

Is Including Games in a College Class Beneficial?

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Teaching History 48(1)

DOI: 10.33043/TH.48.1.134-135

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This semester I was in a class called “Introduction to Political Thought” and instead of our professor just explaining how the French Revolution expressed political thought, we played a semester-long game. Was this an effective way of learning? In this short essay, I explain why I answer “Yes!”

My name is Peculiar Joseph and I am discussing my experience as King Louis in the French Revolution gameplay. The French Revolution Game Play was part of the requirements for the introduction to political thought class, a political science class. I took the class in the Spring of 2023.

Personally, I very much enjoyed playing the French Revolution *Reacting to the Past* game. It was an effective way for students to learn about the French Revolution and political thought, and have fun with it. But more than just fun, playing the RTTP game was a challenging task in a good way. It was challenging because we had to understand the concept of the game and the politics of the Revolution to be able to play it well while trying to reach our victory conditions at the same time. The concept of the game was basically understanding the dynamics of the real-life French revolution between the monarchs, Feuillants, Jacobins, mobs, and clergy and nobility.

In particular, it was challenging because I had a different personality from my character, King Louis XVI. One example was when I had to make the decision of what to do with the other factions when I won the game. Usually, I will just forgive everyone and look towards a common goal, but in the game, I decided to kill everyone. I decided to kill everyone that was not part of the clergy or the nobility because that would be something King Louis would have done in 1789. Doing this helped me understand the reasoning of King Louis and equipped me more to be in his Character, which is a pure monarch. Also, I love to act and usually involve myself in theater with already-written scripts, but in the case of this game, there was no script and we had to utilize our critical thinking and problem-solving skills to play the game, which was different from what I am used to. The uncertainty of the game even provided more room for my personality to clash with King Louis’s, especially when I had to make certain decisions.

In terms of the challenges I faced playing King Louis, it was being uncertain about how the members of the National Assembly were going to vote. I could not vote, but whatever was being voted on can affect me directly or indirectly. I was with the Clergy and Nobility whose main purpose was a complete Monarch as well, and we were against the Jacobins whose main aim was to destroy the monarchy and create a constitutional democracy. The mobs hated the king, while the Feuillants were in the middle of everything (They had to be convinced every voting period to be able to pick a side to vote in favor of). I feel that at the beginning of the game, I understood that I had to be close to the Clergy and Nobility so that they could help me, especially in wanting them to vote for the Royal Veto to be part of a new Constitution. It was still challenging at the beginning even if we stuck together because the Jacobins and Feuillants were always voting against us. One example of the hard times I had was the very first vote to adopt the Civil Constitution of the Clergy to Constitution, which passed 750-250. It was discouraging for me but I had faith that we could still make it and took every aspect of the game seriously.

The required reading assignments were not too challenging for me because I knew what the game was about and just expressed myself while remaining in my character. The readings were mostly the textbook which was Rousseau, Burke, and Revolution in France, 1791 (*Reacting to the Past*).

When the royal veto passed at 625-250. I was really happy because I worked really hard on my writing, and in-class speech, as well as communicating effectively with my close factions (Clergy and Nobility). The end of the game was tricky, but it paid off because I ended up successful: I was luckily able to escape to my allies in the Austro-Prussian invading force, and that force won a dice roll to defeat the Revolutionary forces.

I learned about the French Revolution and the dynamics of how it played out in the time period covered by the game. I got to see other characters and gain insight into how other people were playing in the game, as well as a glimpse of how intense the Revolution was in 1789. The biggest thing I utilized and honed in the Revolution game will be my critical thinking skills. I learned that the Jacobins and the Crowd did not like the King and

wanted him dead or at least out of power. I also understood that the Feuillants were in the middle of everything, in that they needed to be convinced of the side that would have benefited them more.

Regarding other types of professional and academic skills, I learned that working in a team is very hard especially when not everyone is as enthusiastic as you are in the Revolution and game, particularly in the historical scenario and its conflicts. I love the idea of teamwork but it is good to understand that even though we were in teams some people might still have different interests and ideas that might not relate to a defined consensus for the team. These skills were related to the format of the game: I already had some of the skills and the game helped me practice and learn new ones.

I think this game format should be used in courses because the French Revolution is harder (and can be boring) to learn when you have to sit in class and only listen to a lecture. I also think that it is a good work balance in the class because we did a bunch of readings at the beginning of the course and then we did the game, which referred back to readings. I think it makes sense for the class to look like this. I usually referred to the textbook whenever I wanted to do my writing or my speeches because the foundation was always explicit in the book. Also, students get to practice what they learned from class in the game. An example would be the concept Rousseau theorizes about the “general will.” Everyone kept on using that phrase throughout the game, whenever they wanted to make a political point, either to support it or reject it.

In conclusion, the game was a good and memorable one.