

Writing Assignment

WebQuest Report

An Academic Paper

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By

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Section I. Description of the WebQuest

The Christmas Around the World WebQuest at http://www.oakview.ashland.k12.ky.us/Holidays/Christmas_Webquest.html was evaluated by Team #3: Alison Bickel, Kristen Degan, Cody Hammock, and Jeffrey Young. This WebQuest appears to be for elementary students. In the WebQuest, students are asked to research about how Christmas or a similar holiday is different in another country and to write a feature article for the special holiday magazine. Students are to use a magazine database, an online catalog, an encyclopedia, chosen Internet resources, and/or an interview with a person from their chosen country to complete their research. Each group member is assigned one of the following jobs: editor—chairperson for the group and reviews all work for correctness, writer—writes the article for the magazine, graphic artist—finds icons or photos to use with your article, and food editor/cartographer—finds a recipe from their country as well as a map showing the location of their country. Students are given questions to discuss with their group about holiday traditions and questions to consider as they write their article. The author of the WebQuest included five Kentucky Technology Standards and one Core Content Standard that are intended to be met by completing the WebQuest.

Section II. Summary of the Group Evaluation of the WebQuest

The overall aesthetics of the WebQuest were that of a beginning quest. With the goal of the project to learn about how other countries celebrate Christmas, the graphics used on the page (background and dividers) focused on the commercial side of Christmas, specifically presents. Navigating through the site was difficult due to a lengthy home page with unclear sections. Several links were broken which made accessing information troublesome. Even more bothersome was the misspelling of Feliz Navidad as “Felice Navidad”.

The WebQuest was introduced primarily as a research activity, with no compelling “hook” to draw students in. Also worrisome was the focus on Christmas, which could be insulting to others of

different religions. Multiculturalism would encompass all parallel holidays such as Kwanza and Hanukkah. There is no reference to any prior knowledge needed or what the learning goal of the activity is. The actual task does little more than ask students to recall information. Little significance to students' lives is stated and the referenced standards match up poorly to the WebQuest. For example, one standard focuses on using a rubric to self-assess technology used, but there is no rubric given or referenced for students to use.

The actual process of the task was quite frustrating to our group. While many instructions were given, the directions lacked continuity and structure. The product of the WebQuest is an article although no description of the writing process was included. Specific requirements of the task are lacking as to what the students are responsible for including in the article. The instructions for writing the article precede the questions to think about. The task is basic retelling of information, but then students are asked to contemplate why holidays are celebrated differently around the world. Within the task, there are defined student roles which do not provide an equal division of labor. For example, one role is to find graphics for the article compared to another role which is to write the entire article.

Resources students were given for the WebQuest lacked varied information. Most websites focused on Christmas, leaving out other similar multicultural celebrations. Also, many of the sites were so "busy" that hindered the effectiveness of the resource. The sites given were of basic factual knowledge insufficient to produce meaningful, thought-provoking work. This, coupled with unclear criteria for success (no examples of quality work or rubric given) would make this WebQuest especially difficult for students to comprehend and produce poor quality work.

Section III. Suggestions for Improvement

While most of our team agrees that the idea for the WebQuest has potential, it was very poorly executed and could benefit from several improvements. Graphically, the WebQuest could have been improved by adding a great many more pictures related to the theme of how Christmas is celebrated

around the world. This is potentially a subject that could be very exciting for kids, especially in the elementary grades. Showing some similar aged children from around the world participating in fun holiday traditions would enhance the visual appeal tremendously.

Organizationally, the WebQuest should be broken down and split among several pages with a clearly identified navigation bar at the top or side of the page and instructional steps plainly outlined. It would also be beneficial, if possible, to have linked web pages open inside of frames, keeping the main navigation bar of the WebQuest in view. This also allows the instructor to post page specific directions to help students keep from getting “lost” in cyberspace. Of course, the several broken links should also be fixed or removed.

As stated in our team’s rubric, the WebQuest makes a very poor attempt at multiculturalism. This could be corrected in one of two ways. If the desire is to keep the WebQuest focused on Christmas, then the few references to other similar holidays should be removed altogether. However, the better option would be to add more content related to Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and other holidays so that they present equally enticing paths for students to pursue. The overall tone of the WebQuest would have to focus less on Christmas and more on multiculturalism.

To engage all of the students on a higher cognitive level, the team member tasks must be completely redesigned as they are currently uneven and involve only a retelling of information found on other web sites. After researching different countries and their holiday celebrations, students could be asked to compare and contrast the way some of these countries celebrate. Perhaps they could also be asked to identify countries which have a history of cultural conflict, identify some possible causes of those conflicts, and tie those causes into core beliefs and holiday celebrations. The possibilities for other higher level activities with this WebQuest are many. A detailed rubric must also be included so that students clearly understand what is expected of them.