

# All African People's Conference Game Reflection: Learning Through Gameplay - The Impacts and Implications of a Unique Style of Education

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When our African History teacher first mentioned roleplaying the All-African People's Conference, we were intrigued and excited. This was different from typical assignments we'd completed in the past as two juniors attending an independent high school in St. Louis, Missouri. Like most high school students, lectures, projects, and essays... But a roleplaying game? This was new to us and allowed us to engage in studying the past in a way we had never before.

Each student was assigned a different delegate to roleplay and using the historical background our teacher provided of each character, we then began role-playing the conference. We discussed our stances with other delegates, gave speeches, and developed and voted on resolutions. Through this experience, we learned that the All-African People's Conference, hosted by Kwame Nkrumah, held from December 8th, 1958 through the 13th, in Accra, Ghana—consisted of hundreds of representatives from many African colonies and independent states. This diverse group of delegates came together to discuss the end of colonialism, democracy, non-segregation, and the methods by which colonies were to gain their independence. Because the two of us were assigned different roles, our experiences of the project slightly differed; however, we both can attest to the creativity of the activity that allowed us to demonstrate our knowledge about a historical event and our historical research and thinking skills in a new, engaging way.

Kamryn was tasked with taking on the role of one of Kenya's representatives, Tom Mboya, who served as chairman of the conference. With this role, I was given automatic power to help decide the agenda of the conference, which topics would be discussed, and which would be left out; however, I had to avoid being voted out while still trying to encourage my ideas. My stances mostly revolved around Pan-Africanism, non-violence, anti-communism, and positive relations with the West. Learning about and defending these viewpoints in the role allowed me to dive deeper into their meanings and engage more with these important topics than I would from simply taking notes about them. I was excited to take on the role of the chairman, but also slightly nervous about the responsibility of carrying out and maintaining that position. In order to prevent getting voted out, I tried to find some ideas that I could agree with from every representative without compromising my stances so that I had somewhat of a supporter in every other player, even if our beliefs didn't align in every way. In preparation for the conference, I wanted to be really knowledgeable on Tom Mboya's ideas as well as the way he would express them, so along with the role sheet, I read some of his articles and watched some YouTube videos of interviews to really understand his personality, demonstrating how easy it was to become motivated on a whole new level as a student with this activity as I was willing and excited to go beyond the expectations of the activity—something I would not typically do—in order to play my role accurately. This was particularly useful when writing my primary speech—a speech we were assigned to write and give to the class on an assigned topic that was important to our representative. I gave my primary speech on a freedom fund, a proposed system of economic collaboration between colonies to help achieve total liberation of Africa.

I am a student who struggles with public speaking and usually, I am intimidated by assignments that involve it, but this speech allowed me to face this fear differently as I was able to incorporate Tom Mboya's personality and take on a persona. It wasn't simply a presentation where I had to memorize historical facts and regurgitate them formally to the class, but instead, an opportunity to introduce an idea that I took on as my own, allowing me to feel much more comfortable and enjoy it in a way that I have never experienced with public speaking before. This primary speech ultimately turned into a resolution, another part of the activity in which each player laid out the status of their topic and changes they would like to have made in the format that was done in the actual historical conference. My resolution called for the creation of the freedom fund and a permanent secretariat to control the

funds with myself, Tom Mboya, as the Secretary-General. Trying to appoint myself as Secretary-General of this fund and figuring out the way I could do so without facing pushback for trying to have unfair influence was an obstacle. I tried to present it to the other players as if I would not have that much power or influence to get their vote, which ultimately failed because that section of my resolution was removed. However, for the rest of my freedom fund resolution, I stated that the fund would be beneficial for everyone, in an attempt to get full support, and it worked.

Through this process, I gained a real understanding of the abilities needed in order to work with others in an environment where opinions may differ. I learned about the importance of negotiation, cooperation, and advocating for my ideas, which all played a large part in my success in the activity and are skills that I can take with me to all aspects of my life. To be successful in this activity, it was essential to learn about each player's viewpoints and their colony's circumstances to find areas of disagreement or commonalities that could be utilized for an alliance. Through this, I learned about different forms of colonialism that took place in Africa and the challenges associated with each colony in their attempt to reach liberation. Taking on the roles and acting out the conference through first-hand experience as opposed to learning about it in a lecture allowed us to deeply understand the topics of conversation, differences in opinion of how independence would be won, and how the continent would function after in the actual historical context, while also giving me a chance to practice and utilize public speaking, writing, and interpersonal skills.

Ava took on the role of playing Marthe Moumié from Cameroon, meaning I was the only woman represented in our activity. Filling in this role really meant advocating for myself and proving my worth to the men in power. I loved advocating for Cameroonian women, as well as highlighting the struggles they were facing from not just French colonial rule, but from the oppressive men in the state as well. This project differed from typical class assignments, in that recreating a historical figure's persona made me examine more closely and think more deeply about that that person's life and their beliefs than I ever had done before when studying the past. When I mention the love I have for not only my character but for the impact she made on Cameroon, it speaks to the importance of this assignment and the demand for students to take on roles they would never have envisioned for themselves.

On the first day of the conference, I gave my primary speech which mainly discussed what was taking place in French Cameroon, promoted the use of violence as a method to gain liberation and spread information on women's rights. In doing so, I gained historical context on all three topics but found myself gravitating towards the information I learned about the protests women had been participating in. Having the opportunity to go up and speak in front of the other delegates plus guests and reporters made this activity feel so real, and it opened my mind to all the historical debates and discussions about the best way for African countries to achieve liberation. This speech unlocked discussions with other leaders which happened to be my favorite part of the game. Being able to hear everyone's opinions and different goals allowed me to consider the different techniques they offered. Compared to the actual historical events, it was extremely interesting to see myself getting elected to the Steering Committee, the group of delegates that formatted the structure of the conference, despite Marthe Moumié not getting this opportunity in the actual conference. This showed not only the power I had when taking on this role but also the strength of women in negotiation and fighting for their rights. My role allowed me to explore the complexities of the historical context pretty well. My political party, UPC (Union of the Peoples of Cameroon), was labeled communist and many other conference attendees agreed that this is not the best political stance the African people should take. Despite the majority's repression of my idea of promoting communism, I prevailed and had multiple leaders stand alongside this thought.

All of these historical details I obtained about Ms. Moumié were accessible to me through the gamebook our teacher created, alongside some research I did on my own. Contrary to what most of my peers in class wanted, after the official conference, most independence leaders resorted to violence to gain independence as non-violent protest got them nowhere. Overall, the main skills and knowledge I gained from this activity, such as communication, leadership, and poise continue to be prevalent in my home and academic life. I had to communicate with others to reach my agenda, while also trying to play the role of someone who agrees with their views solely to get my resolutions and point across. This simulation kept me engaged through all steps and

reintroduced a more engaging way of learning, while also emphasizing key events and concepts from the official conference. I believe these three characteristics of communication, leadership, and poise, will help with academic papers and speeches in other classes and even at home with leading my younger siblings or possessing poise in front of an audience.

This activity gave us a deep understanding of the AAPC through first-hand experience that incorporated many aspects of learning such as argumentative reasoning, creativity, and persistence through adversity. The two of us had positive experiences with this simulation, including positive and memorable interactions with our fellow classmates. In our view, using games as an interactive way of learning instead of traditional teaching methods gives students a particularly engaging way to understand challenging historical material. It allows students to use critical thinking skills, imagination, and everyday life skills, such as negotiation and compromise when working with others, while also participating in a fun activity. Typically, students write and memorize notes for one quiz or test without retaining the information. In our experience, a game like this effectively facilitates more authentic learning and increases students intrinsic motivation to stay on track for successful completion of the learning outcomes. In sum, a game makes learning fun for students as well as allowing them to practice important skills that are essential for other areas of their life. After being able to experience a less traditional way of learning, we believe it's vital that history teachers around the world incorporate games into their classrooms to help students fully engage with the concepts and events that they are learning.