

Reacting to the Past

What is it?

Reacting to the past is a general education program that Mark Carnes initiated at Barnard College in 1996 and has since spread to colleges and universities across the nation. In Reacting courses college students play elaborate games set at pivotal moments in the past, they embody their roles which are informed by great texts allowing them to bring history to life in the classroom.

Albright, Christine L. "Reimagining Latin Class: Using the Reacting to the Past Pedagogy in the Intermediate Latin Class." *Teaching Classical Languages* 5.1 (Fall 2013): 1-14. ISSN 2160-2220.

- To accommodate the reacting game in an Intermediate Latin Class, the semester was divided into thirds, the first five weeks were spent reading Caesar, using *A Caesar Reader: Selections from Bellum Gallicum and Bellum Civile, and from Caesar's Letters, Speeches, and Poetry*. After the completion of the reading, the next five weeks were spent playing the game. The student manual was posted to the class website, students were not required to purchase anything but it was recommended that several texts be used during the game like, Jo-Ann Shelton's *As the Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History*, Ronald Syme's *The Roman Revolution*, and *Handbook to Life in Rome* by Lesley Adkins and Roy A. Adkins. In addition, students were directed to the departmental library for primary texts and additional secondary resources. Several students had been in Albright's prior classes so she assigned highly motivated students to important roles like Marcus Antonius, Dolabella, and Cleopatra. For students she did not know well, the roles were distributed randomly. Students were directed to read the game materials during the first class. To make sure students had done their reading, the fourth weekly quiz was used to test students on historical and cultural information from the Student Manual. Prior to the game, students were frequently asked to consider certain passages in the texts from their character's perspective, which allowed them to practice Latin skills and understand the basis of the game. There were twenty-six students in the class, the manual suggested 24 but there were roughly twice as many Caesarians than Republicans so it worked out well. Students were required to compose two formal speeches in Latin 350-400 words each, eleven first-year graduate students who were enrolled in a Latin teaching methods course served as tutors to help polish the speeches. The first speech was due at the beginning of the game, the second at a later point. The formal speeches were delivered in Latin but not delivered entirely because there was not enough time. Students also had a small extra credit opportunity to compose political graffiti as well as documents which figured in the game in Latin. The final assignment during the last week of the game was to write a short paper in English about the three classical texts their character would

most likely own. A post-mortem was conducted and time was spent discussing what actually happened after Julius Caesar was assassinated.

Anderson, Carl A., and T. Keith Dix. "Reacting To The Past' And The Classics Curriculum: Rome In 44 BCE." *The Classical Journal* 4 (2008): 449. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 15 Nov. 2016.

- Beware the Ides of March: Rome in 44 BCE, is a proposed Rome game to complement the Athens game. The struggle for power and control of Rome that followed the assassination of Julius Caesar is recreated, the game begins right after the assassination and a majority of the action takes place in the Senate, which is required to deal with the threats to order of the city and the empire as a whole. Students are divided into two principal factions the Caesareans-the larger group, since Caesar had packed the Senate and the Republicans. Some students had indeterminate roles as non-partisan members of the Senate, and can be altered depending on class size and the interest of the instructor. Probable debates in the Senate fall under four headings: public order, Caesar's powers, foreign policy and government. Public order involves practical and symbolic matters like whether to reward the assassins for the murder of the tyrant or to allow their prosecution. Foreign policy involves the Senate deciding whether to proceed with the expedition against the Parthians in order to secure the empire's Eastern border. Central texts are expected to be read by students, they must be familiar with Cicero's *de re publica*, *de officiis*, and *Philippicae*. The development of speaking and writing skills is central to student's success in the game and the course. Reading Cicero's work enables students to flesh out their individual roles and incorporate in the game the complex interplay of principle, ambition, personal and family ties, domestic and foreign crises, and calculation and miscalculation that shaped the historical events. The history of the late Republic offers dozens of other possibilities for instructors interested in creating additional indeterminates of their own, surprises are left completely to the discretion of the Gamemaster who can use them to shake up a deadlocked game or introduce historical situations and factors which have not received sufficient attention from the players. Grading is based on written and oral work, instructors can assign the composition of speeches on the probable debate topics in the Senate. Grading criteria can include fidelity to the models of Roman rhetoric, historical plausibility and suitability to the student's assigned role in the game.

Burke, Kevin R., (Author). "Roleplaying Music History: Honing General Education Skills Via 'Reacting To The Past'." *Journal Of Music History Pedagogy* 5.1 (2014): 1-21. *RILM Abstracts of Music Literature (1967 to Present only)*. Web. 15 Nov. 2016.

- The role reversal that occurs in Reacting to the Past empowers students, for this particular music history class music majors are put in the shoes of famous conductors, performers, composers, and other influential individuals, compelling them to draw on the resources of the game to boost their credibility and chances

of victory. Students compete by winning over classmates through persuasive speaking, writing and negotiation meanwhile the instructor assesses the quality of the performance. The music history classroom has the added layer of students experiencing a piece of music and living in it as the characters they were chosen to represent in the game. It is recommended for a single game to occur ranging from four to seven sessions during the semester to provide students with an alternative learning experience. Prior to the game, students should familiarize themselves and read *Strunk's Source Readings in Music History*. Writing assignments are the heart of this RTTP game; students must complete an 8-12-page paper with at least half of it submitted by the middle of the game, students also submit position papers from the viewpoint of their character and a final reflection on the overall game experience. Students also must write short position papers throughout the game and are graded on a 5-point scale to give students prompt feedback.

Kelly, Kathleen A. "A Yearlong General Education Course Using "Reacting To The Past" Pedagogy To Explore Democratic Practice." *International Journal Of Learning* 16.11 (2009): 147-155. *Education Source*. Web. 15 Nov. 2016.

- A new yearlong course that employs the Reacting pedagogy is called "Equality, Persuasion, and Ethics: The Practice of Democracy," this course used the game set in 403 B.C. Athens and 1791 Paris to engage and historicize the challenges of democracy. 18 incoming honors students enrolled in the course. Dahl's *Democracy and Its Critics* was chosen as the framing text; the course began with his first chapter. The sequence of materials suggested by the game book was followed and discussions of the required texts were extended as well as additional supplements. Two classes were spent discussing and practicing rhetorical skills and assigned two papers, one class had a presentation on the Parthenon, two weeks were spent on Plato's *Apology, Crito, and Republic*. In the eighth week of the course the game was ready to begin, the next six class sessions were spent with the students playing their roles as members of the Athenian Assembly in 403 B.C. Athens. Students became members of the Socratic, Oligarch, Democrat, or Radical Democrat factions, these factions attempted to persuade one another and a group of Independents to re-establish the Athenian government. To fulfill the rhetoric requirement, students had to schedule two formal speeches at the Assembly that were 3-5 minutes long on topics appropriate to their role and the Assembly's agenda. These speeches were videotaped and students were required to submit a self-critique of their substance and delivery. In the second semester of the course, students were given 4 weeks for the required readings of Rousseau's *First and Second Discourses and the Social Contract*, as well as the excerpts from Burke's *Reflections*. Students played roles at the 1791 National Assembly in either the Jacobin, Crowd, Feuillant, or Nobility and Clergy factions or as King Louis XVI, Lafayette, Danton, or an independent. Students were required to develop three

editions of factional newspapers which ensured students were prepared for debate. In the postmortem of the game observations made by students that the challenge to achieve equality and the contest between materialist and idealist histories segued the class into reading the *Communist Manifesto*. The last month of the second semester was used to explore democracy in terms of more specific contemporary issues. The final reading for the class turned democracy into an aspect of personal life, in *The Transformation of Intimacy* by Anthony Giddens. Students final written assignment was written while they read Giddens; students were asked to explore a theme in contemporary presidential politics through a perspective shaped by their readings in Dahl and Held.

Lidinsky, April. "Reacting To The Past' To Be Proactive In The Present: Feminist Roots Of High-Impact Practices." *Feminist Teacher* 3 (2014): 208. *Project MUSE*. Web. 15 Nov. 2016.

- A new introductory general education course based on a Progressive Era game written by Dr. Mary Jane Treacy called "Greenwich Village 1913: Suffrage, Labor, and the new Woman," plunges students into debates about suffrage, labor reform, immigration, and the role of the arts. The course is titled Sex Wars and other Social Revolutions and is to be completed with 30 students. It is a First Year Experience Course. The course includes a peer mentor who is trained and has taken the class before, and plays a role in the game as well as guiding other students. This opportunity gives a student a chance to model leadership and decentralize some power from the instructor. The course begins with about six weeks of work with the texts from the Game Book, and essays or excerpts from works by figures who are characters in the game like: Jane Addams, John Reed, and W.E.B DuBois. Elaborate role sheets describing historical figures with key biographical points, motivations and recommended further reading are distributed along with prompts of each student's strategic role in the game. The peer mentor and the instructor are in charge of assigning these roles. The game lasts for seven weeks and culminates in a vote on which social changes from 1913 are most significant to the most people, At the end of the game, students are asked to evaluate themselves, the professor shares their own notes and the peer mentor's insights in a collaborative grading system which results in tougher evaluation than if the instructor had graded students on their own.

Lightcap, Tracy. "Creating Political Order: Maintaining Student Engagement through 'Reacting to the Past'." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 2009: 175. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. 13 Jan. 2017.

- 18 students participated at LaGrange College in a Cornerstone seminar, this game is suitable for up to 30 students. The game took four weeks to complete and fell into three phases which made staying on schedule relatively easy. The first phase consisted of initial preparation, game books were provided to students and included excerpts from standard histories of the independence movement in

India and the French Revolution. The lectures, assigned classical readings, and reading test provided an outline of the historical events. Students were responsible for reading the outlined rules for the game itself as well. The last step of this phase was to distribute the roles: faction members, individuals + indeterminates. Each role had a set of clearly specified victory objectives, winning the game meant achieving those objectives and that winning was tied to a grading bonus. The second phase moved onto the simulation, six 50-minute class sessions consisted of a series of debates and votes on actual issues. Every faction member, individual character and indeterminate presented a speech supporting their side of the debated issue, the speeches are supported by 4-5 page papers due at designated sessions. All reacting games are decided by a final vote on the positions of the factions, therefore, the positions won in the debates are dependent on the votes of the indeterminates. The final phase was to debrief the games. After the last game session students were to read the sections in the game book concerning the actual outcome of the events. Provided with a background, students discuss the way their game played out and why. Lastly all students reveal their victory objectives and discussed why they had either succeeded or failed.

Mulligan, Bret, bmulliga@haverford.edu. "Coniuratio! Ethopoeia And "Reacting To The Past" In The Latin Classroom (And Beyond)." *Classical Journal* 110.1 (2014): 107-123. *Humanities Full text* (H.W. Wilson). Web. 13 Jan. 2017.

- Coniuratio is a new Reacting game that is set during the Catilinarian crisis of 63 BCE, it was designed to be played over only a few class sessions. Chapter-length games provide an ideal mechanism for contextualizing the texts read in the original language as well as introducing aspects of Greco-Roman history and culture in an integrated manner. In Coniuratio students assume the role of a senator debating how to resolve the political crisis that gripped Rome in 63 BCE. Students win Coniuratio by persuading the Senate to adopt a *sententia* or *consultum* consistent with the personal goals of their character—this is achieved through arguments + politicking. Informed debate is the core of Reacting therefore active partisans are required on both sides of the key interpretive issues as well as characters who can be persuaded to support the goals of either faction. Students are assigned to 3 groups: 1) devoted Catilinarians, 2) Optimates and 3) Indeterminates; each of these might be persuaded to support one of the factions or they can band together and forge a new solution. This class is outlined for 7-24 students to participate, divided equally between the factions. A student's success in the game is dependent on their delivery of a persuasive speech that is true to their character's interest, this speech must be composed of quotes from their primary reading, influenced by classic rhetoric and include Roman predilection to persuade through entertainment. The length of the speech required can be modified depending on the number of students in the class and the days available for debate.

Olwell, Russell, and Azibo Stevens. "I Had To Double Check My Thoughts": How The Reacting To The Past Methodology Impacts First-Year College Student Engagement, Retention, And Historical Thinking." *History Teacher* 48.3 (2015): 561-572. *Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson)*. Web. 13 Jan. 2017.

- Eastern Michigan University implemented Reacting as part of an institutional first-year student's retention initiative. Two complete games were played: one was set in Ancient Greece, the other in Puritan New England. The first game addressed the restoration of democracy to Athens, students deliberated over the fate of the Thirty Tyrants who ruled the city backed by Spartan military power. In the second game, Anne Hutchinson's religious beliefs are on trial before the Massachusetts General Court, while newcomers to the colony attempted to gain entry into the Puritan church through conversion narratives. Students viewed their participation as the key to their own grade, and that winning was only a small "extra credit". Being a part of a faction was noted by students as motivation for them to attend and participate so that they would not let down their fellow students.