Southland History Collective

Contested Conquests: Rethinking George Rogers Clark and the Legacy of the Northwest: *How should George Rogers Clark's legacy be remembered in public monuments and American memory?*

Lesson Plan Author: Jake Sladek
Suggested Grade Level Range: 9-12

Connections to U.S. History Curriculum

This lesson explores the American Revolution's western campaigns through the lens of George Rogers Clark and his 1778 capture of Kaskaskia. Students evaluate competing historical perspectives on conquest, territory, and legacy by examining Clark's memoir, correspondence with Thomas Jefferson, and the implications of monuments commemorating conquest.

Local Context

George Rogers Clark's campaign to capture British-held posts in what is now Illinois, most notably Kaskaskia, was instrumental in establishing American control over the Northwest Territory. His actions directly impacted Indigenous nations, French settlers, and colonial strategy. Today, his monument raises questions about how conquest and legacy are remembered, especially in regions tied to early Illinois history.

Student Learning Objectives

- *I can analyze historical narratives and identify whose voices are included or excluded*
- *I can evaluate how public monuments influence historical memory and civic identity*
- *I can articulate multiple perspectives on George Rogers Clark's role in Illinois and American history*

Standards Addressed

- SS.H.2.9-12: Analyze change and continuity in historical eras
- SS.H.3.9-12: Evaluate historical sources for perspective, limitations, and accuracy
- SS.CV.7.9-12: Evaluate contemporary and historical means of changing societies and promoting the common good

Materials Used

Sources for Lesson Plan Activity
• Source A: Memoir of Campaigns Against the British Posts Northwest of the River Ohio: Part 2 • Source B: Thomas Jefferson to George Rogers Clark, 1 January 1780 • Source C: George Rogers Clark Statue

Procedure

Anticipatory Set/ Staging the Compelling Question

C3 TEACHERS™ idm INQUIRY DESIGN MODEL™ CC BY NC SA

Introduction Monument Context:

- Show the image of the George Rogers Clark monument in Virginia with the inscription "Conqueror of the Northwest" George Rogers Clark Statue
- Discussion Prompts:
  - What does "Conqueror of the Northwest" imply? What ideas or emotions does this evoke?
  - Who might view this phrase positively? Who might see it negatively?

Supporting Question/Activity 1

Primary Source Analysis A:

- Distribute excerpts from Clark's memoir about the July 4, 1778, capture of Kaskaskia Memoir of Campaigns Against the British Posts Northwest of the River Ohio: Part 2
- Provide guided questions:
  - How does Clark describe his actions and intentions during the capture of Kaskaskia?
  - What tone does Clark use to portray himself and his mission? Does this support the idea of him as a "conqueror"?
  - How might Native Americans, French settlers, or British Loyalists have perceived these events?
- Discuss how Clark frames the event in his memoir:
  - What does this source reveal about his perspective and motivations?
  - What is missing from this perspective? Whose voices are not heard?

Supporting Question/Activity 2

Primary Source Analysis B:

- Distribute excerpts from a letter by Thomas Jefferson writing to George Rogers Clark Thomas Jefferson to George Rogers Clark, 1 January 1780
- Provide guided questions:
  - How does Clark justify his campaigns in the Northwest?
  - What tone does Clark use when addressing Jefferson? Is it confident, apologetic, proud, or something else?
  - What words or phrases stand out that reveal his attitude toward his mission or his opponents (Native Americans, British forces, settlers)?
  - Based on this letter, how might Native American tribes view Clark's actions?
- Further Discussion Prompts:
  - Whose voices are absent in this account? How might Indigenous tribes or displaced settlers describe the same events Clark discusses?
  - Does this letter support the idea that Clark was a "Conqueror of the Northwest"? Why or why not?
  - How does this letter shape your view of the monument's inscription?
  - Compare how Clark describes himself and his campaigns in the memoir versus how he presents them to Jefferson in this letter

Supporting Question/Activity 3

Perspective Breakdown Activity for Primary Source A:

- Break the class into groups to research and represent different perspectives:
  - Group 1: Native American Tribes (e.g. how Indigenous nations like the Shawnee might have viewed Clark's actions)
  - Group 2: French settlers in Kaskaskia
  - Group 3: British officials or soldiers in the Northwest
  - Group 4: The American Revolutionaries (e.g. Thomas Jefferson, who admired Clark's efforts)

CC BY NC SA

- Each group presents:
  - How would their assigned perspective view Clark as "Conqueror of the Northwest"?
  - What might they think about the monument's inscription?
  - Would they be supportive of Clark?

Assessment

Structured Classroom Debate: Is the Monument Justified? Students will engage in a formal debate using historical evidence and diverse perspectives to evaluate the legacy of George Rogers Clark and the public commemoration of his actions. Guiding questions include:

- Does the phrase "Conqueror of the Northwest" accurately reflect Clark's historical role?
- Should the monument remain in public spaces as it is? Why or why not?
- What, if anything, should change about its presentation or interpretation?
- What are the broader implications of memorializing historical figures in this way?

Debate Roles:

- Students will represent researched perspectives such as Indigenous nations, French settlers, British officers, and American revolutionaries to argue for keeping, modifying, or removing the monument

Written Reflection: Following the debate, students will submit a short-written reflection addressing:

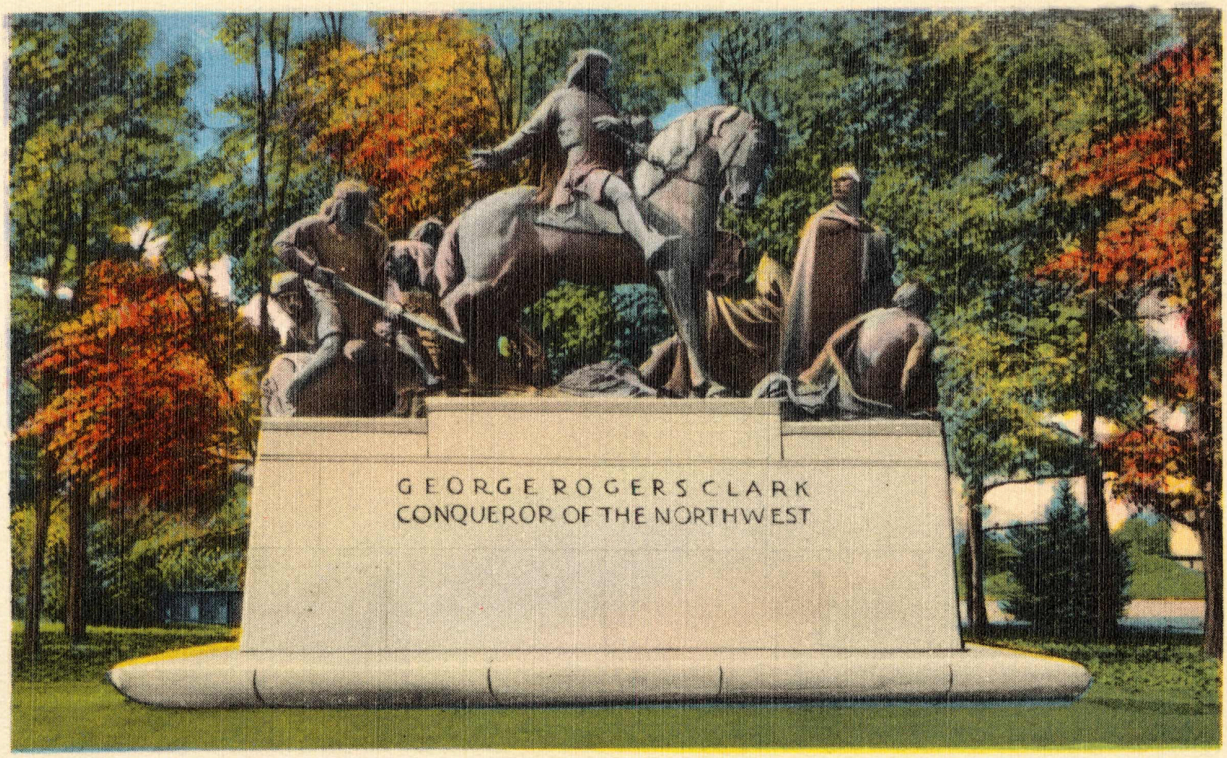
- How did the debate change or deepen your understanding of George Rogers Clark's legacy?
- What can public monuments teach us about how history is remembered and whose voices are elevated or excluded?

Informed Action

Students will draft a reinterpreted monument plaque or digital exhibit that includes multiple voices, Indigenous, settler, military, and civic. These can be displayed in class or shared with local museums or civic leaders as part of ongoing dialogue about public history.

CC BY NC SA

George Rogers Clark Monument,



Charlottesville, Va.

CC BY NC SA