

History enquiry: turtles – past, present and future

Introduction

Historical enquiry is a process which involves the active participation of the learner. 'Turtles - past, present and future', challenges students to investigate their period of history in the context of the turtle. Green sea turtles are reptiles whose ancestors evolved on land and returned to the sea to live about 150 million years ago. They are one of the few species so ancient that they watched the dinosaurs evolve and become extinct. This makes them a continuum throughout history to the present day and we hope beyond, ensuring that this activity will fit regardless of the period of history studied. Students can look at how changes in human history, wealth and providence, fishing activity, laws and regulations etc. have impacted on the green sea turtle, which are killed at a rate of 150,000 a year by fishermen and shrimp trawlers.

Development

Marine turtles are caught worldwide, despite it being illegal in many countries to hunt most of the species. A great deal of marine turtle harvests worldwide are for the food industry. In many parts of the world, the flesh of sea turtles is considered fine dining. Texts dating back to the 5th century B.C. describe sea turtles as exotic delicacies in ancient China. Historically, many coastal communities around the world have depended on sea turtles and their eggs as a source of protein. The skin of the flippers is also prized for use as shoes and assorted leather goods. Since ancient times the shells of sea turtles have been used by the ancient Greeks and ancient Romans. Various articles and ornaments used by the elite of these societies, such as combs and brushes, were made from processed turtle shell. The people of ancient Peru, however, worshipped the sea, often depicting sea turtles in their art, and did not hunt or kill any sea life.

Students can use the animal factsheets together with any other secondary sources of information, including the internet, to support their historical enquiry.

Group activity

Ask students to list all the dangers facing sea turtles today. Make another list of all the laws and conservation measures that exist to protect sea turtles. Using the Historical Enquiry sheet to structure their research, students create a comparable profile of the dangers and legal protection prevalent during the period of study.

Supported by the evidence of their historical enquiry, student groups could create an interactive wall display using a timeline of factors which have impacted on green turtle populations for their period of study.

Plenary

The topic of endangerment generates passion and compassion for the creatures involved. Using turtles as a topic for an historical enquiry to engage students presents a tangible worthwhile area of study, which they can compare and apply to current day issues. Students should be given opportunity to evaluate their own performance alongside others, considering:

- how well they worked as a group
- something they found particularly difficult
- something they did well
- their interpretation and presentation of their findings.

Historical Enquiry: Turtle Past, Present and Future

Using your selected period of history as a starting point use the seven key questions below to structure your historical enquiry:

We recommend, like the geographical enquiry, the questions below should be dotted around the rest of the sheet 'mind map style' with a central box for students to write in the focus period of history.

1. 'How is this time similar to/different from now?'
2. 'What are the world's seas and climate like at this time?'
3. 'Are turtles under threat of extinction in the time period?'
4. 'Were people a natural predator of turtles at this time? If not, why not?'
5. 'What factors pose a potential threat to turtles, if any, in this time period?'
6. 'How do these threats compare to those faced by turtles today?'
7. 'What key factors affecting green turtle numbers have changed since this time period?'