

The Great Parley

This method of teaching history is a constructivist approach to education. Students will research a myriad of resources to produce presentations, thinking critically, while also researching and then anticipating what their colleagues will create and then present to the class.

Like most constructivist activities, students perform best with this method after they have had a period of exposure to substantive content through reading, direct instruction and content rich activities.

Experience has shown that students tend to develop a real passion for creating substantive presentations and papers using this method whether they agree with their assigned position or with their colleagues' positions.

This type activity has worked extremely well with both general and honors classes at the middle school and high school levels.

This method has been used effectively with topics such as:

- The French and Indian War (Seven Years War) -- See Cicero Lessons
- The Congress of Vienna
- Late 19th Century American Railroads
- The Treaties of Versailles
- The League of Nations
- The mid 20th century Transformation of Colonies to Independent Nations
- Compare and contrast: Laissez-faire market economy, Japanese-type capitalism, socialism, communism
- The Space Race.
- The Kyoto Treaty

The Debate

You can assign students to work in four to five groups. Each group will represent a particular group, society, or ideology that is involved with the particular issue.

The project may be developed to deal with an actual historical event, using a fictitious forum as structured in the French and Indian War activity. The war, the topics, and the issue are real, but the meeting of all belligerents is fictitious.

Students are aware that the forum is constructed as vehicle for debate. The data have to be deeply anchored in substantive historical content.

The project may also construct a totally fictitious forum, where the students will debate substance issues anchor in historical events or in historical intellectual theory. The example of the new nation, Origen emerging from a dissolving colonial empire during the 1950s is rooted in philosophical and economical theory. The activity helps students to better understand issues faced by the new nations of Africa and Asia as they gained independence from British, French, Dutch, and Portuguese empires.

Explain to each group the position they represent. Teachers may want to give the students some resources to begin their research. Other teachers may want the students to conduct all research on their own. Nevertheless, even if students are conducting all research, it is advisable that the teacher spend time with students in the library helping them with appropriate websites. Also, this project offers the perfect opportunity for students to investigate the “stacks,” journals, and periodicals.

Each of the groups should have an easily defined and distinguished position on the issue.

e.g.

In the French and Indian War, the American colonists, the British, the French, the Iroquois, the Algonquin all have their own particular objectives. If the project is expanded to the Seven-Years War, the Prussians, Austrians, Russians, Swedes, Saxons, Spaniards, inter alia, all have particular objectives.

In creating a new nation of Origen, the free-marketers, the Japanese-type capitalists, the socialists, and the communists all have their own particular and distinct

positions.

Within their group, decide who will play the following roles within subcommittees:

The Position Subcommittee

This committee should consist of at least two members, but may have more.

The Author of their group's white paper

<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=white%20paper>

One member of the group should be responsible for this paper, but the entire group should contribute.

This person will be responsible for writing a double-spaced 5 page explanation of their group's official position. This is a formal paper. They must cite at least five sources and include at least 10 footnotes. It must be written in the third person.

The Orator will present a PowerPoint presentation addressed to the nation on television. The presentation will be based on the text of the group's white paper. The Orator will not just read the PowerPoint presentation. He must discuss the substance of the white paper. The Orator must be prepared to answer two questions from each group. She should research, or have other group members research what the other groups will probably ask her. She should be prepared to answer those probable questions.

Researchers If there are enough students in the class, some students can serve as researchers. The researchers will investigate what questions the opposition inquisitors might ask.

The Opposition Research subcommittee—the inquisitors

This committee (2 or more) or person must research the other groups. They will compose two questions to ask each group's Orator. If the other group supports their position, they will prepare questions that will allow them to strengthen their position. If the other group opposes their position, they will look to create questions that will be hard for them to answer. They will look to put them into a position that will make their position stronger and their position weaker.

This group should also help their own Orator prepare for the questions that will be asked of him.

The Propaganda Subcommittee—the rhetoricians

Propaganda Authors will prepare a propaganda piece to convince the public to support their cause. It will be much more informal than the white paper. This person (committee) may prepare handouts, posters, brief PowerPoint presentations, short video commercial, etc. The Propaganda author will give a three-minute presentation to advance his group's cause.

The Presentations

On the day of the presentation, each group (if not each person) should receive a copy of all other groups' white paper.

Each Orator will be given 5 minutes to make her presentation to the class.

After each Orator speaks, each other group's inquisitor will ask her at least one question (try to ask two questions, depending on time). The Orator will have one minute to respond to each question.

She should look to counter the opposing views of the other groups in her presentations.

Once the Orators are all done, the Propaganda committees will give their presentations of 3 minutes each.

Their teacher may allow each group to ask another group one or more new questions, depending on the time available.

Once all of the proposals are complete, the teacher will assign a five paragraph essay to give the students the opportunity to express their personal opinion on the topic in their essay; they will establish their thesis (main idea) in the first paragraph. In the next three paragraphs they will express their supporting details. They will get the details from the groups' white papers and presentations. Their last paragraph will conclude their thoughts and should lead back to the thesis.