

California State University, San Bernardino

CSUSB ScholarWorks

Q2S Enhancing Pedagogy

Spring 4-13-2020

Teaching and Testing Textual Analysis in Reacting to the Past: Thucydides and Jigsaw Method Discussion

Cary Barber
cary.barber@csusb.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/q2sep>



Part of the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#), [Classical Literature and Philology Commons](#), [Cultural History Commons](#), [European History Commons](#), [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), [History of Religions of Western Origin Commons](#), [History of Science, Technology, and Medicine Commons](#), [Intellectual History Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#), and the [Social History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Barber, Cary, "Teaching and Testing Textual Analysis in Reacting to the Past: Thucydides and Jigsaw Method Discussion" (2020). *Q2S Enhancing Pedagogy*. 134.
<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/q2sep/134>

This Lesson/Unit Plans and Activities is brought to you for free and open access by CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Q2S Enhancing Pedagogy by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

Barber, C. “Teaching and Testing Textual Analysis in Reacting to the Past: Thucydides and Jigsaw Method Discussion”

Abstract: The activity this work presents is designed to both strengthen and evaluate students’ ability to think critically about ancient texts within a Reacting to the Past gaming environment (specifically in the game ‘The Threshold of Democracy: Athens in 403 B.C.’). The activity is part of a preliminary set of assignments meant to improve students’ sense of the game’s historical, social, political, economic, and religious context. Moreover, the activity helps to ensure that students can incorporate texts appropriately into speeches, writings, and general gameplay.

Using the Jigsaw Method of discussion, I organize students into ‘numbered’ (I, II, III, etc.) groups of four in arrangements that maximize diversity in terms of gender, major, and year in the university. I then allot a letter (A, B, C, and D) to each member of these ‘numbered’ groups. Different readings and questions are subsequently assigned based on these letters, and students are asked to organize their answers into an essay that they bring with them to class. In class, students first meet with their fellow ‘letters’, and they share and improve their written answers through workshop-style discussion. Next, they meet in their ‘numbered’ groups, where they instruct their fellow group-members on their individual readings. They are then asked to complete a group writing assignment that requires information from each person (and text). Through this activity, students improve their ability to write, speak, and work collaboratively by teaching to – and learning from – their peers on several occasions.

Reading and Understanding Ancient Texts: Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*

GOALS FOR ASSIGNMENT

This assignment is meant to:

- 1) Introduce you to an extremely important literary work by the historian Thucydides.
- 2) Supplement and complement the primary and secondary sources you've already read.
- 3) Make you aware of some of the more subtle features of this – and other – ancient works.
- 4) Build on your ability to think critically about authorial intent and bias.
- 5) Ensure that you can apply these analytical and critical skills to other texts you'll read.
- 6) Enhance your ability to: communicate in written form; work collaboratively; and instruct – and learn from – your peers.

ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

The assignments and readings from last week were designed to make you aware of the chronology, context, and importance of the Peloponnesian War, particularly in terms of our upcoming game. This reading assignment is meant to build on this knowledge by exposing you to some of the key texts describing this chaotic and violent period. You will read these works carefully and answer questions associated with them, which you will share with your peers.

INSTRUCTIONS: BEFORE CLASS

Step 1: Make sure you check Blackboard to determine your group and letter for this assignment.

Step 2: Look below to see which part of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* you've been assigned.

Step 3: Carefully read the questions asked of you to help guide you as you read and take notes.

Step 4: By Day 7, turn in to Blackboard a **750-850 word formally written and organized essay** that answers the questions asked of you. Make sure this work is structured appropriately – that is, it has an introduction, body paragraphs for each major supporting argument, footnoted citations, and a conclusion. **Equally importantly, you need to make sure you identify line numbers and cite them as evidence** – this will be key when you discuss these readings with your groups.

- A. Read the ‘Funeral Oration’ and ‘The Plague’. Compare and contrast: 1) The way Pericles describes the Athenians in the ‘Funeral Oration’ with 2) the way Thucydides describes the Athenians in the midst of the Plague. Why do you think Thucydides juxtaposed these two very different perspectives of Athens in his *History* (the story of the Plague follows *immediately after* the Funeral Oration!)? If the ‘Funeral Oration’ is meant to highlight Athenian strengths, what is the impact of the section on the Plague? How are the two related? Think about the impact of empire on Athenian society as you answer these questions and please find 2 secondary sources (**scholarly book, book chapter, or journal article ONLY**) to help you with your answer.
- B. Read ‘The Mytilenean Debate’. What are the main arguments on each side of the Debate (i.e. Cleon’s vs. Diodotus’)? Essentially, I want you to summarize what each side wants and what their justifications are for their positions. In doing so, make sure to tell me what their attitudes are towards **at least FOUR** of the following: power, tyranny, law, compassion, emotion vs. reason, the death penalty, and self-interest. Think about the impact of empire on Athenian society as you answer this question and please find 2 secondary sources (**scholarly book, book chapter, or journal article ONLY**) to help you with your answer.
- C. Read the ‘Melian Dialogue’. What are the main arguments on the two opposing sides of the Melian Dialogue (Athenians vs. Melians)? Essentially, I want you to summarize what each side wants and what their justifications are for their positions. In doing so, make sure to tell me what their attitudes are towards **at least FOUR** of the following: power, tyranny, law, compassion, emotion vs. reason, the death penalty, and self-interest. Think about the impact of empire on Athens as you answer this question and please find 2 secondary sources (**scholarly book, book chapter, or journal article ONLY**) to help you w/your answer.
- D. Read the ‘Sicilian Expedition Debate’. What are the basic arguments made by Nicias, then Alcibiades, and then Nicias again re: the Sicilian Expedition? In the end, what seems to motivate the Athenian Assembly? Can you think of any modern situations in which this debate has relevance?? Think about the impact of empire on Athenian society as you answer this question and please find 2 secondary sources (**scholarly book, book chapter, or journal article ONLY**) to help you with your answer.

INSTRUCTIONS: DURING CLASS

Step 1: First, you will meet with your ‘letter’ groups (A, B, C, or D) to discuss and improve your answers. You should take notes as you prepare for the ‘lesson’ you’ll give to your numbered group. **Identify key ideas, themes, and supporting evidence to bring with you to your group presentation.**

Step 2: You will then be called back to your number groups to educate your peers on what you've learned (So please make sure you bring your answers to class and have prepared a good summary)!

Step 3: Once all group members have presented, you'll answer the following questions in your number groups:

- 1) You've already used Hesiod's *Works & Days* to reconstruct life in Greece (in the Archaic age). How does life (as described by Thucydides) in the fifth century BCE compare with Hesiod's depiction? Remember to think about the 'spheres' of human activity we covered – economic, political, religious, and social – and how they are all interrelated. You should also incorporate what you've learned in lecture and in your secondary source readings.
- 2) What is 'strength' in ancient Greece? What is 'justice' and 'equality'? What about 'tyranny' and 'democracy'?
- 3) Do you think that any of the Athenian arguments/policies/attitudes/characteristics on display in the Funeral Oration, the Plague, the Mytilenean Debate, the Melian Dialogue, and the Sicilian Expedition debate have resonance in modern America? Which? Do you see any lessons for modernity from the Athenian experience across these four important sections of Thucydides' history? Why/Why not?

OPTIONAL: EXTRA CREDIT + RELEVANCE

Western societies have compared themselves to Athens for centuries in their efforts to emulate Athenian success while avoiding Athens' failures, and many modern democratic ideals are based on the Athenian polis. Thucydides has recently made news because of the Trump administration's interest in Thucydides' account of the causes of the Peloponnesian War and what it can tell us about America's orientation towards China. So with all of this in mind, I want you to discuss thoughtfully as a group the questions above just like centuries of other scholars - and part of what I want to know is: **does Thucydides have any relevance for the present? If so, where and how? And if not, why not?**