Developing Role-Playing Games for the Reacting to the Past (RTTP) Curriculum

Reacting to the Past is a pedagogy developed by History Professor Mark C. Carnes of Barnard College in the 1990s designed to engage students more actively and deeply into the material they are studying through reading, writing and argumentation. Taking a cue from role-playing games in the non-academic sphere, these activities are also dubbed 'games.' Each game focuses on a critical moment in the past where students are assigned roles of real individuals from the period and are grouped into several factions. Students are expected to write up and argue a particular position in the voice of their assigned role in the course of one or more class sessions. At the beginning, students are given role sheets with individual biographies, and information as to how to accomplish a particular goal through working with their faction or scheming for their own ends. Although in history, the outcomes have already been determined, in the games, through the implementation of 'contrafactuals,' i.e. things that did not actually occur, students are able to come up with completely different results. Students are expected to research their character, write up speeches and present the speeches on class days set aside for RTTP.

The RTTP main office is housed at Barnard college, which publishes an extensive web site with information about an annual conference (called an 'Institute') at Barnard (June) the Game Development conference (July) and various regional conferences during the academic year. At the Institute and regional conferences one can experience games first-hand and attend workshops aimed at guiding both new and experienced Reactors. A dues-paying consortium of individual and institutional members helps support the main office and website. On the website one may find lists of Published Games, Game in Development, and the *Big List of Reacting*

Games (BLORG), as well as templates for authors to follow when developing a game. Only the BLORG is available to those who are not members of the Consortium.

Fully developed games are published either through WW. Norton, or through the Reacting Consortium housed in the University of N. Carolina Press. There are several levels that a game goes through before it reaches final publication: 1 – Concept, 2- basic prototype; 3- complete prototype; 4 – approved for publication; 5 – published. As part of the process, an author needs to have a prototype 'play-tested' either through his/her own classes and by others in the Consortium either at the Game Development Conference (GDC) or from those requesting the materials.

Currently, there are at least four games of interest to Classicists; they treat aspects of 5th c. BCE Athens (*Athens Besieged; Athens in 403 BC*), the Roman Republic, (*Crisis of Catiline, Beware the Ides of March*) and aspects of Constantine the Great (*Constantine and the Council of Nicaea*). There are several games in development including two which are based on adaptations of Classical texts, one on Medea and another on Achilles. While games typically extend over 6-8 class periods ('full games'), some games are called 'micro-games' for one class session only. Recently, two-class session games called "Flashpoints" are being developed, with the goal of having WW. Norton publish them. Those wishing to run games in development must register with RTTP in order to download the desired materials. In addition, an instructor wishing to use these materials must request formal permission to adopt a specific game through the RTTP website.

This presentation will give an overview of various avenues for instructors new to the RTTP concept to learn about RTTP and resources, participate in playing a game, and develop their own game. I will also discuss my own experience developing a game which is based on a

work of literature rather than a historical point in time. The game is based on Euripides' *Medea* and is tentatively called, *Happy Endings? Medea's Divorce Trial*. It is hoped that my own experiences with RTTP will encourage others in Classics to further investigate and adopt RTTP pedagogy and to consider developing games of their own.

Bibliography

Big List of Reacting Games maintained by Nick Proctor. Nick.proctor@simpson.edu

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