

Hello everyone,

Because of your interest and involvement in social studies, I wanted to make you aware of a grant opportunity and see if you would like to partner with us. PBS is soon going to be launching a new multimedia American History project for students in grades 5-9 called MISSION US. This online game was developed by a team of educators, historians, public television representatives, and professional video game designers.

The centerpiece of MISSION US will be a series of free, standards-based, quest-themed, online video games designed for classroom use primarily by middle school students (though some upper elementary and high school students have used and enjoyed it as well).

We want to get MISSION US into the hands of as many educators, media specialists, and students as possible. UNC-TV has the opportunity to apply for a \$6,000 grant which would allow us to advertise and to have the educators responsible for creating the game to come to NC and give professional development workshops for educators. We wondered if your organization might be willing to help us get the word out to social studies teachers statewide? If we get the grant, we would hope to be able to compensate you for your time and any costs associated with advertising in publications.

To help you decide, here is some more information about the game. Through dynamic, innovative and interactive gameplay, students engaged in MISSION US “choose their own adventures” as they navigate historic settings, develop relationships with key figures, investigate primary source documents, witness pivotal events, and ultimately decide their fate in the face of history.

Developed with the input of American history educators and historians, MISSION US is designed to:

Strengthen student fluency with key historical vocabulary
Build student background historical knowledge
Develop students’ higher-order thinking skills
Help students read and analyze primary source materials
Encourage students to see history as an unfinished story, and a tapestry of multiple perspectives
“For Crown or Colony?”

“For Crown or Colony?” is the first completed game in the MISSION US series. The mission takes place in Revolutionary Boston in the weeks leading up to the Boston Massacre. Students playing the game assume the role of 14-year-old Nathaniel “Nat” Wheeler, who is about to start an apprenticeship in the Boston shop of printer Benjamin Edes. Nat’s family is eager for him to learn the trade from the respected pro-Patriot printer. If Nat can earn the trust and respect of Mr. Edes, he will secure his future in the printing industry.

As Nat, students playing the Mission are charged with a number of tasks while working for Mr. Edes. Nat’s activities introduce the player to the full strata of colonial society, and the growing tensions within it. Students examine primary source documents from the period, and interact with both fictional characters and historical figures, including Phillis Wheatley and Paul Revere. Each student playing the game has a unique gameplay experience based on individual choices, skills, and understanding of the period.

Regardless of which path players choose, Nat witnesses the Boston Massacre on the night of March 5, 1770. In the aftermath of the Massacre, Nat is forced to make decisions about where his allegiances lie. After the player chooses Nat’s path, the player learns about Nat’s ultimate fate, the fortunes and destinies of the other characters, and the progression of the colonies toward Revolution.

The video game is accompanied by an extensive set of standards-based teacher materials, lesson plans, primary source documents, writing prompts, and other support materials to

facilitate dynamic history instruction. These teacher-developed materials have undergone rigorous testing and review by a variety of educators in a series of extremely diverse classrooms nationwide.

“For Crown or Colony?” will be debuting online nationally in May 2010. It will be accessible from both home and school computers. Teachers can opt to use the game in class, as a homework assignment, or split student use between school and home. The game itself is divided into a series of “days” in Nat Wheeler’s life, enabling students to play through the entire game in one sitting, or to stop and start gameplay over a longer period of time.

REACTIONS AND RESULTS

Preliminary results show:

- 87% of teachers said students were more intellectually and emotionally engaged in American history content
- 93% of teachers said their students were able to see historical events “in more human terms they could understand”
- 73% of teachers said that students who struggle academically performed better after playing “For Crown or Colony?”

Data shows gains in student understanding of historical terms and concepts, improvements in identification and ordering of historical events, and an increase in student understanding of material culture and social hierarchy.

Comments from teachers who have used “For Crown or Colony?” include:

“What I was really amazed by was how much [the students] retained, and how much they really understood in such a short amount of time. They were very attached to the characters...in a way that I was really blown away by.”

“The depth of the game, with the characters, really helps them think about the viewpoints of people in history.”

“It’s like a field trip into history, one you can pause and start up again when you want to.”

“Sometimes these concepts are hard to introduce or just keep the kids interested. With a game, you know right away we’re going to grab them.”

Comments from students in grades 5-9 who have played “For Crown or Colony?” include:

“When you have to read textbooks, it’s hard to remember things because it’s so dry. The game had more action, and helped you visualize more.”

“We usually get the viewpoints of Patriots. This time we were able to choose Patriots or Loyalists and we were able to interact with different people and see how they thought about what was going on.”

“This game actually puts the American Revolution in your hands.”

TEACHER TRAINING INITIATIVE AND WORKSHOPS The objectives of the MISSION US:

“For Crown or Colony?” teacher training initiative are to:

- build educator and student awareness of the game and its accompanying materials;

- increase utilization of the game in classrooms and media centers nationwide;
- develop a network of educators and media specialists nationwide who will not only utilize "For Crown or Colony?" with students, but build future MISSION US games into their American history instruction;
- provide teachers, administrators, and media specialists with training and tools to become local and regional "ambassadors" for the future success and utilization of MISSION US;
- identify educators and media specialists using MISSION US materials in innovative, dynamic, and/or groundbreaking ways.

As stated above, ten PBS stations will receive a \$6,000 implementation grant to bring MISSION US: "For Crown or Colony?" to their local communities. All outreach work will be completed between June and December 2010.

In its grant proposal, UNC-TV needs to show how it can effectively and creatively reach the greatest number of educators most likely to use MISSION US. Preference will be given to proposals that clearly demonstrate a systematic approach to wide reach and high impact.

What we need right now is for teachers and administrators to tell us how we can attract the largest interest -- how we can get the greatest number of teachers and students to see and use the game. Any ideas you or your colleagues have would be most helpful.

Please let me know if you are interested. The grant is due April 28, so I need your input, if possible, by April 21. My phone number and e-mail address are below. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Thanks,
Cathy

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