

History Lesson Study Final Report

I. Background

Title

Lesson Study in History: Analyzing how context shapes content

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Discipline

History

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Course Name

Global Origins of the Modern World (HIS 101, Fall 2013)

Global Transition and Change (HIS 102, Spring 2014)

Course Description

“Global Origins of the Modern World” explores the origins and development of the modern world, focusing on the dual dynamics of globalization and vital indigenous civilizations. The course critically examines a minimum of three world civilizations, their ancient antecedents, and will include multiple themes, such as technology and science, religion, gender, war and peace, and the environment. “Global Transition and Change” examines world history from the perspective of one specific theme, such as technology and science, religion, gender, cross-culture connections, war and peace, arts and literature, government, or the environment. The course is global in scope, covering a minimum of three world civilizations. Individual sections trace the development of one theme over the course of major changes in world history, ancient origins to the present. Students have their choice of sections, thus of themes. The HIS 102 in which we conducted the lesson study was organized around the study of human migration in world history.

Abstract

The History Department has selected the General Education Student Learning Outcome (SLO) “*Explain how content is shaped by the context in which it was created*” for assessment in all sections of HIS 101 and 102. For historians this learning outcome means making a persuasive argument about what a particular primary source allows them to understand about the historical setting in which it was created. Our main goal was to encourage students to analyze the primary source and explain why its author chose to write in the way he did during his historical context-influenced lifetime. In this way, students would not merely describe the historical setting; instead, they would think critically about how context informed the actual primary source and why its author wrote in a certain manner and expressed certain arguments. Our observations revealed that many students had difficulty in comprehending the author’s strategies that were specific to the historical context. Most students

who could understand strategy relied on the easiest of strategies only: the author's appeal to emotion and the use of vivid detail. Their analysis was mainly rooted in present-day values, i.e. "slavery is bad." In addition, many students could not make use of their understanding of the relevant historical context in a way that explains author's arguments and strategy.

II. The Lesson

Learning Goals

Our broad general education goal involved helping students explain how content is shaped by the context in which it was created. Our discipline-specific goal required that students analyze the strategy the author uses to make his arguments. In order to do this, students would need to understand the relevant historical context well enough so they could integrate contextual information into a persuasive explanation of the author's argument strategy.

Lesson Plan

Topic: Trans-Atlantic Direction of the African Slave Trade, Eighteenth Century. Discussion of an excerpt of *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), a memoir with eyewitness accounts of the slave trade in Africa and transportation conditions of the Middle Passage to the Americas. Previous classes provided the relevant historical context of how the Atlantic Plantation Complex (ca 1620s-1880s CE) resulted in the commodification of enslaved African laborers. During the class where the lesson study took place, students examined Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* as a primary source that illustrated the migration experience of these enslaved Africans.

Step 1: Outside of class, students prepare answers to reading questions that asked them to identify and summarize the primary source's relevant historical context, main arguments, and point-of-view (bias) issues (see Appendix A). As part of their course materials, students have a "Steps in a Primary Source Analysis" worksheet (see Appendix B). Students were instructed to use this worksheet as they read *The Interesting Narrative*; use of the worksheet reinforced emphasis on historical context, arguments, and point-of-view. Our thinking was that if students came to class with the building blocks of an analysis (context, arguments, point-of-view) already identified, they would then be able to assemble them into a cogent explanation of why Equiano chose to make his arguments the way he did (strategy).

Step 2: 10 minutes of introductory lecture modeling the identification of strategy using a different but related primary source. The lecture, titled "Making an Argument," described how eighteenth century British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson integrated visual evidence ("Plan of the Slave Ship *Brooke's*") into his *Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1786). The instructor explained how Clarkson's involvement in anti-slavery circles in London and his own research into the economics of the slave trade led him to an insurance diagram depicting the number of Africans that could be transported in a slave ship. To Clarkson, the visual of the human beings packed into the hold of the ship seemed the best way to turn readers against the slave trade, so he chose to relate his essay's arguments around the insurance diagram. Then the instructor stressed the differences in the backgrounds of Clarkson (white, university-educated intellectual, never experienced the slave trade first-hand) and Equiano (African-born, kidnapped into the slave trade and survived the Middle Passage as a child, purchased freedom). This distinction between Clarkson's background and Equiano's was then used as a springboard for challenging the students to explain Equiano's argument strategy in his *Interesting Narrative*.

Step 3: 5 minutes. Divide students into groups of four and distribute poster materials (large post-it sheets, markers). Instruct the students to create a poster that selects three significant passages they think represent the main arguments of the primary source and identifies the strategy or strategies used in each passage.

Step 4: 25 minutes. Monitor as students discuss the document and identify specific passages that exemplify strategies used by the author. See that all students are creating a poster in a timely way. During this step all three lesson study professors circulated among the groups, listening and taking notes on a form (see Appendix C). The observation form included these questions: 1) Are the students able to start with discussion of strategy or do they fall back on lower-level analysis (e.g. stating the main argument)? 2) Where did the groups fall on an overall continuum re: quality of their primary source analysis, comprehension of the source (continuum included range from “can make lots of connection between source evidence and what they understood about author’s historical context” to “are unclear or unable to discuss strategy because they do not understand the overall concept”) 3) Did students refer back to the actual primary source and examples as proof during their discussion? 4) Where did the students get stuck? What issues seem to have been responsible?

Step 5: 15 minutes. Collect and hang the posters around the room. The instructor begins discussion by pointing out overall patterns in student posters, asking the class to help add examples and details. Ultimately, each group explains their choices. The instructor encourages the students to take their analysis a step further and suggests alternatives to the entire class. In the last few minutes, the instructor brings the discussion around to the questions for the paper students will be writing on Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative* (due ten days later).

Step 6: Students write a three-four page paper that answers these two questions: How does Olaudah Equiano try to convince his readers that the Trans-Atlantic Direction of the African Slave Trade should end? Based on what you understand about the world he lived in, why did he depict the experience of migration the way he did? (see Appendix D).

III. The Study

Approach

We created an exercise that would make visible the thought process that students go through when they are trying to apply relevant historical context information to explain something about the nature of a primary source (in this case the author’s chosen argument strategies). We had students answer pre-class reading questions to identify the primary source’s arguments, historical context, and point-of-view. We observed their in-class group poster activity that entailed exploring the author’s strategies in his arguments and analyzed their large group discussion and posters. We then evaluated their individual primary source analysis essays to determine how much of what they had figured out in class was retained through the process of paper-writing. In discussing ways to improve our approach, we performed an additional experiment on a completely different kind of primary source from a later time period, to see whether or not the format of the primary source contributed to a student’s ability to determine the author’s strategy.

Findings/Discussion

HIS 101

The pre-class reading question activity confirmed that students could identify the main arguments the author makes in his primary source.

In-class small group discussion and poster activity revealed that students could identify the author's strategies; however, students found it easier to lean on the author's appeal to emotion, vivid language, and their contemporary concepts of "fairness" and "mistreatment." The structure of the "Steps in a Primary Source Analysis" worksheet may have influenced their gravitation towards these strategies. ("Appeal to emotion" and "use of vivid language" were the first two possibilities listed on the worksheet.) The nature of the primary source itself (intense, emotional eighteenth-century prose) may also have led them in this direction.

Large group discussion demonstrated that students' first response was to base their analysis on their own emotional response. They argued that as human beings they could connect with Equiano as a fellow human; as members of families they could connect with Equiano as a person taken away from his family. This was a good start, but many of the students missed the point about relevant historical context shaping the author's strategy: Equiano wrote to humanize Africans in an era when the Trans-Atlantic Direction of the African Slave Trade and the Atlantic Plantation Complex had stripped Africans of their humanity.

Our examination of individual primary source analysis essays further showed that students are limited to their own immediate context, rather than the historical context of the author. Students tended to have a part of their paper where they summarized what they thought of as the relevant historical context. They then moved on to analysis of the primary source, but did not connect their analysis of the source back to prior points they had made about the context. They wrote about context and content...but they did not really explain how context shaped content.

We also noticed that in their papers, students tended to stick with what they saw as the "right" answers from the in-class discussion associated with the poster-making activity.

HIS 102

The pre-class reading question activity demonstrated that students could identify the main arguments the author makes in his primary source.

In-class small group discussion and poster activity revealed that students could not make their own explicit links between the author and the primary source. While students could identify the author's strategy, they continued to focus on the author's appeal to emotion, despite the instructor scaling back instructions that pointed to this strategy and simplifying the introductory lecture.

In large group discussion, students shared their interpretations; however they based their analysis on their own emotional response.

Individual primary source analysis essays further showed that students are limited to their own immediate context, rather than the historical context of the author. In spite of the instructor simplifying the lecture, students fell back to strategy, possibly because of the nature of the primary source itself. Unlike the previous semester, students did not engage with the author's historical

context. A contributing factor is that their essay was their first writing assignment, whereas in Fall semester, it was their second one.

The follow-up examination of a paper on a different kind of primary source, Henry Yoshitaka Kiyama's *The Four Immigrants Manga* (ca 1904-1931) demonstrated that students could provide the relevant historical context in their written responses. While the discussion of historical context improved compared to their first assignment, the degree to which they could incorporate historical context to explain the author's motivations was less successful. They continued to focus on the emotions of the characters in relation to American values of "fairness" and "equality," missing the more subtle and historically specific strategies and motivations of the author. Again we observed the pattern of students writing a part of their paper where they summarized what they thought of as the relevant historical context. They then moved on to analysis of the primary source, but did not connect their analysis of the source back to prior points they had made about the context. They wrote about context and content...but they did not really explain how context shaped content.

Our discussion of the class observations and student papers left us with the following questions that we hope to explore as a department:

How can we encourage students to perform some inquiry, such as into the historical context, the nature of the primary source, how arguments are structured, and the author's use of strategy, on their own without heavy instructor input or dependence on the instructor's lecture?

Can we reasonably expect deep contextual analysis and learning from inexperienced students? What is appropriate to expect at this level in a General Education class?

Would practice through repeated informal writing help students to marshal the relevant historical context to make a historical argument? What feedback methods are practical in classes of 45?

How can we encourage students to connect strategy and motivation to historical context rather than only in relation to their personal reactions separate from historical understanding? How do we get them to go beyond thinking that the whole task is just to identify something about context, then identify something about content (without ever connecting the two together)?

IV. Appendix

Lesson and Study Materials

Appendix A "Reading Questions: Week 9"

Appendix B "Steps in a Primary Source Analysis"

Appendix C "Questions for Observation of Group Work/Poster Making"

Appendix D "Primary Source Write-Up #2"

Appendix A “Reading Questions: Week 9”

Required Reading = Equiano *Interesting Narrative...* pdf pp. 57-69 (D2L/Content/Wk 9)
“Steps...” Handout for Primary Source Analysis

Consider your answers to these RQ a first draft of PSWU#2. Focus on analyzing Equiano’s main arguments and evidence, his point-of-view, and his overall strategy for making his arguments.

In class on Wednesday, you’ll be participating in activities designed to help you focus in on the second paper question: “Based on what you understand about the world he lived in, why did Equiano make his arguments the way he did?” In order to facilitate this focus on the second Q., you’ll need to have solid summaries of the main arguments ready to go at the start of class.

Directions:

1. Complete all the reading questions.
 2. Type up your answers to them.
 3. **Bring a printed-out copy of your answers to the RQ with you to Wednesday’s class.** If every person in our class brings a printed-out copy of their RQ answers to Wednesday’s class, I will cancel one of the remaining reading quizzes and award each student a score of 25/25 points. (If not everyone brings their RQ: no deal – sorry!)
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1. [“Steps...” Handout II.a] Summarize the main arguments that Equiano makes about these aspects of an enslaved African’s life experiences ca the mid-1700s CE:
 - a. kidnapping, enslavement in Africa, journey to the coast for sale to European slave buyers
 - b. being separated from family members, temporarily reunited, then separated again

4. ["Steps..." Handout III.c] Now, focus in on the strategy Equiano seems to be using to make his main arguments (RQ#1a-d).
- a. How does Equiano make his arguments? Based on what you understand about the world he lived in, why do think Equiano decided to make his arguments this way?

 - b. Analyze the part where Equiano describes the experience of the Middle Passage (from the part that reads "The first object..." on p. 64 through to the "O Ye Nominal Christians..." big finish on p. 69). What is Equiano trying to get the reader to think, feel, decide, etc in this section? What is his overall strategy, argument-wise? Discuss an example to back up your explanation.

 - c. The part I pointed you to on pp. 64-69 is often considered to be one of the "go-to" examples of Equiano's strategy for making his main argument in the *Interesting Narrative*. But, **what other parts of this primary source do you think also illustrate how he is making his argument, and why a former slave writing in the late 1700s might make the argument that way?** Discuss two good examples that you think demonstrate how/why Equiano makes his arguments the way he does.

Appendix B “Steps in a Primary Source Analysis”

Learning Outcome: “*explain how content is shaped by the context in which it was created.*”

CONTEXT

- I. Start by Piecing Together the Background Context of the Primary Source:
 - a. Explain what is known about the Author
(Who was this person? What was their occupation, social status, etc.?)
 - b. Figure out the Historical Setting of the Primary Source
(What are the relevant world regions, the relevant time period, and the relevant ideas/events/circumstances that are tied to this source?)
 - c. Understand the Author as a Product of His/Her Historical Setting
(How does the author fit in to/relate to their time/place/circumstances?)
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NEXT: Focus on the Content (words, images, etc.) of the Primary Source itself. Read the primary source carefully for Step II. Then go back and read it a second time for Step III.

CONTENT

- II. Summarize the Main Arguments in the Primary Source
 - a. Identify and Explain in your own words what points are being made
 - b. Identify and Describe the types of Examples given and Evidence used by the author to make their arguments
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- III. Analyze the Primary Source to ***explain why this author chose to write this way about this issue during their historical context-influenced lifetime***
 - a. Describe the Format of the primary source
(Is this a private letter, a published memoir, someone’s homework assignment? Who is the intended audience? Why would this author choose this form of communication to reach this audience?)
 - b. Identify and Explain any Point-of-View issues that might shape arguments
(Are there any detectable mindset, or bias, issues that relate to what you know about the author and their historical context?)

- c. Describe the Strategy the author uses to make their arguments (How do they try to get the reader to see things their way? Do they do things like: use really vivid examples, appeal to emotion, highlight certain evidence, make dramatic appeals to particular people or ideas to increase their credibility/authority on a topic?)

IV. Answer the “How is Content Shaped by the Context In Which it Was Created?” Question

- a. Look back at how you summarized the main Arguments of the Primary Source (Content, Part II)
- b. Explain why this particular author living in this particular historical setting (Context, Part I) would decide to make their arguments the way that they did (Content, Part III)
- c. Identify the best Quotes and Examples from the primary source that illustrate/prove your answer is a plausible one. Have them ready for class discussions and paper-writing.

Appendix C “Questions for Observation of Group Work/Poster Making”

Prompt for Group Work/Poster Making (will be displayed on projector screen throughout):

“Choose 3 parts of the primary source that illustrate the strategy Equiano uses to make his arguments. Explain the strategy he uses in each of your chosen examples. Put the pg number in () at the end of each example.”

I. Questions for Observation of Group Work/Poster Making:

1. Are the students able to start with discussion of strategy or do they fall back on lower-level analysis (e.g. stating the main arguments)?
2. Where did the groups fall on overall continuum re: quality of their primary source analysis, comprehension of the source etc:
 - Can make lots of connections between source evidence, what they understand about author’s historical context, etc. and author’s strategy
 - Can explain the overall strategy – what Equiano is trying to accomplish
 - Repeat phrases from the “Steps...” Handout sheet that describes what analysis of strategy involves (e.g. “appeal to emotion”)
 - Talk about non-strategy related info (example = summarize main arguments)
 - Are unclear or unable to discuss strategy because they don’t understand the overall concept.
3. Did students refer back to actual the actual primary source and examples as proof during their discussion?
4. Where did the students get stuck? What issues seem to have been responsible?

II. Poster Evaluation:

How many groups actually come up with three examples?

How many groups have original (i.e., not most obvious) examples?

How many groups include “and why...?” types of discussion (e.g. related to motivations, point-of-view of author) in their answers?

Appendix D “Primary Source Write-Up #2”

- Due Date = Wednesday 11/6 at start of class
- Point Value = 150 pts, 15% of final grade
- Primary Source = pp. 57-69 of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano Written By Himself* (pdf file in D2L/Content/Wk9)
- Secondary Sources = 1) pp. 2-19 of *The Interesting Narrative* pdf file
2) *E&P* pp. 456-460, 463-465
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Explain how content is shaped by the context in which it was created.

For historians, the above learning outcome means making a persuasive argument about what a particular primary source lets us understand about the historical setting in which it was created. For this assignment, your job is to explain how a former slave-turned-abolitionist writer living in the mid-late 1700s made his argument that the Trans-Atlantic direction of the African slave trade (aka the “Middle Passage”) must be stopped.

Questions and Directions:

Write a 3 page essay (double-spaced, 12 pt font) that answers these content-linked-to context questions: **How does Olaudah Equiano try to convince his readers that the Trans-Atlantic direction of the African slave trade should end? Based on what you understand about the world he lived in, why did he make his arguments the way he did?**

To answer these questions, you’ll need to develop your own arguments that summarize:

- (1) the relevant background context (historical setting) for the primary source & author
- (2) the main arguments made by the author in his primary source (content) and what kind of evidence he used to make those arguments
- (3) how the content of the primary source is related to the background context

Be sure to include:

- Relevant evidence from the primary source (incl. quotes, details, and examples)
- Relevant evidence from secondary sources (incl. quotes, details, and examples)
- Proper Chicago-Style footnotes and Works Cited/ Bibliography page (Bibliography may be on a 4th page, it doesn’t count in 3 page paper limit)

Grade of A (90 to 100%) means that your assignment was very well done.

Answered the paper questions via analysis of the primary source in a way that was persuasively argued, easy for the reader to follow, and clearly supported with direct quotes and examples. Clearly linked the primary source (content) to specific details of the historical setting (context). Secondary source information appropriately used to support and expand arguments. Included proper Chicago Style footnotes and bibliography.

Grade of B (80 to 89%) means that your assignment was on the right track.

Explanation of the primary source made sense to the reader; included examples and quotes supported answers to the paper questions. But, paper argument could have been clearer and better connected to the evidence. Integration of secondary source information was helpful but may not have been fully relevant to your argument. Attempt was made to link historical setting (context) to the primary source (content). Included Chicago Style footnotes and bibliography.

Grade of C (70 to 79%) means that your assignment needs improvement.

Summarized the content of the primary source, but did not provide relevant analysis of quotes and examples in a way that answered paper questions. May have missed some key arguments or relevant sections from the primary source. Didn't clearly address the relationship between historical setting (context) and the primary source (content). Secondary source information was referred to, but not clearly integrated into your broader points and answers to paper questions. Included Chicago Style footnotes and bibliography.

Grade of D (60 to 69%) means that your assignment did not answer the paper questions in a way that the reader understood or could be convinced by.

Explanation of the primary source was unclear or historically inaccurate; it was not clear how the examples and quotes related to answers to the paper questions. Also unclear how the historical setting (context) linked to / shaped the primary source (content). May have been missing relevant evidence from the primary source. Did not integrate information from secondary sources. Poor proofreading and/or editing may have contributed to the reader's inability to follow your arguments. Included Chicago Style footnotes and bibliography.

Grade of F (59% or below) means that your assignment was missing vital information.

Was missing one or more of these components: evidence from primary source to support answers to the paper question; discussion of the historical setting (context) for the primary source (content); Chicago Style footnotes; Chicago Style bibliography.

Plagiarism Warning: Misrepresenting the ideas of another person as your own ideas constitutes plagiarism, and will result in an automatic score of 0 points (F). "Another person" applies equally whether it is a fellow classmate, another student at the University, a website, or a published article or book. Do your own work. Cite any idea you did not independently develop. If you have questions about what to cite and/or how to cite it: ask me for help. Failure to include proper citations will result in an automatic score of 0 points (F). This requirement is non-negotiable. Do NOT turn in written work without proper footnotes and an

end-of-paper bibliography. The Chicago Style Quick Guide can be found at:
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html