

## A Century of the Panama Canal

By: Phil Parker

### **Elaborated Lesson Focus:**

This lesson is designed to allow students to understand the events that led to the construction of the Panama Canal, the effects of the Panama Canal treaties signed by President Carter, and the place of the Panama Canal in the world today.

### **Georgia Performance Standards:**

**SSCG20 The student will describe the tools used to carry out United States foreign policy (diplomacy; economic, military, and humanitarian aid; treaties; sanctions; and military intervention).**

**SSUSH14 The student will explain America's evolving relationship with the world at the turn of the twentieth century.**

- c. Explain U.S. involvement in Latin America, as reflected by the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine and the creation of the Panama Canal.

### **Enduring Understanding / Essential Questions:**

The Panama Canal is one of the most important trade routes in the world. While vital to world commerce, the canal has been surrounded by controversy on many occasions during the last century.

1. Was the U.S. justified in taking the actions it did in order to gain the land to build the Panama Canal?
2. Why did President Carter negotiate a treaty that would result in the U.S. giving up control of such an important strategic location?
3. As the Republic of Panama took control of the Panama Canal in 2000, what concerns might the United States have had?
4. How has the Panama Canal changed since the transition to ownership by the Republic of Panama?

### **Performance Tasks:**

Students will examine various documents related to the History of the Panama Canal, including primary source documents from the Carter administration. Students will work together in groups of two or three to identify key events in the history of the Panama Canal. They will focus specifically on the American Construction of the Canal, the debates over the treaties signed by President Carter, and the position of the Panama Canal in the modern world. The group will complete the following tasks:

**Task One** – Students will work together to peruse the list of documents and choose several to analyze. NOTE – TEACHERS MAY WISH TO SHORTEN THE LIST OF DOCUMENTS OR REQUIRE STUDENTS ONLY TO VIEW A CERTAIN NUMBER

OF DOCUMENTS IF TIME IS SHORT. Students will discuss not only the contents of the documents but also how they are relevant to answering the essential questions for this lesson. (Assessment – Dialogue and Discussion, Teacher Observation)

**Task Two** – After discussing the documents in depth, each student will write an essay in which he/she defends or criticizes the actions taken by President Carter in signing the Panama Canal treaties of the late 1970s. Students will cite specific sources and use detailed examples from the documents to strengthen the positions expressed in their essays. (Assessment – Dialogue and Discussion, Written Essay)

**Task Three** – Working as a group, the students should use their research to create an illustrated timeline of the Panama Canal, from the beginning of U.S. construction in 1903 until the present day. They may use computer software (such as PowerPoint, Microsoft Word, Inspiration, etc.) to create the timeline or they may use posters, markers, crayons, and cut-out images. Students will show evidence that they understand the Panama Canal's importance to the U.S. throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The timeline should include images of Presidents, Panamanian leaders, Canal Zone events, canal construction, etc. The timeline may not include plagiarized text of any kind; all descriptions must be in the students' own words. (Assessment – Teacher Observation of students working in groups, finished Timeline Project)

## **List of Documents – Jimmy Carter**

[Panama Canal Treaties Address to the Nation](#)

[Letter to President Jimmy Carter from U.S. Congressman Daniel J. Flood](#)

[Letter to U.S. Congress from President Carter, August 12, 1977](#)

[Letter to U.S. Senators from President Jimmy Carter, November 5, 1977](#)

["Beyond the Panama Treaties" The New York Times January 28, 1978](#)

[Panama Canal Treaties Message to the Senate Transmitting the Treaties](#)

[Panama Canal Treaties Letter to Senator Richard Stone](#)

[Carter Presidential Timeline](#)

## **List of Documents – Bill Clinton**

[Statement on the Transfer of the Panama Canal to the Republic of Panama](#)

[Message to Congress on the Panama Canal Commission](#)

## **List of Documents – Panama Canal History**

[American Construction of the Panama Canal](#) (Read Our Story)

[Panama Canal Milestones](#)

[The Panama Canal – An Online NewsHour Special Report](#)

[Carter Center Monitors 1989 elections in Panama](#) (page 4)

## **List of Documents – Panama Canal in the Modern World**

[Canal in Transition – Photos](#)

[Speech by the Honorable Louis Caldera, Chairman of the Panama Canal Commission](#)

[Panama: 'The canal is ours' – ceremonies held on December 14, 1999](#)

[Virtual Tour of the Panama Canal](#)

[Panama Canal Expansion 2008](#)

### **Rubric for Panama Canal Essays**

- 4** Offers thorough analysis, including clear descriptions of multiple points of view related to the Panama Canal Treaties.  
Offers in-depth and persuasive explanation of opinions, including the use of examples from the documents themselves.  
Constructs an organized, well-written essay without factual errors or mistakes in punctuation, spelling, or grammar.
- 3** Offers in-depth analysis, including descriptions of more than one point of view related to the Panama Canal Treaties.  
Explains opinions and includes an example from the documents themselves.  
Constructs an organized, well-written essay without factual errors and with minimal mistakes in punctuation, spelling, or grammar.
- 2** Offers some analysis, including minimal description of a point of view related to the Panama Canal Treaties.  
Offers limited explanation of opinions with only weak links to the documents themselves.  
Constructs essay with minimal factual errors and few mistakes in punctuation, spelling, or grammar
- 1** Offers little analysis and does not identify different points of view related to the Panama Canal Treaties.  
States an opinion but does not explain or connect to the primary source documents.  
Constructs an essay with some factual errors and several mistakes in punctuation, spelling, or grammar.

### **Rubric for Panama Canal Timelines**

- 4** Includes multiple events with in-depth descriptions in students' own words.  
Includes multiple photographs and illustrations that are clearly related to the essential questions.  
Constructs a neat and well-organized timeline with no factual errors or mistakes in punctuation, spelling, or grammar.
  
- 3** Includes several events with in-depth descriptions in students' own words.  
Includes several photographs and illustrations that are clearly related to the essential questions.  
Constructs a neat and well-organized timeline with no factual errors and with minimal mistakes in punctuation, spelling, or grammar.
  
- 2** Includes several events with descriptions in students' own words.  
Includes several photographs and illustrations that are somewhat related to the essential questions but that relationship is not clearly identified by students.  
Constructs a neat timeline with minimal factual errors and with few mistakes in punctuation, spelling, or grammar
  
- 1** Includes few events on the timeline and not all descriptions are in students' own words.  
Includes a few photographs and illustrations but does not clearly identify or explain their relationship to the events on the timeline.  
Constructs a timeline with some factual errors and several mistakes in punctuation, spelling, or grammar

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