



Brent Kington: Mythic Metalsmith - Activities

Illinois State Museum

Lesson Plan: What is Blacksmithing?

Inspiration: Brent Kington started out as a metalsmith working in silver and other fine metals. Then he became interested in blacksmithing to the point that he sought out blacksmiths to teach him the skills. This changed his artwork forever. He worked with traditional blacksmith's materials, tools, and techniques. Why is this traditional art so intriguing, even enjoying a resurgence over the last thirty years?

Goal: students will be able to explain via the creation of a timeline and a narrative definition what the trade of blacksmithing was and what a blacksmith did from the Iron Age to the 20th century by researching the history of blacksmithing on the Internet, given a list of sources.

Concepts: 1) Blacksmithing has changed over time; 2) Blacksmithing has changed across cultures; 3) Blacksmithing has changed with technology.

Pre-test and Post-test questions to answer and keep in mind as you search:

- What does a blacksmith do?
- How old is blacksmithing?
- How did a person become a blacksmith?
- List some of the metals with which a blacksmith works.
- List some of the tools that a blacksmith needs.
- List some of the objects that a blacksmith made before the invention of machines that could mass produce.
- Why did blacksmithing almost die out in the 20th century?
- How did L. Brent Kington help revive blacksmithing?

Web sites: students look at these and other sites and take notes.

- <http://www.appaltnet.net/aba/history.htm> (Appalachian Blacksmithing Association)
- <http://www.horseshoes.com/assoc/nationalblacksmiths/nbwa/history.htm> (National Blacksmith's and Welder's Association)
- <http://www.history.org/Almanac/life/trades/tradebla.ctm> (Colonial Williamsburg)

Activity: Use web sites, books, dictionary, and other sources to come up with a written definition of traditional blacksmithing and a timeline showing smithing skills, technology, products, as well as events of developments that impacted the viability of traditional hand-smithing.

Search the sites for the communities' needs for a smith's skills; (horses for transport, locally made tools, utensils in isolated communities; see gallery of ISM handmade metal artifacts from Illinois in this lesson.)

- changes in technology that made production easier and faster; (steam/electric engines)
- events that called for smiths' skills; (settling the west, civil war)
- societal changes that led to less need for smiths (urbanization, world trade)

Class discussion of timelines: Look at sample timelines and decide which style will work best for the history of blacksmithing. Does it read left to right or bottom to top? What increments of time are appropriate for this subject? Is there more than one thing happening at any one time in your timeline? How will you represent this?

Students will assemble their timeline facts in chronological order. They will experiment with a couple of timeline styles, then choose the one that is the clearest organization to them. They may work individually or in pairs, making sure each has a task and that they check each other's work. When the timelines are finished, they should be posted so that all students can inspect and compare them. Discuss the ways in which the same information can be displayed to tell the same or somewhat different stories.

Developing a definition of Smithing: After the students complete their research and timeline, they should each start composing a written definition of blacksmithing. A group definition can be attempted, showing how facts learned can be incorporated (or not) into an essential definition. The definition should be grammatical, inclusive, but clear. Class discussion can hone the final product.

For Scouting enthusiasts, here is a link describing the [Metalsmith Merit Badge](http://www.appaltnet.net/aba/scout.htm).
<http://www.appaltnet.net/aba/scout.htm>

National Educational Standards in History for Grades 7-8

Standard 1. Chronological thinking

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Construct a timeline of smithing from the Iron Age to the 20th C, by centuries and/or decades, noting the technological changes and economic factors related to the growth and decline of smithing; establish temporal order in constructing a narrative outline of the history of smithing.

Standard 2. Historical Thinking

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- a. Identify authors and sources of documents or narratives.
- b. Reconstruct a literal meaning of a passage (viewed on the Internet sites listed).
- f. Appreciate the historical perspective of those who lived in an era.

Standard 3. Engage in historical analysis and interpretation

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- c. Analyze the causes and effects of industrialization (on smithing).

Illinois history standards for grade 7-8 students addressed in this lesson:

16.D.3a

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Describe the characteristics of different types of communities in various sections of the U.S. during the colonial/frontier and 19th century eras.

16.D.3b

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Explain the relationships among the economy and - slavery, immigration, industrialization, labor, and urbanization (as influencing the rise and decline of blacksmithing).