



THEMATIC COURSE TITLE:

AMERICAN MYTHS: APPLE PIE TO FRANK SINATRA TO VEGAS

STUDENT LEVEL: 8th – 12th Grades (Period 4?)

TEACHER: Ms. Coffin, History and Sociology

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

What is an American myth? How does one define popular culture in America? American myths and folklore often encompass the folk traditions that have evolved on the North American continent since the arrival of Native Americans about 15,000 years ago along with European colonization in the 16th and 17th centuries. Later, American mythic heroes were showcased on the big screen or stadiums thanks to Hollywood studios and radio.

In the United States, myths have often served many different purposes. Many American myths and folklore legends tend to explain the founding of the country (Thanksgiving, Pocahontas, Betsy Ross), historical figures (Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, John Henry) legendary creatures (The Jersey Devil, Bigfoot), folk music (Star Spangled Banner, Ballad of Casey Jones), and cultural or Hollywood icons (Frank Sinatra, JFK, Marilyn Monroe).

The course, “American Myth” will discuss such cultural topics as legendary lost cities, tall tales of about American heroes, and its celebrity icons. Frank Sinatra’s rise to stardom will be a main focus of the class. Sinatra is considered to be one of the greatest entertainers in the history of American popular culture. Students will watch the documentary, *Frank Sinatra: The Man and the Myth*, which provides a comprehensive portrait of this American legend -- from Sinatra’s boyhood in Hoboken, New Jersey to his successful career as a singer and actor. Many of Sinatra’s films and songs will be discussed and provide inspiration for many assignments.

The city of Las Vegas in Nevada will also be covered in this course. This city bills itself as the “The Entertainment Capital of the World.” The class will learn about Frank Sinatra’s gang known as the “Rat Pack” who became regular performers at Vegas’ Sands Casino as well as in films in the 1960s such as *Ocean’s 11*. Elvis Presley’s ties to Las Vegas and legacy will be included along with his film, *Viva Las Vegas*. Students will also explore the connections between Vegas’ Luxor Casino to the temples of Ancient Egypt and the mob’s establishment of the Flamingo Hotel and Casino.

Throughout the year, students will be assigned several PowerPoint topics, film summaries, and historical worksheets in addition to the homework related to the readings handed out in class.