**Reacting GB Boilerplate 2018**

*WHAT IS REACTING TO THE PAST*

Reacting to the Past is an innovative classroom pedagogy that teaches history and related subjects through a series of role-immersion games. Students read from specially designed game books that place them in moments of heightened historical tension. The class becomes a public body, or private gathering; students, in role, become particular persons from the period and/or members of factional alliances. Their purpose is to advance an agenda and achieve victory objectives through formal speeches, informal debate, negotiations, vote taking, and conspiracy. After a few preparatory sessions, the game begins, and the students are in charge. The instructor serves as an adviser/arbiter. Outcomes sometimes vary from the history; a debriefing session sets the record straight.

*HOW TO PLAY A REACTING GAME*

The following is an outline of what you will encounter in Reacting and of what you will be expected to do.

**1. Game Set-Up**

The instructor will present the historical context of the game before the game formally begins. During the set-up period, you will read several different kinds of material:

* The game book (from which you are reading now), which includes historical background, rules and features of the game, core texts, and essential documents
* A role sheet, describing the historical person you will model in the game and, where applicable, the faction to which you belong
* Supplementary documents or books, that if assigned will provide additional information and arguments for use during the game

Read this material before the game begins (or as much as possible, catching up once the game is underway). And just as important, go back and reread these materials throughout the game. A second and third reading while *in role* will deepen your understanding and alter your perspective, for ideas take on a different meaning when seen through the eyes of a particular character. Students who have carefully read the materials and who know well the rules of the game will do better than those who rely on general impressions.

**2. Game Play**

Once the game begins, usually one student, randomly chosen, elected, or identified by role, will preside over the class sessions. Your instructor then becomes the gamemaster (GM) and takes a seat in the back of the room. While not directing the play of the game, the GM may do any of the following:

* Pass notes to individuals or factions
* Announce important events, some of which may be the result of student actions, others instigated by the GM
* Perform scheduled interventions, sometimes determined by die rolls
* Interrupt proceedings that have gone off track
* Arbitrate play-related controversies

Reacting games usually employ three types of roles: faction roles, mostly the same for all members of the group; individual roles, differentiating otherwise similar faction members; and indeterminate roles, identifying individuals who operate outside the established factions. Generally speaking, you either are in a faction as a differentiated individual, or you are outside the factions as an “indeterminate.” In games where the factions are tightly knit groups with fixed objectives, indeterminates provide the most obvious source of extra support. Cultivating them is, therefore, in the interest of faction members, because never will one faction have the voting strength to prevail without allies. Collaboration and coalition building are at the heart of every game.

The classroom may sometimes be noisy with multiple points of focus, because side conversations, note passing, and players out of their seats are common and accepted practices in Reacting. But these practices also are disruptive and can spoil the effect of formal speeches. Nothing is accomplished by trying to talk over the din to persons not listening, so insist upon order and quiet before proceeding.

Always assume, when spoken to by a fellow student—whether in class or out of class—that that person is speaking to you in role. If you need to address a classmate out of role, employ a visual sign, like crossed fingers, to indicate your changed status. It is inappropriate to trade on out-of-class relationships when asking for support or favors.

Work to balance your emotional investment in your role with the need to treat your classmates with respect. Some specific roles may require you to advocate beliefs with which you personally disagree. While such assignments may seem difficult at first, careful study of your role sheet and the readings should help you develop a greater understanding of why this person thought and acted as he or she did. In a few cases, you may even need to promote ideas that are viewed as controversial or offensive in today’s society. Again, always go back to the sources: analyze why those ideas made sense for that particular person in that particular time and place, and then advocate those beliefs as persuasively and effectively as you can. If you ever feel uncomfortable or uncertain about your role, you should feel free to speak with your instructor. Remember also that you will have an opportunity during the debriefing session to discuss the differences between your game character and your personal beliefs or values.

**3. Game Requirements**

The instructor will lay out the specific requirements for the class. In general, though, a Reacting game will have students perform three distinct activities:

* **Reading and Writing.** This standard academic work is carried on more purposefully in a Reacting game, since what you read is put to immediate use, and what you write is meant to persuade others to act in preferred ways. The reading load may vary with roles (for that done as research is in addition to that done as preparation); the writing requirement is typically a set number of pages per game. In both cases, the instructor is free to make adjustments. Papers are often policy statements, but also autobiographies, poems, newspaper articles, clandestine messages, or after-game reflections. Papers written provide the bases of speeches delivered.
* **Public Speaking and Debate.** In most games every player is expected to deliver at least one formal speech (the length of the game and the size of the class will affect the number of speeches). Debate occurs after a speech is delivered. Debate is impromptu, raucous, and fast-paced and often results in decisions determined by voting.
* **Strategizing.** Communication among students is a pervasive feature of Reacting games. You will find yourselves writing emails, texting, attending out-of-class meetings, or gathering for meals. The purpose of these communications is to lay out a strategy for advancing your agenda and thwarting the agenda of your opponents, or to hatch plots to ensnare individuals troubling to your cause.

**4. Skill Development**

A Reacting role-immersion game provides students the opportunity to develop a host of academic and life skills:

* Effective writing
* Public speaking
* Problem-solving
* Leadership
* Teamwork
* Adaptation to fast changing circumstances
* Work under pressure with deadlines to meet