Teaching World History through Nationalism

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Introduction

Congratulations! You have been assigned to teach World History. Now what? The subject seems daunting because there are five thousand years of empires, cultures, eras, wars, and people to cover in eighteen weeks. How can it be done? How is it possible to teach 100 Freshmen everything from Mesopotamia to 9-11? How do you help them not only understand the event, but understand how events are interconnected? You ask yourself these questions as you scan through the tome that is the textbook. Never fear, there is a simple solution to this dilemma. Teach thematically. To teach thematically is to create a connection between topics that makes it possible for students to understand how one event or culture is connected to another. I’m sure your mind is listing all the themes that could be used to teach World History such as religion, culture, and war. There is one over-arching theme that can tie together entire subject, however, is nationalism.

Nationalism is “an ideology that places the nation at the centre of its concerns and seeks to promote its well-being.”¹ Any topic in World History can be taught through the central theme of nationalism. Don’t believe me? Why did the empires of Egypt, China, India, and Mesopotamia flourish? The answer is nationalism. "In its most familiar and historically potent form, nationalism is the principle that the nation is the ground of political sovereignty and that political sovereignty is the right and destiny of the nation."² Why did the Roman and Persian empires expand as far as they did and become powerhouses? The answer is nationalism. Why did the Crusades, colonization, and world wars occur? Again, the answer is nationalism. Anthony Smith defines a nation as “a named human community residing in a perceived homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a distinct public culture, and common laws and customs for all members³ Both Anthony Smith and Benedict Anderson argue that nationalism is a purely modern phenomenon. I disagree. Anthony Smith’s arguments can be used to explain why nationalism is found in all eras of history. Hobsbawn argues “Nationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalism but the other way round.”⁴ I believe that in order to understand the large nationalistic movements found in the American Revolution, French Revolution, and the World Wars, you must first understand the smaller nationalistic movements found in ancient civilizations.

North Carolina is adopting the Common Core Standards curriculum. As such, there must be a great deal of vertical alignment in order for the subjects to flow into each other. By adopting the idea of thematic teaching, vertical alignment is easily achieved. Using nationalism as that central theme not only aids in vertical alignment, but it does so
without losing focus. Students are not asked to jump from topic to topic. Teaching thematically will lead to an increase in students’ retention, and academic progress in World History. The perception of World History will change as students’ interest and academic performance increases. World History will not be looked on as a ‘fluff’ class, but as one that has merit and value in today’s society.

**Rationale**

To prove that this concept of thematic teaching is possible, I have created a lesson that uses nationalism as the central focus. My lesson concerns the Cold War. Most semesters, World History teachers have a week (if they’re lucky) to teach the Cold War. I believe the Cold War is an important topic for students to study, not least because much of what is happening in the world today is a direct result of the Cold War. I want my students to understand how the Cold War pertains to their lives. I believe the best way to accomplish this is to teach the Cold War through the common theme of nationalism. As Suisheng Zhao states in *A Nation-State by Construction*, “The power of nationalism came from the fact that it ‘locates the source of individual identity within a people, which is seen as the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective security.’” Benedict Anderson agrees “…since World War II every successful revolution has defined itself in ‘national’ terms…-and in doing, has grounded itself firmly in a territorial and social space inherited from the pre-revolutionary past.”

Traditionally, World History has been a lecture course that students must ‘slog through’ in order to obtain their diploma. This perception has been perpetuated by the increased academic stress of math and science and the decreased emphasis on World History and Social Studies in general. This devaluation of World History has led many people to view the subject as ‘fluff’ and not truly critical to a well-rounded academic education. The perception of World History as a ‘fluff’ class disappears as the relevance of the class is highlighted. Thematic teaching allows students the opportunity to understand how World History relates to their lives and their future.

To be effective in the classroom, a teacher must be able to link the subject at hand with students' personal experiences. Stuart Hall in his essay *Ethnicity: Identity and Difference* states “You’ve got to find out who you are in the flux of the past and the present.” This current generation of students has grown up with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the aftermath of 9/11. Incorporating these topics into the class give students an opportunity to become part of the lesson; by evoking an emotional response you are now able to engage students in classroom conversations about the world at war. Students' interests are piqued when they are able to experience a topic outside of the perceived norm. By this I mean students are able to engage in lively discussions in which they are able to interject their own life experiences instead of simply taking notes in a lecture environment. This then becomes a golden opportunity to deepen students'
understandings of the societal impact of war, thereby increasing the amount of higher order thinking skills students engage in. World History should not be considered as "fluff" and irrelevant to a well-rounded education; instead, World History is a worthy subject that should be appreciated by everyone. Nationalism will become the bridge between students' personal experiences and the subject taught in class, thereby increasing the likelihood that all students in the class will be able to perform at or near the same level of proficiency.

Wars are fascinating to students. Battles and countries’ political decisions are used to answer the key questions that people have about wars: who, what, when, where, why, and how. World Wars One and Two are relatively easy to explain this way. However, the Cold War is not so easily compartmentalized. I propose that the Cold War can be taught through the concept of nationalism. Nationalism can be utilized to explain not only why the Cold War happened, but to also explain key events during the tense years of mistrust and political intrigue and helps explain why the Cold War ended. Anthony Smith explains it best. "Nationalism's core doctrine provides no more than a basic framework for social and political order in the world, and it must be filled out by other idea-systems and by particular circumstances of each community's situation at the time." For example in the Soviet Union Stalin used nationalistic ideals to gain the trust of cooperation of people living in the Soviet Union. Michael Roskin argues, “There were a number of reasons for nationalization. First, it got rid of capitalists, and capitalists were the enemy.”

Through the use of the common thread of nationalism I will eliminate much of the confusion students experience in trying to keep events straight. Students often complain that there are too many countries, people, events, and dates to remember in their study of the Cold War. I will simplify the lesson; make it more 'student-friendly', by introducing the concept of nationalism as the central focus.

Objectives/Background

The unit on the Cold War is designed for ninth graders near the end of their tenure in World History. World History is a semester-long class of eighteen weeks. The eighteen weeks are broken into nine week long quarters that are further divided by topics. Quarter One concentrates on the pre-1500 world, with snapshot studies on topics such as ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, classical civilizations of Greece and Rome to the influence of the Middle Ages. Here, students receive a foundation of key civilizations, movements, and accomplishments that will aid them in their study of Civics and Economics, the Social Studies course they will take in their tenth grade year. The first quarter gives students a firm foundation in early nationalistic movements. In Smith’s works, “The influence of classical humanism…the rise of reading…literatures; the rapid growth of indigenous populations in Western Europe…the emergence of large-scale
military participation…all those factors came together…’to give birth to modern nationalism.’” Quarter Two concentrates on the post-1500 world with snapshot studies on topics such as the Enlightenment, the Reformation, Revolutions in America and Europe, and the development of modern nationalism, through the Cold War. By understanding smaller nationalistic movements found in the growth of empires, exploration and the American and French Revolutions, students will have a deeper understanding of the large nationalistic movements of the world wars and the Cold War. Topics discussed in this quarter will aid students in their study of American History, the Social Studies course they will take in their eleventh grade year. According to North Carolina Standard Course of Study, "To become informed citizens, students require knowledge of the civilizations that have shaped the development of the United States. World History provides the foundation that enables students to acquire this knowledge which will be used in the study of Civics and Economics and United States History".

My unit, "The Cold War" is presented during the last weeks of instruction and will take approximately seven to ten days to complete. The unit contains lessons on the cause of the Cold War, key global events that occurred during the height of the Cold War, and the end of the Cold War. Immediately prior to this unit, students will have studied World Wars One and Two. Information presented in this unit gives students the background needed to accomplish the tasks of the unit on The Cold War. Key events to be discussed will include: the Marshall Plan, the Truman Doctrine, NATO, the Warsaw Pact, the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall, the Arms and Space races, the Solidarity movement, and Glasnost.

The Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine

These topics are introduced at the beginning of the unit to help students see how nationalism led to the rise of the Cold War. The Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine are also used to link American History, Politics, and Geography to World History. Both the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine are examples of American nationalism. In both instances, America was attempting to spread its influence into Eastern Europe and South Asia. Some teachers believe that these topics are related to ideology rather than the concept of nationalism While ideology; i.e.: capitalism vs. communism, explains part of this situation, nationalism explains more.

NATO and the Warsaw Pact

These topics occur during the middle of the lesson. The purpose is to help students understand that nationalism led to the spread of Cold War propaganda and intrigue. Students will be divided into groups representing various parties and will be given
situations that occurred in the Cold War. Students will use think-pair-share and cooperative groups to reach an understanding of the impact of these two alliances.

*The Arms Race, the Space Race, and the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall*

These topics will be discussed two-thirds of the way through the unit. The purpose is to help students see how nationalism, and not necessarily ideology led to the spread of the Cold War. As Smith puts it, “East European politics had become increasingly bound up with the needs and interests of nationally defined states and their elites.” These topics will be taught through Cornell and Target Notes.

*The Solidarity Movement and Glasnost*

These topics are discussed at the end of the unit. The purpose is to help students see how nationalism led to the end of the Cold War and the rise of independent nations from the former Soviet Bloc. “Starting…in Poland, the tensions and conflicts,…, helped to speed, even if they did not cause, the break-up of the Soviet Union and its empire along ethno-national lines.”

**Strategies**

The following strategies are used within the unit The Cold War. Preceding each strategy description is a sample of how it is used within my classroom.

**Warm-Up/Ticket-Out**

Warm-Up/Ticket-Out is a strategy that is used to assess students’ understanding of issues discussed in class on any one particular day. I use Warm-Up/Ticket-Out on a daily basis. To use this students create what I call a ‘Warm-Up Sheet’. Because I use this on a daily basis students use their own paper. On a Warm-Up Sheet, students first fold their paper in half length-wise. The right-hand column is labeled “Ticket-Out” and the left-hand column is labeled “Warm-Up”. The front side of the sheet of paper is then divided into three sections as if they were folding a business letter and then labeled on the far left-hand side “Monday”, “Tuesday”, and “Wednesday”. The back side is divided into two sections labeled “Thursday” and “Friday”. The Warm-Up is completed during the first five to fifteen minutes of class and is designed to not only grab the students’ attention, but to get them thinking about what is going to be discussed that day.

For example, as a Warm-Up I will ask students to give me their own idea of what nationalism is. They then write their response in the Warm-Up section of their Warm-Up Sheet. I like to call on at least four students (two males and two females). This serves
two purposes: first, it gives students an opportunity to hear what other students think thereby giving them an opportunity to check their own answer against the responses of others. Second, I have an opportunity to check their understanding before I delve into the discussion. Their responses guide my discussion. I.E.: I don’t want to expound upon something they already fully understand.

Students complete a Ticket-Out in the last five to ten minutes of class and are designed as an informal assessment. Rather than give students a set of questions to respond to I require them to create a written response. As a daily Ticket-Out, I require students to write a minimum of three sentences. The first two sentences are for them to describe to me what they learned that day. The third sentence is a chance for them to ask me a question on something they do not understand from the class lesson, or something that they would like to know more about. For example, a student might ask for a different explanation as to how the Marshall Plan was created to benefit the United States.

**Think-Pair-Share**

In Think-Pair-Share students are in small cooperative groups. The students are grouped heterogeneously to secure the widest possible input of collected information. Think-Pair-Share works best in groupings of two or three students. It is recommended that the teacher assign the groups to ensure that students are divided up in such a way as to ensure the greatest chance of academic language being spoken, and not gossip. Heterogeneous grouping is best; however, if the class has a high percentage of limited English proficient (LEP) students, then homogenous grouping is recommended in order to take full advantage of peer mentoring. In this strategy students are given a topic to contemplate. They will then pair up in their groups and share their thoughts and answers. My favorite way to conduct this strategy is through a SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) strategy called “Inside-Outside Circle”. In this strategy students are put into two groups. Group One forms a circle in which they face outward. Group Two forms a circle outside of Group One and face inwards directly in front of someone in Group One. The great thing about “Inside-Outside Circles” is that you can constantly rotate partners. After a few statements have been bantered back and forth, students go back to their seats and we have a group debriefing about what they learned.

For example, students are given a situation to contemplate as an opener to the discussion on the Truman Doctrine. Students are asked if it is okay to offer help to someone in order to help them defeat someone that both of you dislike, but that in order to get this help the other person had to do exactly what you said. Students share their responses with a few partners and then return to their seats. The students’ responses are then compared to what the United Stated offered to non-Communist countries to not only slow the spread of Communism, but more importantly to spread American-brand nationalism into Europe and Asia.
Socratic Seminar

Socratic Seminar is a whole-class discussion of a specific topic. In this strategy, the teacher introduces a topic, gives the students a visual reference, and guides them through a discussion of self-discovery within the topic. "The Socratic method of teaching is based on Socrates' theory that it is more important to enable students to think for themselves than to merely fill their heads with "right" answers. Therefore, he regularly engaged his pupils in dialogues by responding to their questions with questions, instead of answers. This process encourages divergent thinking rather than convergent."

This method of class discussion is uncomfortable to some students, so the teacher will need to spend time, prior to the lesson, coaching students through the Socratic process. An example of Socratic Seminar is giving the students a reading a day in advance of a class discussion on the same topic.

Within this unit Socratic Seminar is used as culminating activity on the Cold War. It is through the use of Socratic Seminar that I will engage the students in a mock United Nations in which they will try to prevent nuclear war. Students lead discussions on whether or not to engage in the Truman Doctrine, Marshall plan, Arms Race, Warsaw Pact and NATO. Students will take on the roles of various capitalist, communist, and neutral nations. At the end of the mock-United Nations students will assess their successes and failures at international diplomacy. Students are also expected to explain how nationalism was key in the decisions they made and the impact of those decisions.

Collaborative Groups

Collaborative grouping is different from cooperative groups in that collaborative groups do not follow all of the rules that one might see in cooperative groups, such as assigning roles to students within the group. "‘Collaborative learning’ is an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual effort by students, or students and teachers together. Usually, students are working in groups of two or more, mutually searching for understanding, solutions, or meanings, or creating a product." In collaborative groups, the teacher takes on the role of a mediator.

Within this unit collaborative grouping is used to complete guided readings on key topics within the Cold War. For instance, I divide the class up into seven groups. Each group has a guided reading to complete on a specific topic, such as the Space Race, that they then must use to create a 'graffiti wall' that explains their topic for the rest of the class. After each group has completed their 'graffiti walls' the posters are then hung up in the hallway and students participate in a 'gallery walk' to obtain the information they need. A 'graffiti wall' is an extra large poster (or sheet of butcher paper) that students design and fill in with key information. A 'gallery walk' occurs when you hang their
'graffiti walls' in the hallway and have students walk down the hall looking at the posters and taking notes on them.

**Cornell Notes**

Cornell notes are a style of note-taking that has been proven to be successful in helping students study and stay organized. The simplest way to conduct Cornell notes is to direct students to fold their paper in half lengthwise. The left column is for the note heading. The right column is for the actual notes. This way, students can fold their paper, looking at the headings listed on the left side of the page and quiz them or neighbors on facts from class discussions. The Cornell Notes used in this lesson are a modification of actual Cornell Notes used by Cornell University. My Cornell Notes have been simplified for ease in practice for ninth grade students. The notes are made up of two columns. The left hand column is used exclusively for terms the students need to know or questions the students must answer. The right-hand column is used to define the terms and to give the answers to the questions students are posed.

As stated in Wikipedia, "Notes from a lecture or teaching are written in the note-taking column; notes usually consist of the main ideas of the text or lecture, and long ideas are paraphrased.... These notes can be taken from any source of information, such as, fiction and nonfiction books, DVDs, lectures, text books, etc."16

**Target Notes**

Target notes is a graphic organizer used to help students define and expand upon a topic in class. This strategy is perfect for diagramming a definition or key concept. This graphic organizer is perfect for English language Learners and students not performing at grade-level. Target notes greatly resemble a bulls eye.

In Target Notes, students draw a bullseye that is made up of three expanding circles on their note paper. In the center students write the main concept they are going to learn about, in the case of this unit it is the Cold War. In the next layer of the bullseye students define the main idea by using who, what, when, where, why and how. The outer layer of the bullseye contains key facts and main ideas of the topic being discussed. This graphic organizer can be completed within one class period, or stretched out over an entire unit. I encourage students to draw symbols and pictures to coincide with the key facts and main ideas. I find that students are able to understand a topic more fully when they are able to associate a picture of some kind with it.

**Debate/Discussion**
A debate or discussion is an excellent way to ensure that every person in the class participates in the topic being presented in that each student is required to speak up and contribute to the topic at hand. A debate or student-focused discussion is an excellent strategy to use when summarizing and finishing a topic. In order for a debate or student-led discussion to be successful, the teacher must do prep work. At least two days before the discussion give students a selection in the textbook or an outside source to read. Have them create at least two questions from what they read.

On the day of the discussion have students write their questions down on blank note cards and place them in a box or basket. Pull out questions randomly to get the discussion started. A good discussion only works if every student participates so create a rubric or guideline in order to verify that everyone participates. I let my students know that a response of “I don’t know” is not an acceptable answer and that they must come to class with ideas of what they would like to contribute to the discussion.

Storyboard

A Storyboard is an excellent strategy to use for students that do not have strong written skills. I like to use this as a review of a topic for regular-level students and LEP (Limited English Proficient) students. To begin I give each student a 9 X 13 sheet of paper (construction paper works great) and have them fold it first in half length-wise, and then in thirds width-wise. The sheet of paper now has six boxes. I explain to my students that a storyboard is just like a comic strip. In each box students will have a caption and a picture that tells a story. I always give my students the caption for the first and sixth boxes.

An example of a storyboard for this unit is the caption in box one describing the Potsdam Conference. Box Six’s caption describes the collapse of the Soviet Union. Students are then directed to create a caption for the remaining four boxes that describe the course of the Cold War, making sure that events are in chronological order. I allow my students to use the Internet to locate and print pictures for their storyboard, but the captions must be their own words.

Classroom Activities

The class will be organized into groups representing various blocks or factions within Europe to accommodate World History's Eurocentric view of the Cold War. In a sense, the class will resemble a model United Nations in the hope of giving students an intimate look at what transpired during the Cold War. The unit on the Cold War will encompass seven to ten days. By weaving common threads of nationalism through the lesson I will
aid students in their discovery that not only is the Cold War a relevant topic, but this is a concept that is impacting politics today and will do so for many years to come. Each day the students will explore major events in the Cold War, tying them to the key concept of nationalism.

Day One

The unit begins with target notes to explain what nationalism is and how it was a major cause of the Cold War. Target notes give students an opportunity to organize their thoughts on an issue through the use of scaffolding to answer who, what, where, when, why, and how. The purpose of this exercise is to encourage students to create their own definition of not only the Cold War, but the concept of nationalism as well. The teacher will call on a random sampling of students to share their definitions of nationalism. After students complete the graphic organizer and share responses, they use it to write a working definition of nationalism. Students are then encouraged to reference this definition and graphic organizer as we make our way through the unit. Target notes should be a continual work in progress.

Days Two and Three

Students will discuss the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine. Cornell Notes will be used to explain the cause and effect of these nationalistic movements. Care will be taken to explain that these policies were not just ideology, but were in fact nationalistic movements. Ronald Suny states, "In the shadow of potential war and violence, nations are being born and reborn." These topics will be taught through Socratic Seminar. The Socratic seminar is a student-led discussion based on students’ Cornell notes, readings from the textbook and outside sources. The teacher begins the discussion by asking each group what their particular region they represent likes or dislikes about the Marshall Plan and Truman Doctrine.

Days Four and Five

Students will discuss NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Day Four students will use Cornell Notes to understand the basic concepts of these organizations. Day Five will be used as a cooperative group debate. Each class will be divided into six groups which include the United States, the Soviet Union, Neutral Nations, Eastern Bloc Nations, Western Europe, and Asian Countries. Each group will represent their nation’s interest in a mock-United Nations debate. At this point students have a working definition of nationalism, the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The teacher guides the discussion by first asking each group the following: 'what is more important - national identity or security and why?' Encourage students to think not from their own point of view, but the point of view of the area they represent. I.E.: It's not what Johnny wants, but what Poland wants. This then frames their broadest understanding of how the national
interests of the smaller countries were sacrificed for the national interests of the Soviet Union and the United States.

Days Six and Seven

Students will discuss the Arms and Space Races, and the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall. Day Six is dedicated to the Arms and Space Races. Students will use Cornell Notes to understand the causes and influences of the Arms and Space Races. Day Seven will begin with Cornell Notes and progress to a debate on the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall. Students will use their vast knowledge of nationalism to defend how nationalistic tendencies led to the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall and in turn the end of the Cold War. I use student-led discussions and Inside-Outside Circles once they have finished their notes on these sections.

Days Eight and Nine

Students will discuss the Solidarity and Glasnost movements. Target Notes are used to clarify their understanding of the end of the Cold War and how nationalistic movements in Eastern Europe led to Glasnost and Solidarity. A Socratic Seminar is then used to help students solidify their understanding of the course of the Cold War. The teacher must ensure that students have had at least two days to prepare for the Socratic Seminar. I like to give my students an article to read and highlight two days before the Socratic Seminar. As with student-led discussions, have students write down questions or thoughts prior to the actual event.

Day Ten

The unit will end with a revisit of the Target Notes used on Day One to assess their growth in understanding of the Cold War and how nationalism led to the beginning and ending of the Cold War. I give each student a blank target notes page so that they can redefine nationalism and its impact on the Cold War. By comparing the two target notes, students are able to see for themselves knowledge they have gained through the lesson. I also use this second target notes as an informal assessment to ensure that they have met my objectives for the unit.

Students will then review all that they have learned in the unit and successfully complete a test on the Cold War. In the test I want to see exactly what each student knows. In order to accomplish this I steer away from multiple-choice and matching tests, and instead require my student to respond to short answer, fill-in-the-blank, and true-false questions. For the short answer questions I require students to write a minimum of two sentences so that I can assess their thought process. Depending on the level of my students I may, or may not, offer them a word bank for the fill-in-the-blank questions. These questions will center on key vocabulary that I believe are crucial to the
understanding of the Cold War. I include a caveat for the True/false questions in that I require students to correct any false statements.

Resources

Reading List for Teachers

The following are books that will give teachers an in-depth look at the intricacies of the Cold War. Excerpts from these books can be pulled into class discussions to augment the lessons being presented in class.

Nations and Nationalism in A Global Era by Anthony D. Smith

The Rebirth of East Europe by Michael G. Roskin

Parting the Curtain by Walter L. Hixson

Nation and Identity by Ross Poole

National Identity by Anthony D. Smith

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Key concept

Definition

Features
End Notes

13. Ibid, 130.
Annotated Bibliography


Barbara Leigh Smith and Jean T. MacGregor, [http://learningcommons.evergreen.edu/pdf/collab.pdf What is Collaborative Learning?](http://learningcommons.evergreen.edu/pdf/collab.pdf) (accessed October 2011). This website is for teachers who would like to learn about how to incorporate collaborative groupings into their lesson plans.


Appendix

Implementing District Standards

NCSCOS Social Studies (World History) Objectives related to the unit on nationalism in the Cold War:

1.03 Relate archaeology, geography, anthropology, political science, sociology, and economics to the study of history.

4.03 Evaluate the growth of nationalism as a contributor to nineteenth century European revolutions in areas such as the Balkans, France, Germany, and Italy

5.04 Trace the course of the Cold War and assess its impact on the global community including but not limited to the Korean War, the satellite nations of Eastern Europe, and the Vietnam War

6.05 Analyze issues such as ecological/environmental concerns, political instability, and nationalism as challenges to which societies must respond

6.06 Trace the development of internal conflicts due to differences in religion, race, culture, and group loyalties in various areas of the world

8.03 Classify within the broad patterns of history those events that may be viewed as turning points

8.05 Analyze how the changing and competing components of cultures have led to current global issues and conflicts, and hypothesize solutions to persistent problems

8.06 Analyze the meanings of "civilization" in different times and places and demonstrate how such meanings reflect the societies of which they are a part