

Final Project Assignment

The American Adventure and the Age of Jackson

Introduction

Throughout his life, Walt Disney was passionate about history. (Here's a [brief article](#) about Walt's vision of what his parks could teach about history.) He made a point of using his movies and theme parks to teach history to audiences across America and the world. It might be tempting to dismiss history taught by Disney as shallow, silly, even misleading. The term "Disneyfication" is an insult meant to slam the pretensions of a pop culture corporation to anything other than money making entertainment. Nevertheless, with yearly attendance at Disney World in the tens of millions, a lot of people are exposed to Disney's message about what the past means. Anyone interested in how history is communicated to a public audience would be wise to take Disney seriously.

One attraction that expressly aims to teach history is the American Adventure show at the American Pavilion in Epcot's World Showcase. With images, songs, and animatronics, the show tells the story of U.S. History from the arrival of the Puritans through WWII, with a musical montage finale bringing things to the present.

You can find video of the attraction [here](#). The audio is not the best, so you might want to check the script [here](#).

As you'll notice, the show covers American history via a series of vignettes about a particular moment such as the voyage of the *Mayflower*, the American Revolution, or the Civil War. The Age of Jackson is covered in a brief sequence about westward expansion (showing sturdy farmers on the move) and an animatronic appearance by Frederick Douglass (although I think he's technically talking about abolition and slavery in the 1850s but close enough).

The vignettes vary somewhat, but generally they each have two parts:

1. What we'll call the **Visualization** sequence, in which the audience sees one or more large paintings with a camera effect that appears to pan across the painting, zooming in to reveal details. (I'm sure it's all digital now, with no actual painting, but that's what it's supposed to look like.)
2. What we'll call the **Animatronic** sequence, in which several animatronic figures talk to each other and to the audience. Animatronics of Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain take turns appearing in the scenes.

Within each portion of a vignette, there is also speech, dialogue, action (either implied in the painting or shown with the animatronics). A narration introduces the vignette, links the sequences, and provides a conclusion.

Your task is to create a vignette for the attraction that tells an important story about the Age of Jackson and reflects what you've learned in our course.

Assignment

Create 1 vignette in the spirit of the American Adventure show as described above that shows something important that people should know about the Age of Jackson.

Further Instructions

You must include **two equally important parts**.

1. A description of each part of the vignette.
2. An explanation of why what you've chosen is important.

You may explain the significance of each element one at a time OR you can describe everything first and then explain why it is all important. Either organization is fine. Just make sure both parts—description and explanation—are present.

You may employ a certain degree of poetic license. It is fine to depict characters in a way that might not be 100% historically accurate if it is necessary to convey your point within the confines of a brief scene. Make sure to acknowledge and explain your choice, however. The sample answer I wrote contains several examples of how to do this effectively. Don't go crazy--no Jackson wielding a bazooka against zombies. If you're in doubt, please ask for guidance.

You must choose material that aligns with our course. Within the timeframe of 1815-1848, you can choose anything you think is important. You can do something from Jackson's life, an aspect of his presidency, or a particular policy such as Indian Removal. But you don't have to do something specifically about Jackson. You can do the Second Great Awakening, reform movements, slavery, Manifest Destiny. Don't forget about material from later in the course, such as antebellum medicine or the war with Mexico.

The target length is **3-4 pages**. By target, I mean a little over or under is fine. 1 page is not. Neither is 6 pages. By the way, that's double spaced, with 1 inch margins, and a normal 11 or 12 point font (like Calibri or Times New Roman).

Finally, just to be clear: you do **NOT** have to create any picture or image or artwork of any kind. A text-based description of what the vignette should look like is sufficient. Similarly, you don't have to write actual dialogue. A description of what kinds of things would be said is fine.

Advice

Start early. If you start early and have questions, I can help. If you wait until the last minute, I won't have time.

The description of vignette elements and the explanation of their importance are equally important. Address both. One of the first things I'll look for when grading is whether you have a solid explanation of importance or if your paper is mostly description.

When thinking about the importance of a scene, you should be able to fill in the blank in this sentence: "Through the vignette, visitors will learn _____ about Jacksonian America." If you want to borrow that language, go ahead.

When considering the significance of what to show, you might want to think about the following questions (not to write about directly but to mull over):

- Disney attracts people from all over the world, many with no background in U.S. history. How does your material communicate with such a diverse audience?
- The temptation might be to simplify the material we've learned to make it more accessible. But there comes a point when things are so simplified they're no longer true. How do you preserve content quality?
- Earlier this year the Hall of Presidents attraction in Magic Kingdom debuted the President Trump animatronic. For a while there was speculation Disney was [stalling its appearance](#). Then, when the new version opened there were some [disruptions](#). Disney wants money from everyone, so they would prefer to stay away from controversy. Yet, avoiding offense might make the show bland. How does your material tell a meaningful story without running afoul of political partisanship?
- Disney, of course, is for kids, but a lot of history isn't kid friendly. How do you make your material age appropriate, without compromising its integrity? The show does address slavery and the fate of Native Americans and during the Civil War vignette there's a coffin shown, so it is possible to depict some dark themes.

Example

I have created a sample answer that will show you how to structure your papers and what a description of the scene and explanation of the scene's importance should sound like.