

Lesson 4:

THE LEXICON OF WAR AND PEACE IN TEXTBOOKS

Impressions about the nature of and reasons for military conflicts are generally developed second-hand by American school children. History textbooks provide one of the primary sources for students' formation of concepts concerning war and other types of armed conflicts as students study the wide variety of armed conflicts that have occurred in history. Yet as teachers, we rarely ask our students to critically examine and think about the ways that different conflicts are described in their texts, and how those descriptions might influence their perceptions.

Orienting Questions:

1. What words are used in our textbooks to indicate that physical or armed conflict occurred between two groups of people?
2. What determines the use of the different words or phrases?
3. Do our textbooks provide any guidelines for distinguishing war from other kinds of conflicts?
4. What explanations do our textbooks give for the causes of physical/armed conflict?
5. What do our textbooks have to say about peace?
6. Based upon what they read in textbooks, what conclusions might students draw about the nature of war and peace?

- Objectives:**
- To reinforce student learning about different conflicts in history.
 - To develop students' critical reading skills through attention to word usage and meaning;
 - To develop students' skills in critically evaluating underlying values and/or biases of a text;
 - To engage students in thinking about the meanings of the range of terms used to refer to armed conflict in history textbooks;
 - To develop students' critical thinking skills through reflection about the ways in which textbook descriptions help shape their own attitudes and impressions of different historic events.

How/When to Use: Grades 5 – 12. There a number of different ways to use this activity.

- The activity can be introduced at the beginning of the year as an exercise accompanying each new unit of study. At the end of the year a cumulative comparison can be done.
- Alternatively, the activity can be assigned three to four times throughout the year as part of a combined review of several units of study. At the end of the year a cumulative comparison can be done.

- At the 7th grade or above, if it is possible to get a copies of textbooks from earlier grade levels, different sections from different grade level texts can be assigned, providing students with a much richer comparison. This can be most powerful at the beginning of the year, alerting students from the outset to read critically.

Materials: For Parts I and II, a copy of Student Worksheet # 1 for each student and one group worksheet and one group instruction sheet for each group. For Part III, a copy of Student Worksheet #2 for each student *or* a class bulletin board. For all parts, student textbooks.

Procedure: This activity can be done as an individual assignment, but is more powerful if given as a group assignment.

PART I: THE LEXICON OF WAR

1. Decide what sections of the textbook you want students to examine.
2. Divide the class into groups of four to five students. Students should have textbooks available to them. Assign the sections of the textbook to be examine.
3. Give each student several copies of the individual worksheet. Instruct that this part is to be done individually. (Alternatively, this part could be assigned for homework.)
4. After students have filled out their individual worksheets, give each group a blank group worksheet and the group instructions. Point out that it is the responsibility of the group to resolve differences regarding information through crossing-check facts, and differences in opinion through respectful discussion.
5. Have groups share their results. You may want to use a large version of the worksheet (on the board, on butcher paper, etc.) to record the results of the entire class.
6. Discuss with the class:
 - Why are so many different words used to describe conflict? Can they see any patterns between choice of words and other factors, e.g., the duration of the conflict? the parties to the conflict? the outcome?
 - Did the choice of words influence their feelings about how important the conflict was? How?
 - Can they think of other, equally valid ways of describing each of the conflicts?

Extension: Have students re-write the textbook description of one or more of the conflicts, retaining the facts of the case, in-so-far as they know them, but using different vocabulary to describe the conflict itself.

PART II: THE CAUSES OF WAR

7. In their groups, have students examine the causes given by the textbook of each of the conflicts they found. (Refer back to their individual worksheets.) Be prepared to report out on:

- the different *kinds* of causes mentioned by the textbook; and,
- any relationships or patterns they see between the causes cited and
 - a. the parties to the conflict
 - b. the importance of the conflict
 - c. who won the conflict
 - d. any other relationships or patterns they may observe

8. Discuss with the class:

- What different kinds of explanations did the textbook provide for the causes of different conflicts? (In some cases, the text may have provided no explanation at all.)
- What patterns did they observe between the types of causes mentioned by the text and other factors?
- Based on their textbooks, what conclusions might they draw about the causes of war?
- Overall, do they think their textbooks do a good job explaining different kinds of armed conflict and their causes? Why or why not?

PART III: PEACE

This can be used as a year-long monitoring exercise, or it may be done as a cumulative review activity at the end of the year.

9. Tell students that the class will be monitoring what our textbooks have to say about peace. Each time they come across a discussion of peace or the use of the word, they will add it to the chart. Periodically, and at the end of the year, we will compare how our textbooks discuss peace to their treatment of war.

10. *Either* post a bulletin board in the room (or use an electronic bulletin board) using the format on Student Worksheet #2, or give each student their own copy of Worksheet #2 to keep in their notebooks as a year-long recording device. If using the latter approach, remind students periodically to record the information on their worksheets.

11. At the end of the year, or periodically when enough references to peace have occurred in the text to provide a basis for comparison and generalization, engage the students in the following Socratic Seminar. (Note: Peace is mentioned far less frequently than conflict or war, so it will take a while to compile a sufficient numbers of instances.)

Socratic Seminar

1. Is peace a common topic in our textbooks? When does it get discussed? Why do you think that is?
2. How is peace described in our textbooks? What other words or descriptions are used to indicate peace? How does this compare with words used in the textbook to indicate war? Why do you think this difference exists?
3. Does the textbook pay more attention to peace or to war? What about periods when there is no war – are they described as peaceful? In your opinion, are periods between wars always peaceful? Why?
4. What does the textbook have to say about the causes of peace? We often say that people or nations “go to war” or “make war.” Do you believe people can “go to peace” or “make peace?”

NAME: _____

Geographic Region, Culture or Time Period: _____

Look for instances of armed conflict in the assigned section of your textbook. How do you know it is an armed conflict? What words are used that suggest this? (examples: "attacked" "revolt" "invade" "captured" etc.) Use additional worksheets if needed to cover all the conflicts.

1. <u>Conflict</u> (chapter & page #):		1. <u>Conflict</u> (chapter & page #):	
2. List all words or phrases that indicate that a conflict took place.	3. Who were the parties to the conflict?	2. List all words or phrases that indicate that a conflict took place.	3. Who were the parties to the conflict?
4. Was this a major conflict? Yes _____ No _____ Explain your answer.		4. Was this a major conflict? Yes _____ No _____ Explain your answer.	
5. Was this a war? Yes _____ No _____ Explain your answer.		5. Was this a war? Yes _____ No _____ Explain your answer.	
6. According to the textbook, what were the causes of this conflict?		6. According to the textbook, what were the causes of this conflict?	

Group Instructions

Use the group worksheet “Comparing Textbook Descriptions of Conflict” to record the requested information for four different conflicts identified by group members.

1. Enter the name of the conflict.
2. List the parties involved in the column for each conflict.
3. List the words used in the textbook to describe that conflict by comparing the lists of words different people have recorded for each conflict (box #2 on individual worksheets.) Some people may have listed different words used to describe the same conflict. If so, verify (by going back to the text) that all of the words listed are correct.

Discuss: Are there differences in the kinds of words or phrases used to describe different conflicts? If so, why do you think that might be?

4. For each of the conflicts on the group worksheet, compare how group members answered the questions in box #4 on their individual worksheets.

Discuss: Does everyone agree? Why? If not, discuss the differences in your responses, listening carefully to each others’ perspectives, and respectfully debating any differences of opinion.

Be prepared to report out to the class on your discussions.

GROUP WORKSHEET

COMPARING TEXTBOOK DESCRIPTIONS OF CONFLICT

Conflict Name	Conflict Name	Conflict Name	Conflict Name
Parties to Conflict	Parties to Conflict	Parties to Conflict	Parties to Conflict
Conflict Words	Conflict Words	Conflict Words	Conflict Words
Important? A war?	Important? A war?	Important? A war?	Important? A war?

NAME _____

DISCUSSIONS OF PEACE IN OUR TEXTBOOK

(an example is provided)

Time Period/ Date	Page # in book	Topic	What the textbook says	Other words used to indicate peace
27 BC - 250 CE	23	<i>Roman Empire at its height</i>	<i>"Because Rome was strong, the empire was peaceful and stable."</i>	<i>stable, well-fed, strong, wealthy</i>