



HISTORY OF THE AMERICAS FINAL

OSUN Connected Learning Contest Winner

Daniel Freund

Bard High School Early College Manhattan

Course: History of the Americas

In each of the fall and spring semesters, students completed a culminating civics project, pegged to current events topics. In the fall, it was attached to a particular set of Constitutional questions or issues. This project was broader, in that it was not attached to the Constitution specifically, but the historical context part of the assignment had students thinking back to the rest of the semester. The project enabled students to engage with topics that they chose, and that are clearly relevant to the present, but also required them to think about them within the context of broader trends in history. It also challenged them with writing that was structured around arguments but was somewhat different from the more academic writing we generally require in Americas.

History of the Americas

A 9th grade survey class covering the History of the Americas.

Practical and pedagogical value

We think that the element of choice and the relevance of the topics was quite worthwhile. The project encouraged students to explore what they were interested in or what was relevant to their personal lives and experiences; for instance, race and education is an issue many have already thought about. Most topics also connected to the current covid crisis. The project also had as its backbone a single website to centralize readings, so it was easy enough for students to engage with the material. Students were guided through different types of stories in a newspaper so they could identify opinion pieces. We had a digital research class, in which students received instruction on how to explore the New York Times

(in the past we've used other databases, but again short on time, we narrowed the research), led by our librarian which worked well over Zoom (we combined multiple sections for each session).

We put together a Google Sites website, which was a single portal for almost all the materials that students considered. That website had articles from diverse online sources, and students received instruction on the use of the New York Times digital archives. We also ran classes and research sessions with Zoom, and of course students could get counsel during our regular Zoom office hours

The assignment

It's important to note that this is a project collaboratively designed and implemented by all of the Americas teachers. Petra Riviere, Veronica Vallejo, Kara Studwell, and I designed the project and all 8 sections of students completed it, providing a common experience for students across the grade. The project had two main parts. The instructors put together a website with five current events topics on it. First students selected one of those topics. Having selected a topic, they explored a historical event attached to it (so for instance, we attached the following to the topic of immigration: Johnson Reed, the Bracero Program, The Immigration and Nationality Act, and DACA). The second major part of the project had students writing an op-ed about the topic of their choosing. We put together a website with sources for students to draw on. In past iterations of the project, students collaboratively found and selected the pool of sources for the entire grade to use, but we decided that was too much considering the limitations imposed by distance learning.

Americas final project handout
Civics project, Spring 2020

In the civics project for this semester, you all will again be considering a topic in the news today. However, you will do so with less of a Constitutional angle, and instead of just exploring the broader debate, you will be entering it. You will also be connecting the present to the past, looking at the way historical themes change and continue.

Below is a summary of the tasks that you will be completing in the process of this month-long final assignment. There will be additional information provided about each of these steps, but this outline should give you a sense of the overall trajectory of the work.

Assign #	Assignment description	Due
–	Select your topic: You must visit the following website: https://sites.google.com/bhsec.bard.edu/civics-project-s20/home . From the menu (top left on a computer, but the layout is different on a phone/tablet) you will see several topics that you can consider for this project. Read the brief descriptions and maybe the articles posted under “background” and select the topic you are most interested in considering for this project. Your instructor will provide information about how to submit this to them.	5/15
1	Historical Analysis: As the old adage says, history repeats itself. In this step, you will aim to draw connections between the past and the present by examining a historical event that relates to your topic. This assignment will be broken down into two stages: <ol style="list-style-type: none">Research: Historical events that are related to your topic are posted on the Civics website. For this part of the project, you will choose ONE of these events to consider. You may need some additional background information on the events before making that choice. For this, sources such as Wikipedia or Britannica.com are acceptable. If you have another event that you know of that is not listed, please get approval from your instructor before using it. Having chosen your event:<ol style="list-style-type: none">Visit <u>one or two</u> of the interactive exhibits listed on the Civics Project Website to get a sense of historical events, themes, and connections. To be clear, these exhibits might not pertain directly to this one event. That’s okay.After our research workshop, you will find <u>one or two</u> primary source articles that are directly related to your historical event. You will use the <i>New York Times</i> digital archives to find that source. Please stick to the <i>Times</i>.Respond: Read your historical sources and respond to the following in paragraph form. You will likely not be able to respond to all of the questions below, so please use them as a guide for your response. Your response should be no more than 500 words in total:	5/26

	<p>a. Describe your historical event: What was the context? Who was involved? What happened?</p> <p>b. Based on your current understanding, how does this relate to your current events topic? What themes or ideas do you see continuing? How have things changed over time?</p>	
2	<p><u>Current Events Topics:</u></p> <p>1. <u>Sourcing:</u> In this next step, go back to the civics website and return to your topic page. Now, look under the section: “Current Events Topic and Op-Ed Sources.” You will review the “Background” sources and 3-4 of the "Current Events, Policy, and Opinion.” You will take notes for each source that answers the following questions:</p> <p>a. What are the basic facts? Who is involved? What is happening?</p> <p>b. Do you see any recurring themes or ideas in this article or across articles?</p> <p>c. What clarifying/understanding questions do you have?</p> <p>2. <u>700-1000 word op-ed.</u> This is where you take a stand! The culminating assignment for this project will derive from assignment 1 and will require that you provide an argument regarding your current events topic. Op-eds appear in newspapers every day and they are generally where authors make arguments about issues relevant to the day. This will require you to revisit your articles to determine what debates exist around your topic. Your Op-Ed should include:</p> <p>a. A debatable question that you create after consulting your sources. What question seems to be driving the conversation?</p> <p>b. Your opinion. However, your opinion should be backed up by evidence and facts from your research. You should make mention to the historical themes and connections you developed in part 1. This can be how you introduce your Op-Ed, but does not have to be.</p>	6/8
3	<p><u>Share your Research:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Details to be announced by your instructor(s) at a later date 	

Op-Ed Support Document:

Step 1 Read articles and collect information (You may use the following table for notes)

Article Title and Author Name	Notes on Information: <i>What information is related to your topic?</i>	Notes on Opinion: <i>What are various opinions on your topic?</i>

--	--	--

Step Two: Create debatable questions. Remember:

- Debatable questions should not be answered with a simple yes or no.
- Debatable questions can be answered with “sides,” in other words, are argumentative.
- Debatable questions should be answered using evidence!

--

Tips for writing an Op-Ed:

What is an Op-Ed?

An Op-Ed is a piece of writing that expresses the opinion of its author.

Write a clear and attention grabbing headline

The title for your op-ed should stand out to a potential reader and make him/her want to read your piece.

Focus on a single point, but be as persuasive as you can

In less than 1000 words, you will not be able to get at all threads of debate in your topic, but this word limit should help you focus on what you think is most important. Remember, also, the goal of your Op-Ed: To convince others of your perspective.

Consider starting with an anecdote if possible and then relating it to a broader position

Consider starting with a specific case or example that displays the larger debate or, ideally, your position. It will hook your reader. There are lots of good ways to start Op-eds; likely you read some that didn't start with a story. This is just a suggestion.

Advocate for a clear position in your piece

Your Aquinas assignment allowed you to identify and engage opposing positions within your topic; in this piece, refine and explore your own voice.

Use various sources to support your ideas and to make your position credible

Locate and employ the best evidence from your sources to support your point of view and to convince your reader. Don't forget to cite them.

Acknowledge the other side

Make sure that you do not ignore an opposing voice in your piece, but don't let your rebuttal of the opposition viewpoint overwhelm your own position.

Provide a "So what?" for the reader that pays attention to the most recent debates about your topic

Make sure that your reader understands why your debate and position are substantive and important. Why do they matter to people?