students to be prepared to share their ideas tomorrow.

DAY 2:

The teacher may ask the students to share what they think the parachutes held for the Berlin children. Optional: If any student offers candy as a possibility, the teacher could then distribute small chocolate bars to the students as the story is read aloud, or the candy could be given after the reading.

The teacher will conduct an interdisciplinary social studies/English Language Arts (ELA) listening and writing activity by reading aloud the non-fiction account of a young girl, Mercedes, and her encounter with the Chocolate Pilot during the Berlin Airlift.

The students will be engaged in a listening activity as the picture book, *Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot* is read orally to the class. Prior to reading the teacher should distribute the *Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot* ELA/SS Listening and Writing Activity (**Handout 3.4 B on Resource Disc**) and read the directions with the students. The book should be read twice orally. During the readings the students should take notes in the box provided using any graphic organizer that they prefer, e.g., webs and charts. The questions should not be reviewed prior to the readings. However, as a modification, the teacher may read the questions with the students before they listen to the story. As a modification, the teacher may choose to have the students complete only selected writing activities. These may be completed in class or for homework.

DAY 3:

Begin class by asking students what they would like to know more about. Perhaps the next slides will answer some of their questions. Allow students to be the “script”. They should have enough background information to explain the following slides.

Slide 14: You’ve just heard Mercedes’ story. Now, let’s meet the real people. Lt. Gail Halvorsen meeting the children of Berlin at the fence along Tempelhof Airport.

Slide 15: The Chocolate Pilot, Lt. Gail Halvorsen, prepares the candy parachutes.

Slide 16: Lt. Gail Halvorsen reading the letters he received from the Berlin children. Perhaps he’s reading Mercedes’ or Peter’s letter!

Slide 17: This map shows the air routes used during the airlift. Note that there were 2 air corridors to enter West Berlin and one to exit. This organization helped with the air traffic control. There were pilots and crewman who lost their lives during “Operation Vittles.” Bad weather was the cause of many of the crashes.

Slide 18: This memorial to the Berlin Airlift may be found at the Tempelhof Airport in Berlin. What do you think the shape symbolizes? It represents the 3 air routes used for the airlift. The Germans refer to it as the “hunger rake.”

Slide 19: This memorial to the Berlin Airlift is in England.

Slide 20: Here is a picture of the real Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot.

Slide 21: The teacher may wish to have students hear Ret. Col. Gail Halvorsen talk about the Berlin Airlift.

Slide 22: Photo of Uncle Wiggly Wings.

Slide 23: Have students discuss ways in which they might help others in need either as a class or individually.

WHOLE GROUP REFLECTION:

- Yes, the Chocolate Pilot helped to make the lives of children in war torn Berlin happier with his candy bombs, but what he accomplished was far greater. Discuss how one man’s act of kindness affected a nation of people. Are there any examples of this today?

MODIFICATIONS:

- Break students into pairs. Give each pair a copy of the book, *Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot* to read together instead of the whole group listening activity. Students may then complete the *Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot* ELA/SS Listening and Writing Activity (**Handout 3.4 B on Resource Disc**) independently.
- Allow students to refer to the picture book while completing the *Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot* ELA/SS Listening and Writing Activity (**Handout 3.4 B on Resource Disc**).



EXTENSIONS:

- For younger children the teacher may wish to have the students make parachutes following the directions provided on the National Museum of the United States Air Force Parachute Activity, located at the following link: <http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-121107-012.pdf>. This would be an interdisciplinary Math, Science, Technology (MST) activity. Perhaps candy could be placed inside and the children could deliver them to students in a younger grade following the same act of kindness demonstrated by the Chocolate Pilot.
- The teacher may direct the students in a fundraising activity to help those in need, be it locally, nationally, or internationally.
- Students may want to research the real life of Ret. Col. Halvorsen, write a character sketch of this American hero, and discuss where in the world someone like him is needed right now. The essay should give accurate details and comments to persuade others to act in the same manner as Ret. Col. Halvorsen did many years ago.
- For greater in-depth research on the Berlin Airlift the following websites are suggested to assist students in their search for information:

U.S. Centennial of Flight Commission

http://www.centennialofflight.net/essay/Air_Power/berlin_airlift/AP35.htm

Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/berlin_airlift/large/

Operation Vittles song by Irving Berlin

http://www.coldwar.org/berlinchapter/CWMnewsletter2008feb.english_doc.pdf

The Berlin Airlift

http://www.maam.org/wwii/ww2_berlin.htm

A Child of the Berlin Airlift Tells Her Story

<http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=50295>

- There are many YouTube videos that the teacher may show to the class, or students may use headphones to view the sites during computer lab time.

C-54 -"Spirit of Freedom"- (Candy Bomber) Part #1 - Fly/In C

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-WLXynpUTA>

Berlin Airlift, National History Day Documentary by Josh Brown

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOvfNjLlCJc&feature=related>

Candy Bombers Remembered September 8, 2008

<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/candy-bombers-remembered/>

Listen to Gail Halvorsen tell his story of the Berlin Airlift!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-4vE6DCLeU>

- The teacher may wish to show the PBS video, *The Berlin Airlift*, which includes interviews with Gail Halvorsen and Mercedes Wild.

Sources:

Tunnell, Michael O. (2010). *Candy Bomber: The Story of the Berlin Airlifts "Chocolate Pilot."* Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge.

Weisel, Karl (2008, June 17). *A Child of the Berlin Airlift Tells Her Story.* USAG Wiesbaden Public Affairs. Retrieved January 27, 2013 from: <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=50295>