

Playing Games in the Classroom: Reacting to the Past

Instructors looking for innovative ways to actively engage students in course content while strengthening their students' ability to debate, work collaboratively, and increase empathy may want to consider running a Reacting to the Past Game in the classroom. Reacting to the Past is an immersive game-based pedagogy in which students take on the roles of individuals living in historical conditions as they work to deal with specific historic events and resolve problems. These games do not occur online nor do they use a game board. The game itself is played in the classroom through debates, discussions and staged events and is supported by game manuals published through the Reacting Editorial Board. Although the majority of published games are linked to the humanities, several are suitable for STEM classes. (A complete list of games can be found [here](#).) I used two of games, Modernism and Traditionalism: Art in Paris, 1888-1889 and Greenwich Village 1913: Suffrage, Labor and the New Woman in an American Art History course and found that most of the students engaged enthusiastically and naturally in the game play.

The materials necessary to play the game are readily available and comprehensive. They include: 1) A game book (purchased by the students), which contains a summary of the historical situation, describes the game and the players, and provides primary source materials. 2). An instructor's manual, which provides detailed information on how to facilitate the game, assessment strategies, grading rubrics and class handouts.

Although I found the game books and manuals to be very user friendly, facilitating a game is not necessarily an easy task. You may want to consider attending one of the Reacting to the Past Conferences or Workshops where you will have a chance to play the games yourself and attend sessions on assessment strategies and facilitation techniques. The Reacting Facebook Group provide a useful discussion forum for both new and veteran Reactors.

Things to consider: Reacting Games do take a considerable amount of class time. The Modernism and Traditionalism Game required ten class (1hr 15 min) sessions. Although many games provide alternative, shortened versions, including any game requires a restructuring of the class schedule and assessments. Class size is also a consideration: the number of players varies per game, but most are suitable for classes sizes of 15 -20 students.

Benefits: I found that students really took ownership of their roles and worked extremely hard to make sure their characters succeeded. They did a great deal of research beyond what was required and continued to discuss the ideas presented in the game long after the game, and even after the semester, had ended. SoTL studies assessing the effectiveness of Reacting across disciplines indicate that Reacting students show an increased ability to understand multiple viewpoints, discuss controversial issues and also developed better speaking skills. Assessment studies, along with other publication on Reacting, can be found [here](#).

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