

“Journey through the Alps”

An Online Educational Companion

Teacher’s Guide

Introduction

“Journey through the Alps” is a one-hour educational companion to the film *The Alps*. This media-rich online content takes students through the entire span of human history, allowing them to experience the incredible impact the Alps have had on the entire range of human endeavor. The companion is designed for middle school and high school students.

This teacher’s guide will introduce educators to the companion, and offer suggestions for extending both the cinematic experience and the online media into the classroom setting through a series of multi-disciplinary learning activities. All activities are aligned with national curricula and standards.

Using the Companion

“Journey through the Alps” has been designed to fit into a variety of classroom scenarios. Instead of focusing specifically on any one subject or lesson, the companion’s subject—‘human geography’—has been carefully selected to connect the media to the widest possible range of subject areas. Teachers of various disciplines will be able to incorporate the film, and the companion, into their lesson plans.

“Journey through the Alps” will assist geography teachers in answering that age-old question posed by all students: “Why do we have to study this?” While interacting with the content, students will quickly find the answer: because geography affects all aspects of human experience, and is at the heart of our greatest endeavors. The media will demonstrate the connection between geography and other disciplines such as art, history, culture, and science, encouraging students to see how these subjects fit together, and how our environment influences everything we do.

Ideally, teachers should utilize the companion in combination with a field trip to see the film. However, the media has been designed to ensure the utmost flexibility, and can be used in advance of seeing the film, as a follow-up to the film, or independently of the film (with the hope that students will see the film on their own in the future).

Content Breakdown

The online companion will take students approximately one-hour to complete. The interface has been designed for easy navigation, and students will have no problem following the prompts through the media. It is suggested that teachers preview the companion before using it in their classrooms.

The companion’s content has been broken down into seven major sections, as follows:

Section 1: Overture

- John Harlin, the narrator, introduces the media and provides a quick overview of its main topics.
- As John is also the star of the film, he provides a link between the cinematic experience and the online media. His powerful family story offers students a compelling ‘hook’ into the content.

Section 2: In the Beginning

- Students are taken back 200-million years to witness the birth of the Alps. They learn about tectonic plates, the creation of continents, and the ice ages that carved the mountains into their present form.
- A satellite map is then used to review the present-day countries that the Alps traverse.
- The geography lesson continues with a display of the major lakes and rivers that lie amidst the Alps.
- Finally, students are given the opportunity to click on the Alps’ major peaks. They learn a few interesting facts about each of them.

Section 3: Early Settlement

- Students jump back 7,000 years into the past, and are given a short history of the region’s earliest settlers, including:
 - The ‘Lake Dwellers’
 - The Celtic tribes
 - The Romans

Section 4: The Conquerors

- Jacques-Louis David’s famous painting of Napoleon traversing the Alps is used to introduce three major generals who led great campaigns over the Alps: Hannibal, Charlemagne, and Napoleon.
- An animated series of maps leads students through the history of these great campaigns. They will witness the gradual creation of a unified European culture.
- Additional media elements, such as a painting of Hannibal’s elephants crossing the Alps, and a dramatic reading of Polybius’ rendering of this great crossing, add great drama to the story.

Section 5: The Artists

- Major artists inspired by the Alps are portrayed, including Jacques-Louis David, Richard Strauss, and Percy Bysshe Shelly.
- David’s heroic portrait of Napoleon is contrasted with ‘real’ Napoleon in order to provide the students with a short lesson on *symbolism*.
- Additional media elements include a dramatic reading of passages from Shelly’s poem *Mont Blanc* and a series of musical excerpts from Richard Strauss’ *Alpensinfonie*.

Section 6: Harnessing the Alps

- Students arrive at the modern era, and encounter the many ways humans have ‘mastered’ the Alps.
- A multi-step interactive exercise takes the students through the alpine ‘Water Cycle’ culminating in the creation of hydroelectric power.
- Mining, concrete production and agriculture are also briefly covered.

Section 7: Finale

- John Harlin reminds students that, despite the fact we have now ‘mastered’ the mountains, these ancient peaks still call out to people like him—‘the climbers.’
- Students are given the opportunity to work through a short history of climbing.
- John then recaps the entire journey and connects it with his personal passion for the mountains.

Extensions

Students will use critical analysis, investigative techniques, and communication skills to further explore topics from the film and the companion.

Lesson Plan #1: English 7–10 ***“Facing Danger”***

Most people do everything they can to avoid danger. Students have just met John Harlin, a man who climbed the north face of the Eiger, the very peak that claimed his father’s life. What compelled John Harlin to climb this mountain? What makes people take risks? Name other famous people who have taken risks or willingly faced danger. What do they have in common with John Harlin? Are their motivations similar, or different? How so?

These questions can be used to spark a class discussion and/or form the basis for a ‘compare and contrast essay’ between John Harlin and someone of the students’ choosing. Graphic organizers should be used to facilitate discussion and to plan essays.

Lesson Plan #2: English 7–12 ***“Symbolism”***

During “Journey through the Alps,” students were told that symbolism means “when something (an object, word, phrase, etc.) means more than meets the eye.” As a class, or in groups, have students brainstorm as many symbols as they can think of. Examples such as a green light, a cross, the stars and stripes, or the sound of a bell may be used to get the students thinking. A running list can be kept on the board. After the list has been compiled, have students classify the symbols according to the following categories: object, word, phrase, musical/sound, visual etc. For more advanced classes, lead a discussion on the difference between universal and local symbols—for instance, some cultures associate black clothes with mourning, while others associate white with this same human emotion.

As a culminating activity have students write an essay explaining a poem containing symbols (e.g. the ‘rose,’ ‘worm,’ ‘storm,’ ‘night,’ and ‘bed’ in William Blake’s *The Sick Rose*; the ‘roads’ in Robert Frost’s *The Road Not Taken*; the ‘ships,’ ‘seas,’ ‘daffodil,’ ‘sailors,’ and ‘wharf’ in Emily Dickinson’s *Where Ships of Purple*—note that this poem is generally considered to be about a sunset, even though most students will probably think it is about either a garden or a busy wharf. For a great discussion of both Blake’s and Dickinson’s poems see Laurence Perrine’s essay “The Nature of Proof in the Interpretation of Poetry.”) Have students present their essays and discuss the results.

Lesson Plan #3: Art History 9–12 ***“Jacques-Louis David”***

In “Journey through the Alps,” students learned about David’s famous painting of Napoleon crossing the Alps. David painted Napoleon a number of times. He also painted a number of historical figures from Greek and Roman times. Have the students select one of David’s paintings and research the historical characters and setting. After organizing their research into a short essay, it should be presented to the class for discussion. Debate on interpretation should be encouraged, as should discussion on symbolism (which was also discussed in the media companion – see lesson #2). For more advanced classes, have students research David’s life and politics. They can use what they find to further refine their interpretation of their chosen painting.

Lesson #4: Music 7–12**“Music of a Place”**

During “Journey through the Alps,” students saw how the composer Richard Strauss was influenced by the Alps to compose his *Alpensinfonie*. Other composers have also been inspired by places to create great musical works. Have students research such works and present the music and their interpretation to the class. Remind the students of the definition of ‘program music’ (music that tells a story) before they begin. Suggested works: Richard Strauss, *Aus Italien*; Bedrich Smetana, *The Moldau* and *My Country*; and Antonin Dvorak, *Symphony #9: From the New World*.

Lesson #5: Geography 7–12**“Influence of Environment”**

The students have just watched the film and/or navigated through the online companion. They have experienced the myriad ways that the Alps have influenced history, art, culture, music and technology. After brainstorming and discussing what they learned from the film and/or companion, have them research and write an essay on how another great geographical feature (e.g. mountain, river, sea, lake, strait, etc.) also influenced history, art, culture, music, technology, etc. Suggested examples include the Bearing Strait, the Mediterranean Sea, the Mississippi River, and the Ural Mountains. Students should present and discuss their findings.

Lesson #6: History 7–12**“Vanquishing the Alps”**

During “Journey through the Alps,” students were introduced to three of the most famous military figures associated with the Alps: Hannibal, Charlemagne, and Napoleon. But these three are not the only generals who attempted to master the mountain range. Have the students research other figures who vanquished (or were vanquished by) the Alps. Students should focus on how these generals had to anticipate the environmental conditions they would confront, and plan accordingly. Research should be organized into short presentations, and discussion should be encouraged.