

LAC Instructional Workshop, Spring 2007
Enabling Students to “Own” the Material: Strategies to Facilitate
Comprehension and Inspire Discussion
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1. Introduction: HIST 143.
 - a. Its peculiarities. Every LAC class is going to be different depending on the subject, the professor, the course goals, the time structure, etc This particular courses consists of two lectures per week giving by the professor and one discussion class at the end of the week leaded by a TA.
 - b. The assignment. There is an assignment for every week. Students must read 4/5 texts and quote from one of them in order to answer to a specific question. They must post their quote and answer on blackboard before the day of the discussion.
 - c. Our mission. We are supposed to use their quotes and comments during the discussion to arrive to a specific “take-home” message. All TAs meet with professor and he communicates us that message.
 - d. What I do. I do not always find very useful to make them use their quotes in class. I like making students somehow “possess” the texts in order to arrive to that “take-home” message.
2. Examples.
 - a. Social Revolution.
 - i. The texts. They were a series of texts talking about the different social revolutions occurring along Latin America. In some cases, they were written by the leaders of the revolutions: Allende, Che

Guevara, etc In other cases, they were personal accounts about people who decided to join the revolution. I added a text about Tamara Bunker, a German woman who came to Cuba to fight with Che Guevara. Her image is seen as kind of idealistic and romantic, specially by young people.

- ii. The assignment. The students had to understand why people took part of these revolutions.
- iii. In class. I brought some examples of personality tests from magazines on-line. In groups, students had to imagine that they had to recruit people for the revolution. In order to do so, they had to create brief multiple choice tests that would conduct the audience to opt for becoming a member of the revolution.
- iv. Result. The test consisted of 3 or 4 questions, so that there was time to read many of them. Once they did so, I asked them which were the motivations that they were thinking of when creating the questions.

b. Caudillos.

- i. The texts. There were different accounts about caudillos from different historians belonging to different moments in time.
- ii. Assignment. The specific question was why people followed caudillos. Students also had to notice how historical approaches varied depending in the historical moment and the approach.

iii. In class. I had one group preparing a scene mentioned in one of the texts. This scene consisted of someone who was about to marry a man, but in the middle of the ceremony she refused to do so, pointing at the man with whom she was really in love. The caudillo of those people could not allow that disruption of order and commanded both the woman and her lover to be hanged. Each of the other groups had to work on the different perspectives of the texts, representing each group a different text (in very basic terms, the first one was Eurocentric, the second one was a socio-economic approach, and the last one was a micro case that took more into account cultural facts). The scene was performed and each group, pretending to be the particular historian, had to comment on it.

iv. Result. I think that students felt mucho more comfortable because after all they were talking in someone else's place. The texts were somehow hard but this exercised made everything more simple and even fun.

c. Yawar Fiesta.

i. The text. This time this was a novel about a town in the Andean part of Peru. In this town, indigenous, mestizos and white people.

ii. Assignment. Students had to write an essay about the novel. The main issue was the dilemma of the nation's builders.

iii. In class.

1. Groups. There were many characters in the novel. Most of them could be grouped into mestizos, indigenous, government representatives, and somehow “special cases,” meaning those who should belong to one of the previous groups because of race but they actually didn’t because of their actions. I wrote one name of a character per student and I told them to figure out a way to group. They actually found it easy!
2. Activity. I made up an announcement written by the government offering a prize to the groups who would design the monument most representative of the “nation.” They had to draw it and explain it. From there, they were easily encouraged to talk about how they included some of these ideas in their papers. The monuments were fun and very representative of the groups and how they were different from each other.