The Siege of Masada

A Case Study for Preliminary Year 11 Students

Overview Statement:

This is a Stage 6 Preliminary Case Study Unit for students in Year 11 at a coeducational school. Students are of mixed ability. The overarching area of learning is the Ancient myth of Masada.

The narrative of Masada, culminating in the moment during the Jewish revolt of 70ce when approximately 960 ‘Zealots’ took their own lives atop the famous fortress rather than to be captured by invading Roman forces, is one of Israel’s most significant and culturally defining national myths.

This unit is multifaceted and will teach students to understand the importance of the excavation of Masada, the importance of its role in the formation of modern Israeli identity and of course to question what really happened at Masada – Heroic death or slaughter.

As per the Stage 6 NSW History Syllabus, this case study will cover the following:

- Location and geographical features of Masada
- Overview of the Roman control of Judaea and the organisation of a Roman province
- Overview of the problems between the Jews and Romans
  - Concept of Clint/King States
  - Religious Beliefs
  - Policies of Roman Emperors leading to the First Jewish War/First Roman War with particular focus on Vespasian and Titus
- The role of Sicarii
- Occupation of Masada – people at Masada
- Account of Josephus, *The Jewish War*
- Archaeological evidence/site of Masada
- Yigael Yadin – concept of ‘Patriotic Archaeology’
- Military campaign – role of Falvius Silva
- Organisation of the Roman Army and camp
- Roman siege weapons
- Eleazar bin Yair – leadership and strategy
- Archaeological site of the Roman camp
- End of Masada AD 73 to 74 and the aftermath.
To cater to the varying abilities and learning styles of the students within this class, a plethora of strategies will be used and there will be a focus on student centred learning activities.

The case study will be explored over the course of 8 lessons, 4 of which will be outlined in detail below.

Masada, a fortress in Ancient Israel is famous as the site that was besieged by Roman troops in the 1st Century AD as part of the First Jewish-Roman War. This siege resulted in the apparent mass suicide of its apparent defenders in the face of imminent defeat. Like many myths of the Ancient world, there is a vast array of apparent anomalies in the Masada story, however it is important that students recognise the historical context in which this narrative was adopted – at a time when the early Hebrew settlers in Palestine were attempting to establish a solid and unified identity. Many of the discrepancies in the Masada myth can be traced to Israeli archaeologist and former Hagana commander Yigael Yadin and his interpretation of the archaeological remains. He will become a core focus area of this case study as students are introduced to the concept of ‘patriotic archaeology’ and encouraged to think about Yadin’s possible motives for fuelling this myth.

**Learning Outcomes**

As per the Stage 6 NSW Ancient History Syllabus, this case study will address the following learning outcomes:

- **P1.1** describe and explain the contribution of key people, groups, events, institutions, societies and sites within the historical context
- **P2.1** identify historical factors and explain their significance in contributing to change and continuity in the ancient world
- **P3.1** locate, select and organise relevant information from a variety of sources
- **P3.2** identify relevant problems of sources in reconstructing the past
- **P3.3** comprehend sources and analyse them for their usefulness and reliability
- **P3.4** identify and account for differing perspectives and interpretations of the past
- **P3.5** discuss issues relating to ownership and custodianship of the past
- **P3.6** plan and present the findings of historical investigations analysing and synthesising information from a range of sources.

**Assessment for Learning**

There will be 2 x in class worksheets for students to complete that should ensure that students are ‘on the right track’ and then one formal assessment – assessment notification attached.
Lesson 4 - The Sicarii

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus Content</th>
<th>Teaching &amp; Learning Strategies/Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes:</strong></td>
<td>This lesson will examine the role of the Sicarii in the Siege of Masada.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P1.1 Describe and explain the contribution of key people, groups, events, institutions, societies and sites within the historical context</td>
<td>Class will begin with a refresher discussion on the last lesson:</td>
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<td><strong>Students learn to:</strong></td>
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| • Comprehend and analyse a range of written and archaeological sources in reconstructing the past. | • Problems between the Jews and the Romans  
  o Client Kings/States  
  o Religious Beliefs  
  o Vespasian & Titus |
| • Possible triggers for the First Jewish-Roman War  
  o Documented triggers – Greek’s sacrificing birds outside a Synagogue  
  o Hypothesized triggers | Following on from the refresher discussion, students will be asked to read the Richard Horsley Article *The Sicarii: Ancient Jewish ‘Terrorists’*. Due to the length and complexity of the article, students will be given 15 to 20 minutes to do this. |
| | Once they have read the article, students will be divided into pairs as allocated by the teacher (the pair allocations will be divided so that weaker students are with stronger students). Students will be asked to fill out an information table on the Sicarii (see attached) using the article as stimulus. Students will be given 10 to 15 minutes to fill out their tables. |
| | Once the students have filled out all the information required in the table, we will go through all of the sections to confirm everyone is up to speed. This will give students to question anything they do not understand. |
| | To conclude the lesson, students will be asked to think about the following: |
| | *Suicide is against Jewish law. Do you think that the Sicarii on Masada did the right or wrong thing? Do you think they were heroic? Why? Why not?* |
| **Resources Required:** | |
| • Photocopies of *The Sicarii: Ancient Jewish ‘Terrorists’*  
• Photocopies of table |
Lesson 5 – The account of Josephus: ‘The Jewish War’

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<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes:</strong></td>
<td>This lesson will focus on Josephus’s account of the siege of Masada as per <em>The Jewish War</em>. Students will be asked to think about the usefulness and reliability of <em>The Jewish War</em> and the relevant problems of this source.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3.2 Identify relevant problems of sources in reconstructing the past.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3.3 Comprehend sources and analyse them for their usefulness and reliability.</td>
<td>The lesson will begin with a digital presentation about Josephus</td>
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<td>P3.4 Identify and account for differing perspectives and interpretations of the past.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Students learn to:</strong></td>
<td>Following on from the digital presentation and discussion, students will be asked to individually complete the distributed worksheet which will ask them to analyse and evaluate Josephus’s account. They may use the internet to assist them with this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ask appropriate historical questions and test hypotheses about the nature of sources, their reliability and usefulness and the problems posed by some sources in reconstructing the past.</td>
<td>Class will conclude with a summary of today’s learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Evaluate differing perspectives and interpretations of the past.</td>
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**Resources Required:**

- Computer + internet connection for both teacher and students
- Data projector
- Photocopies of the worksheet
Lesson 6—Archaeological evidence & the site of Masada

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| **Outcomes:**                                                                 | Today’s lesson will focus on the archaeological evidence and the site of Masada.  
| P1.1 Describe and explain the contribution of key people, groups, events, institutions, societies and sites within the historical context | The class will begin with an exploration of the site of Masada looking at both the location and geographical features. We will firstly view the 5 minute clip on the Israel Nature and Parks authority page to give students an overview of the site. Students will be asked to explore this site as well as the UNESCO World Heritage website on Masada and complete the distributed worksheet using information from both sites. After students have completed this, their worksheets will be collected for informal assessment.  
| **Students learn to:**                                                          | We will then move on to discuss the possibility of the siege at Masada actually taking place and of course the Archaeological evidence. We will view an 8 minute youtube clip that looks in to this.  
| • Comprehend and analyse a range of written and archaeological sources in reconstructing the past.  
| • Describe and assess different methods used by historians, archaeologists and other specialists to understand the contributions of key people, groups, events, institutions, societies, written sources and sites of the past. | Class will conclude with an overview of today’s learning and a discussion on the feasibility of Masada.  |

**Resources Required:**
- Computer + internet connection for both teacher and students  
- Data projector  
- Photocopies of the worksheet

**Websites:**
- [http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1040](http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1040)  
- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynTHvVYtpIA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynTHvVYtpIA)
Lesson 7 — Yigael Yadin & Patriotic Archaeology

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<td><strong>Outcomes:</strong></td>
<td>This lesson will introduce students to the concept of ‘patriotic archaeology’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P1.1 Describe and explain the contribution of key people, groups, events, institutions, societies and sites within the historical context</td>
<td>We will begin the class by first making the concept of ‘patriotic archaeology’ clear to all students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3.1 Locate, select and organise relevant information from a variety of sources.</td>
<td>Students will then be divided into groups of three or four. Each group will be given a different article to study (see attached). Students will have 15 minutes to read and discuss their articles writing key points on to provided butcher’s paper. A spokesperson from each group will then be asked to present the key points from the article and their own thoughts about the article to the rest of the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3.2 Identify relevant problems of sources in reconstructing the past.</td>
<td>This will lead in to a whole class discussion on Yigael Yadin and his possible motivations in the excavation of Masada.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3.4 Identify and account for differing perspectives and interpretations of the past.</td>
<td>Class will conclude with a summary of today’s learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Students learn to:**
- Ask appropriate historical questions and test hypotheses about the nature of sources, their reliability and usefulness and the problems posed by some sources in reconstructing the past.
- Evaluate differing perspectives and interpretations of the past.

**Note:** This topic will be further explored next class.

**Resources Required:**
- Photocopies of articles
- Butchers paper + markers
References


