

Lesson Plan: What If? Weaving New Histories from Tapestries and Time Lords

Materials Needed:

- Access to a high-resolution online version of the Bayeux Tapestry (the Bayeux Museum website is excellent).
- A copy of Cecilia Holland's short story 'Repulse at Hastings, October 14, 1066'.
- Access to the Doctor Who serial 'The Time Meddler' (Season 2, 1965). This may be available on streaming services like BritBox, or on DVD.
- A notebook or digital document for brainstorming and notes.
- Materials for the final project. This will depend on your choice, but could include: large paper and colored pencils/markers, a word processor, digital art software, or an audio recording device (like a smartphone).

Lesson Overview & Objectives

This lesson explores a single historical event—the Battle of Hastings in 1066—through three different lenses: a historical primary source, an alternate history story, and a science-fiction adventure. By comparing these narratives, you will move beyond memorizing facts to understanding how history is a story that can be told, retold, and completely changed. This is a lesson in critical thinking, cause and effect, and creative storytelling.

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Analyze the Bayeux Tapestry as a historical narrative and identify its point of view and potential bias.
- Compare and contrast how a historical event is altered by a small, realistic change versus a large, external intervention.
- Evaluate the "ripple effect" of changing a key historical event on a nation's culture, language, and politics.
- Create an original artifact that communicates your own alternate historical narrative based on the Battle of Hastings.

Part 1: The "Official" Story, As Told by the Victors (Approx. 45 minutes)

Goal: To understand the accepted historical narrative of the Norman Conquest and analyze its primary visual source as a piece of propaganda.

1. **Introduction (5 min):** History is often called "the story told by the winners." The Bayeux Tapestry is perhaps the most famous example of this. It's a 70-meter-long embroidered cloth that tells the story of the Norman Conquest, culminating in the Battle of Hastings. But it was made by the Normans. Our first job is to be historical detectives and look for clues about the story they wanted to tell.
2. **Activity - Reading the Tapestry (40 min):**
 - Using an online viewer, explore the Bayeux Tapestry from beginning to end. Think of it not

- as a single piece of art, but as a medieval comic book. Follow the story panel by panel.
- Pay close attention to these key scenes:
 - King Edward the Confessor sending Harold Godwinson to Normandy.
 - Harold's oath to William of Normandy (look at the body language!).
 - The appearance of Halley's Comet, and how the people on the ground react.
 - The battle itself: the cavalry, the archers, the shield wall.
 - The death of King Harold.
 - **Discussion & Reflection Questions (in your notebook):**
 - Who are the clear heroes and villains in this story? How does the artist show this? (Think about size, position, and actions).
 - The tapestry shows Harold swearing a sacred oath to William and then breaking it. Why was it so important for the Normans to include this scene?
 - The most famous scene is Harold's death, supposedly from an arrow to the eye. Some historians believe he was actually cut down by swords, and the arrow was added later to the tapestry. Why might they add an arrow? What does it symbolize?
 - Is this a reliable historical document? Or is it a masterful piece of political propaganda? Can it be both? Explain your reasoning.
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Part 2: The First Twist – A Human Change (Approx. 45 minutes)

Goal: To explore how a single, plausible change on the battlefield could have rewritten history.

1. **Introduction (5 min):** The Normans won, but it was a very close battle. It raged all day, and the English shield wall almost held. Alternate history authors love these "hinge points." We're going to read a story that asks: What if the shield wall *didn't* break?
 2. **Activity - A Different Outcome (40 min):**
 - Read Cecilia Holland's short story, 'Repulse at Hastings, October 14, 1066'.
 - **Discussion & Reflection Questions (in your notebook):**
 - According to this story, what was the key mistake William made, and what was the key success of the English strategy?
 - Holland briefly describes the world *after* an English victory. What are the major consequences for England and for Normandy?
 - Does this feel like a believable alternate history? What makes an alternate timeline feel "real" or plausible to a reader?
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Part 3: The Second Twist – An Alien Intervention (Approx. 2 hours)

Goal: To consider the ethics and consequences of deliberately meddling with history, especially with a technological advantage.

1. **Introduction (5 min):** So far, we've seen history as it was told and how it might have changed on its own. Now, let's add a chaotic new element: a time traveler with a plan. In 'The Time Meddler,' the Doctor arrives in 1066 just before the Battle of Stamford Bridge (the battle Harold fought against the Vikings right before Hastings) and discovers another time traveler, the Monk, who is trying to "improve" history.
 2. **Activity - Watching 'The Time Meddler' (1 hour 40 min):**
 - Watch the four-part serial. As you watch, keep the following questions in mind.
 3. **Discussion & Reflection Questions (15 min, in your notebook):**
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- What is the Monk's plan? What advanced technology is he using to change history?
- Why does he want to do this? Does he see himself as a villain?
- The Doctor is horrified by the Monk's plan. He believes in observing history, not interfering. Why is interference so dangerous, even if your intentions are good? What are some of the unintended consequences the Monk didn't think about?
- Compare the Monk's meddling with the small change in Holland's story. Which creates a more interesting "what if" scenario for you, and why?

Part 4: Your Turn to Meddle – The Culminating Project (Flexible Time)

Goal: To synthesize your learning and creatively apply it by designing your own alternate history artifact.

Your Mission: You will now become a historian, an artist, or a time meddler from an alternate timeline where the Normans lost at Hastings. Your task is to create one artifact from your new timeline that tells a piece of its story.

Step 1: Choose Your Point of Divergence.

First, decide exactly **how** and **when** history changes. Be specific!

- *Example 1 (Small Change):* Harold's brothers, Gyrth and Leofwine, convince him not to fight in person, so he directs the battle from the rear and survives.
- *Example 2 (Bigger Change):* The Norman invasion fleet is scattered and largely destroyed by a storm in the English Channel. William lands with only a fraction of his army.
- *Example 3 (Dr. Who-style Change):* A time traveler gives the English longbows, a technology that wasn't widely used for another 200 years.

Step 2: Brainstorm the Ripple Effect.

In your notebook, map out the consequences of your change. What happens next?

- **Immediate:** Who wins the battle? Who lives and who dies?
- **10 Years Later:** Is there another invasion? How does English leadership change?
- **100+ Years Later:** Think about...
 - **Language:** English would have far fewer French and Latin words. What might it sound like?
 - **Culture & Politics:** England would likely remain more Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian in its connections, rather than European. The feudal system the Normans brought might not exist.
 - **The World:** How would a stronger, non-Norman England affect the history of France, the Crusades, or the rest of Europe?

Step 3: Create Your Artifact.

Choose **one** of the following projects to create. The goal is to make something that feels like a genuine piece of your new timeline.

- **Option A: The Saxon Tapestry.**

Design and draw (on paper or digitally) 3-5 new panels for the Bayeux Tapestry. These panels should show YOUR version of the battle's end and the immediate aftermath (e.g., William's capture, Harold's coronation celebration). Include short, descriptive captions in a style similar

to the original tapestry.

- **Option B: A Scholar's Chronicle.**

Write a 1-2 page entry from a history book or a scholar's journal, dated to the year 1466 (400 years after the battle). The entry should explain the significance of the "Great Victory at Hastings" and describe how it shaped the English language, government, and identity in the centuries that followed.

- **Option C: The Meddler's Audio Log.**

Record a 2-4 minute audio log, as if you are a time traveler (like the Monk, but maybe you're more careful... or more clumsy!). In the log, describe the change you made to the timeline, why you made it, and what surprising, unintended consequences you are now observing in the "new" 1066.

- **Option D: A Newspaper from Another Present.**

Design the front page of a newspaper from the modern day of your alternate timeline. The headlines, articles, and even the advertisements should reflect a world that evolved from an English victory in 1066. (For example, a headline might read "King Edmund V Opens Anglo-Norse Trade Summit" or an ad might be for a trip on a Viking-style cruise ship).

Project Evaluation Criteria:

- **Creativity & Originality (40%):** Is the artifact imaginative and engaging? Is the core idea fresh and interesting?
- **Historical Reasoning (40%):** Does the alternate timeline follow a logical path from your point of divergence? Does the artifact show a clear understanding of cause and effect?
- **Clarity & Execution (20%):** Is the artifact well-crafted, clear, and easy to understand? Does it effectively communicate the story of the new timeline?