

Writing Assignment title: “Doing History”

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Summary: In this lesson, students learn what it is historians do. Students read primary and secondary historical documents (varying accounts of the birth of Israel). They then argue for their own analysis of the modern Middle-Eastern peace process, writing a history of their own.

Objectives:

1. Critical thinking: Students will be able to critically analyze academic texts, international news, maps, histories, and their own received ideologies and received wisdom for assumptions, political and cultural points of view, and stated and unstated biases.
2. Core concepts: Students will have a basic competence in the core concepts of each of the five disciplines, including an awareness of how these disciplines frame problems, and how the disciplines can complement one another.
3. Applying disciplinary contexts: Students will understand how to use historical background, geographical context, political systems, economic structures, and socio-cultural milieu to better understand regional and global developments.
4. Skills: Students develop core liberal arts skills: reading unfamiliar information and making sense of it; thinking critically about what they’re reading; synthesizing material; coming to a conclusion about it; and articulating that conclusion verbally and in writing.
5. Diversity: Students should gain an awareness of international diversity and learn to think about what the world, or specific issues, might look like from other points of view.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Students recognize the extent to which history is constructed: that facts don’t stand alone and don’t have meaning outside of the interpretive system being used to make meaning from them.
2. Using the methods of the discipline, students begin to understand what it is that historians do.
3. Students demonstrate their capacity for selecting and weighing source material to support an argument.
4. Students practice critical thinking as they argue in their essay for their own interpretation of events.

Materials Required:

1. Two (2) packets of reading materials are required: two separate sets of primary and secondary historical texts for students to analyze. A bibliography of suggested materials follows.

Lesson Activities:

1. Before course begins, create a course reader with 2 packets of historical documents: one from the Zionist point of view, celebrating the birth of Israel, one from the Palestinian

- perspective, dissatisfied with their displacement from what they perceive to be their homeland.
2. Assign each student one of the two packets of reading materials within your course reader. (One easy way to do this: have all students whose last name begins with A-L read one packet, and those beginning with M-Z read the other.)
 3. After reading their assigned packets, schedule a class debate.
 - a. Two teams are created, one for each packet
 - b. Each team is subdivided and asked to develop a separate question. The first group addresses “Why did the Palestinians leave Israel?” The second group addresses “Who started the hostilities?”
 - c. The debate is structured as follows:
 - i. Group A1 reads their statement
 - ii. Group B1 reads their statement
 - iii. Group B1 offers a rebuttal of Group A1
 - iv. Group A1 offers a rebuttal to Group B1
 - v. Group B2 reads their statement
 - vi. Group A2 reads their statement
 - vii. Group A2 offers a rebuttal of Group B2
 - viii. Group B2 offers a rebuttal to Group A2
 4. After the debate, assign students the packet of materials that they did not originally read.
 5. Have a follow-up discussion the following day. Ask students what they learned, or what stood out most to them from their reading.
 6. Finally, students write an argumentative essay analyzing the issue.

Comments:

The students say they like this assignment because they are presented with the challenge of looking at both sides of the ongoing struggle. They like not being asked to take a position on this complex issue, but being granted the opportunity to show the strengths and limitations of different positions.

The primary objective of this assignment is to get students do the work of an historian—to read different, even contradictory accounts of the same material and, on the basis of some articulated criteria, choose how to weight them so as to offer a reasoned history. Students often don’t do the assignment as requested. One of the most common problems is that instead of writing a history they write an essay *about* the different points of view thus avoiding the problem of weighing and evaluating sources.

The second major problem is that students write a narrative that’s clearly derived from some tertiary source—whether cited or not—to avoid having to evaluate the source materials themselves. While encouraging students to do further research and make use of additional *primary* sources, its important to emphasize to them the overall goal of the paper. There are a number of students also who go to tertiary sources like Wikipedia or any number of pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian Web sites and simply use their accounts of events as a basis for their essays. Instructors may need to watch for uncited material that didn’t come from the class or the packet—not just for issues of academic integrity, in other words, but because the goal of the writing assignment is to do the work of the historian.

In addition students often have a real problem using new terminology accurately. They confuse or conflate terms like Arab and Palestinian, or Arab and Muslim, using them incorrectly

or interchangeably. It may be worthwhile for instructors to spend some time in class addressing this issue before asking students to turn in a draft.

This class can be taught with or without the class debate component. Teachers who use it like the way it allows many of the terminological issues and problems of representation to surface in class discussion before the students write their papers. Other faculty consider it a use of class time that could be better spent on other topics.

Reading Packets

There are many source documents available for this exercise. The following selections were chosen by Sheldon Anderson and are widely used by Miami faculty, although some supplement or alter this list.

History Exercise Packet A - Selections from:

- D. Ben Gurion. *Israel - A personal history* 1971
- L. R. Banks. *A Torn Country*. 1982
- Y. Ben-ami. *Years of Wrath, Days of Glory: Memoirs of the Irgun*. 1982
- T. Prittie. Middle East Refugees in M. Curtis, ed. *The Palestinians*, 1975
- E. Silver. *The Haunted Prophet*. 1984

History Exercise Packet B – Selections from:

- I. Tanrous. *The Palestinians*. 1988
- M. Riad. *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East*. 1981
- T.G. Fraser, ed. The UN and the Partition of Palestine. *The Middle East, 1914-1979*. 1980
- H. Nuseibeh. *Palestine and the United Nations*. 1981
- D. Shipler. *Arab and Jew*. 1986
- E. Said, ed. *Blaming the Victims*. 1988
- UN Proposal for Partition of Palestine, 1947

TERMS: Haganah. Jewish Defense Forces.
Irgun. Jewish paramilitary group.
Stern. Jewish paramilitary group.
Yishuv. Jewish community in Palestine.
Jewish Agency. Government before creation of Israel.

BACKGROUND to the ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT:

1516. Palestine, ancestral home to Arabs, Jews, and Christians, fell under Ottoman Turkish rule.
1882. Russian Jews begin first settlements in Palestine, and Zionist idea for a Jewish state in Palestine gains adherents in Europe. Almost 50 communities by 1918.
- 1914 Outbreak of World War I. Turks fight on the losing side of Germany and Austria-Hungary). Population of Palestine: 535,000 Muslims, 70,000 Christians, 85,000 Jews.
- 1914-1918 World War I. British capture Palestine from Turks in 1917. British Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour issues Balfour Declaration promising British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine.
- 1919 At Paris Peace Conference, British try to secure mandate in Palestine through the League of Nations. Arabs disappointed at not receiving full independence.
- 1922 League of Nations gives final approval and terms of British mandate in Palestine. Mandate includes provisions for the development of a Jewish National Home. Almost 20,000 Jews had already arrived in Palestine, setting off sporadic Arab-Jewish clashes. British promise Arabs that a Jewish state would not encompass all of Palestine. Mandate comes into force in September, 1923.
- 1929 Communal clashes claim 250 Arab and Jewish lives.
- 1933-35 Jewish emigration to Palestine increases; over 130,000 new immigrants in these years.
- 1936 Arabs begin national uprising over the fear of a Jewish national home and demand Palestine's independence.
- 1937 British royal commission recommends partition, but in two years the British change their position. Arabs reject the idea. Zionists ambivalent. Arab revolt continues, and British exile Arab leadership.
- May 1939 British promise Palestine's independence within 10 years. Five year limit of 75,000 Jewish immigrants. End of British-Zionist entente. Jewish population of Palestine estimated as 445,000 (30%).
- 1939-1945 World War II. Some Jews in Palestine help British war effort, making weapons. Some weapons fall into the hands of Zionists. David Ben-Gurion in U.S. to enlist support for Jewish army and a Jewish state. Jewish underground forces about 65,000, some of which are attacking the British.
- 1945 League of Arab States declare boycott of Zionist goods.
- 1946 Anglo-American commission recommends increasing the limits of Jewish immigration if Zionist underground disbanded. Plan of provincial Arab and Jewish autonomy drawn up.
- 1947 British refer Palestine question to U.N, which recommends partition into Jewish and Arab states.