Battle of the Somme Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question: Who won the first day of the Battle of the Somme?

Materials:
- Battle of the Somme PowerPoint
- Copies of Documents A-C
- Copies of Graphic Organizer

Plan of Instruction:
1. Introduction: Overview of the Battle of the Somme. Use the PowerPoint presentation to provide an overview of the battle as it occurred between July 1, 1916, and November 18, 1916, and to introduce the day’s Central Historical Question.

a. The Battle of the Somme was one of the most costly battles of World War I. It lasted from July 1, 1916, to November 18, 1916, and resulted in over 1 million casualties.

b. The Allies, in particular the British forces led by General Haig, initiated the battle. The plan was for a “great push” through German lines on the western end of the Western Front.

c. In many ways the battle was characteristic of trench warfare. After massive artillery bombardments of German lines, thousands of allied soldiers went “over the top,” pouring out of trenches and into “no man’s land.” Hundreds of thousands were killed due to the military technologies used in the war – in particular, machine guns, artillery, hand grenades, and gas attacks. Months of fighting, with several assaults up and down the northern end of the Western Front, resulted in relatively small, Allied gains in land.

d. Many historians argue, however, that the Battle of the Somme ultimately turned the tide in favor of the Allies by fatally weakening German forces.

e. Our job today is to investigate what happened on the first day of the battle, July 1, 1916, by reading three historical accounts of the day:

   i. a British newspaper article written by a journalist who was at the battle
   ii. the memoir of a British soldier who fought in the battle
   iii. the memoir of a German soldier who fought in the battle
In particular, we will explore these documents to address the question: Who won the first day of the Battle of the Somme?

2. Hand out Document A: *The Daily Express* along with the Graphic Organizer for the lesson.
   a. Students read document and answer the Guiding Questions.
   b. Share out and discuss responses.

Points to note:
   a. *The generally cheery tone of the article and its optimistic assessment of the British advance.*
   b. *Although written on July 1, this article appeared in the newspaper on July 3.*
   c. *The author notes that he was not actually at the battle.*
   d. *The authors claim that British troops are advancing and that German troops are surrendering.*

3. Hand out Documents B and C.
   a. Students read documents and answer Guiding Questions in Graphic Organizer.
   b. Share out and discuss responses.

Points to note:
   a. *Difference in tone between Coppard and The Daily Express.*
   b. *These are first-hand accounts, but they are memoirs, written long after the battle.*
   c. *Difference in outcomes on day 1 of the battle described by Coppard and Lais as compared to The Daily Express.*
   d. *How Coppard’s and Lais’ accounts include reasons for the high number of British casualties – namely, how the British artillery bombardment proceeding the battle failed to adequately destroy German machine gun positions and the massive lines of barbed wire used to protect them.*

4. Final Claim
   Students use evidence from the three documents to address the question: Who won the first day of the Battle of the Somme?

5. Discussion
   a. *Why are Documents B and C so different from Document A?*
   b. *Which of these documents is most trustworthy? Why?*
   c. Share final slide on casualty statistics for Day 1. *Which documents does this data corroborate with?*
   d. *Who won the first day of the Battle of the Somme?*
Citations
Document A

Document B

Document C