

## *Game of Thrones* and Gaming the History Classroom

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**M**OST OF THE UNDERGRADUATE students who take my introductory and upper-level history courses are non-majors. They enroll in courses such as “Western Civilization,” “Introduction to World History,” and the “History of Medieval Europe” to satisfy the university’s general education curriculum requirements. As a comprehensive Catholic institution that enrolls about 2,300 undergraduate students, my university places a high value on both traditional humanities courses and courses that have professional applications in the world outside the university.<sup>1</sup> My students expect to engage with material in a way that seems relevant and applicable to the twenty-first-century skills they need to develop to be successful. To convince students that history is not just the memorization of a static past, they do not just read (and write) about historical material in my classes. Instead, students actively apply that material in specific situational classroom contexts. I integrate gaming into the classroom to build the framework for considering course content. To do this, I have developed a historical game, which I have connected to the pop-culture hit, *Game of Thrones*. Students have opportunities to work collaboratively (and a bit competitively) in different teams. While many begin the class thinking they will

just check off a university requirement, they are soon working with their peers in teams trying to win the class game by demonstrating their understanding of the historical context, chronology, and sources.

By using the *Game of Thrones* pop-culture television series, I have structured my courses in a way that seeks to solve problems that plague many history courses serving university requirements. Specifically, I will discuss how gaming the classroom can serve as a solution to the issue of engaging majors and non-majors alike in courses where students feel as though they are “forced” to enroll. While the active learning concepts developed by the Reacting to the Past model have introduced gaming and historical role-play into the history classroom with much success,<sup>2</sup> I will demonstrate how my gaming technique allows additional flexibility for instructors, especially in courses that are set up as historical surveys covering large periods of time. To outline how my gaming strategies in the classroom operate, I will first review the mechanics of the game. Next, I will discuss how the game itself functions within the larger framework of my history classroom. Finally, I will discuss the ways in which the game operates within active learning models and has furthered the learning outcomes of the classroom. In the end, the goal of my history classroom is to create historians-in-training—students who analyze sources and make their own connections and arguments—and gaming the classroom does just that.

### **Defining the Game and the Rules**

Gaming the classroom, and connecting it to pop culture, can offer a solution to the problem of how to make history feel relevant in a diverse classroom.<sup>3</sup> To game my history classroom, I have used the show *Game of Thrones* to act as a broad narrative arc in which to frame the real historical content of my class. Airing on HBO from 2011 to 2019, the show essentially is set in a fantasy world that mimics aspects of “real” history, or what a general audience may perceive as real history—although some historians have noted the problems with the way this historical authenticity has been presented.<sup>4</sup> The actors wear costumes that evoke clothing of the ancient or medieval world, or conjure up images of what a barbarian tribe may have worn. Characters live in castles, fight with swords, ride horses, and, in some cases, employ the use of fire-breathing

dragons. The storyline of the show includes alliances created and broken; battles between competing rulers and factions; marriage politics; and forays into the ways in which religion influenced people and political decisions. Ultimately, however, the show's driving force is towards a conclusion that entails one leader winning this political gamesmanship and asserting effective rule over the land. The show became so popular because there is love, action, and betrayal—essentially, the characters in the show offer compelling stories. It is this aspect that I use to hook my students—history has real-life people whose stories are just as compelling. Learning their motivations and reasons for acting is just as exciting and dynamic as the fictional show.

Because the development of the game for the history classroom is not directly dependent on making connections between historical content and characters or events on any one show, this gaming strategy offers instructors many opportunities to customize the game experience in a way that works for their students and for themselves. While I have chosen to link my classroom game to *Game of Thrones* and elements of its perceived historical landscape, this is not the only option that would work. Other pop-culture content, such as *Harry Potter*, *The Last Kingdom*, *The Hunger Games*, or even sports-themed connections, could work to provide a thematic and easily recognizable link for students to begin framing the content of the course to the historical game. Although certain historically themed shows may provide more direct connections to the history classroom, this is not the driving force behind setting up the classroom game.<sup>5</sup> I have chosen to use *Game of Thrones* because I find the show an interesting set piece that uses elements of history—not just western medieval history—that I believe I can use effectively to integrate gaming into the classroom.<sup>6</sup> My enthusiasm for the show's narrative elements, and historical nods, allow me to translate this into a dynamic and exciting game in the classroom. This helps me to convince my students that the historical content of the course is relevant and applicable. To do this, the game takes the course content and puts it into action through the development of teams within the classroom. These teams have to work through the historical material in the form of game cards and a game board that directly correspond to the information they have been assessing as part of the classroom content.

To set up the game for the classroom, I create instructions for all students and post them to the class's learning management system (at my university, we use Canvas). These instructions function in a couple of ways. One, they set up the premise of the game with a short introduction. This is where I connect the drama of the show to the content of the course. True to the *Game of Thrones* style, I set up the narrative arc of the historical information that the students have been learning within the same dramatic context as the television show. This allows students to begin thinking about the historical content in a way that is not just information that happened in the past, but as something that is relatable. For example, in my "History of Medieval Europe" class, the students play a game that is based on content of the early medieval world. In this case, students have been learning about the historical content and context from the year 500 CE to the year 900 CE. For this material, the instructions introduce the game by stating:

The Early Middle Ages emerged from the ashes of the Roman Empire. Kings are rising and falling, knowledge has been lost and found, and people are on the move. Who will emerge as the winner in Medieval Europe, and claim the Iron Throne?

The object of the game is for your group to successfully navigate the historical context of the Early Medieval World. To do so, you will have to employ your knowledge of the age, and the accomplishments and disasters that befell its people.<sup>7</sup>

Depending on the course content, the instructions could frame any number of historical time periods, such as those of ancient Rome, ancient Chinese dynasties, or World War I.

Two, the instructions also lay out the rules of the game, and how to use the game pieces to play the game effectively and earn as many points as possible. I outline how many rounds there will be within the game, and how many plays each round will have. Depending on the length of the instructional time (seventy-five minutes for a twice-per-week class, or two hours and forty-five minutes for a once-per-week class), the students play between two and three rounds of the game with three to five cards per round.<sup>8</sup>

To create the game board, I draw a map on the classroom whiteboard that corresponds to the regions that the students have been learning about through their historical content. The game

pieces include cards from which the students draw, and different colored markers for each team to indicate on the board when a card has been played. These cards are labeled with the names of historical people, places, or groups that link directly to whatever course content the students have been focusing on to that point in the class. For example, my students playing the early medieval game may have game cards that list an important king, like Charlemagne; an important place, such as Rome; significant groups of people, such as Saxons; or historical events that are broad, such as battles. While this content relates to a course on medieval Europe, and is played on a game board that is a map of Europe, instructors could easily create a game board and cards that link to other courses and content. For example, in a class that focuses on the American Revolution, students might have cards that highlight the rising tensions between the colonists and the English (e.g., a map of the United States, George Washington, Boston, loyalists, and battle—students may choose to connect to the concept of “battle” to the particular conflict on Bunker Hill in this instance).

In addition to game cards that have specific historical people, places, groups, and events, there are also game cards that are called “time machine” cards. Time machine cards allow students to reset the game board back to whatever time period corresponds to a card they would like to play. This is an important aspect of the game, and the game rules, because students are usually playing with cards from a large time period, as we will see in an example of student gameplay below. There are also blank cards in the deck, and if a student team pulls one of these, they can use it to play any person, place, group, or event they would like. It acts as a wild card, and allows students to create any type of card that would best help their team advance.

To play the game cards, students are formed into no more than four teams that connect to the family names (or “houses”) featured on *Game of Thrones*. Students pull a house name from a deck of index cards to start the game, so they are randomly assigned to a specific team. I usually have anywhere from twenty to thirty-five students per class, so the teams are a reasonable number of students. With the premise that one family—and one king (or queen)—will win the Iron Throne on the show, I have utilized this goal of “winning the throne” by gaming the historical events, people, and concepts. For the class, winning means making as many accurate historical plays and

accruing as many points as possible as a team. At the end of every class period where we play the game, one team emerges as victorious.

To begin gameplay, student teams pull game cards containing different historical concepts as described above. I create game cards for each game from index cards, and write the historical concepts that will be part of gameplay. This allows me to tailor each game specifically to course sources and materials. Each team pulls a set number of game cards for each round as laid out by the game instructions. All of the teams receive five minutes at the start of each round to strategize with one another. It is here that they can review course material together to decide what the possible plays are with each card. As part of the instructions, and my syllabus, I encourage students to bring technology to class, so that they can easily access course content for such games. The focus is not that students have memorized everything, but that they can research possibilities during the game by reviewing course materials to start creating historical connections.

The scoring structure of the game rewards student teams for making connections between the cards that their team holds, cards that other student teams have already played, and cards that their team has played previously. The reward for making a connection is that they can either gain extra points during their play or take points away from a rival team. To gain extra points during their play, the students can make an “alliance” with a card that has already been played and is on the board. In order to remove points from another team’s score, the students must play their game card in a way that impacts the success of a card that another rival team has already played. Below, I will consider an example of each type of play to highlight how the historical concepts on the game cards can be employed in various ways during the game.

When students play their cards, one representative from the team house comes up to the game board. To play a card, the team house representative brings the game card to the board and announces how they plan to play it. For example, if we were in my “History of Medieval Europe” class and were playing the early medieval game, student teams might hold the “Charlemagne,” “Rome,” “Saxons,” and “battle” cards that they pulled from the game card deck. One team is randomly chosen to make the first play, and this is how the time period is initially set for the game. If a student from the first team to play a card came up to the board and played the

“Charlemagne” card to start the game, that student would note that Charlemagne began to rule over the Franks in the year 768 CE. This correct information would earn the student’s team one point and, as this is the first play of the game, the team would be setting the time period of the game board at the year 768 CE for all teams and all subsequent plays. Because time only moves forward, this would mean that only cards that related to historical content from the year 768 CE and later could be played. In order to play any card from an earlier time period, for example, from the year 500 CE, the team would need to have a “time machine” card to play along with this other card from 500 CE. Playing the two cards together would reset the game board to the year 500 CE, and then all subsequent plays would need to be after the year 500 CE. Meanwhile, if the student had not correctly identified some aspect of Charlemagne, then the student’s team would lose a point, and another team would be able to set the chronology of the game board.

In the next round, if the student’s team was able to play the “Rome” card, and the game was chronologically still in the same time period, the team may decide to create a “self-alliance” between the “Rome” card and the “Charlemagne” card. The team could do this by providing the historical connection that Charlemagne was crowned as emperor in Rome in the year 800 CE. Doing this allows the team to earn a point and a half because they connected a card that they had previously played with the current play they were making. This is advantageous because it earns them more points than just playing a stand-alone historically correct piece of information about the city of Rome. In the game, students are rewarded with extra points for creating historical connections in this way.

Encouraging interaction with the information is significant because the strategy of the game cannot simply be to go up to the board and state some information about a card. If a team does that, then they surely will not win (nor achieve much historical analysis). Rather, they must make as many connections between game cards to gain as many extra points as possible. This scoring system encourages discussion among the team members about the relationship between the cards in their hand, and the cards that have been played on the board. It also emphasizes the way in which figures and events in history are dependent on multiple circumstances and specific contexts, or, in this case, multiple plays.

If a team's strategy is to try to take points away from an opposing team, they can do so by "destroying" a card another team has played and removing it from the game board. We can consider the early medieval game cards that I noted above: "Charlemagne," "Rome," "Saxons," and "battle." In this scenario, we will assume that one team has played the "Saxons" on the board, and have noted that they are a pagan group in the eighth century. If a team that holds the "Charlemagne" card comes up to the board next, they could choose to have Charlemagne take action against the Saxons. To do so, they would note that Charlemagne defeated the Saxons (finally) in 804 CE. By doing this, the team has earned a point. But, because they defeated the Saxons with this move, the team that played the "Saxons" card will now lose a point from their total score. Another scenario that would have the same effect would be if the team that held the "Charlemagne" card also held the "battle" card. If they had already played Charlemagne previously as King of the Franks in 768 CE, they could use their "battle" card to defeat the Saxons in 804 CE.

As this example demonstrates, not all game cards are specific people or specific historical events. A game card that simply states "battle" is broad enough to refer to any number of battle events during this time period. One of the key components of the game is to introduce more general terms that allow the students to decide how to narrow the term to play it in a specific historical context. That specific historical context is dependent on what other cards have already been played on the board. While there are often specific rulers listed, such as Charlemagne, there also are more broad historical events or people listed on the game cards. By allowing for more open-ended game cards, the students are able to think about how that card can better connect to events already played and can construct the appropriate context to maximize their game points.

After all rounds of play are finished, each team house tallies up its points. The team that wins the game earns some bonus points. I have found that giving some incentive, such as a small number of bonus points, helps to motivate the teams by having a tangible reward (as well as class bragging rights until the next game).

Not every class during the semester is a game, but gaming the class is the defining active learning strategy that allows students to connect the specific historical evidence with the broader historical context.<sup>9</sup> To understand how gaming the classroom integrates with

the course materials, I will now discuss how the games are situated within the course overall.

### **Gamification and the History Survey Course**

The courses I teach at my university for the most part are survey courses. While the overall class sizes are not unmanageable, with course caps between twenty and thirty-five students, the content that the courses are supposed to cover is quite large. For example, “Western Civilization” covers ancient Mesopotamia to the Italian Renaissance; “Introduction to World History” covers pre-history to the twenty-first century; and the “History of Medieval Europe” covers the end of the Roman Empire to the Italian Renaissance. While some aspects of each of these courses differ—some are also considered writing intensive and focus on revision—they all cover a large time period. Whether courses have a large number of students, or cover a larger time period, integrating gaming into the course structure can allow students to interact with course content in a way that promotes application rather than memorization. To allow for this to happen, I structure my courses in a way that provides easy access to course content for all students, and then integrate gaming as a strategy to promote discussion about particular historical topics, review for course exams, and serve as the exam itself. By doing this, I am able to transform courses that were initially more concerned with breadth into ones that focus on specific applications of history within the correct context.

My desire to create a more active learning environment was in part inspired by the Reacting to the Past model.<sup>10</sup> However, the Reacting to the Past model, and its fully immersive setup for students to explore a particularly significant problem in history, was not possible for the way in which the courses at my university were created for ancient history courses. There are no topics courses that allow for a semester-long investigation of a narrowly defined time period or concept. Since the courses within the curriculum are surveys, it is not feasible to address the content by remaining in one topic or historical problem for too long. Thus, I did not have time to spend multiple weeks, or an entire semester, on one historical event of particular significance. To work around this problem, I sought to embed gaming in other ways in my class, and my *Game of Thrones* method

allowed for more flexibility to employ this strategy in multiple ways throughout the semester. It also allowed for more time periods, and more historical problems and contexts, to be considered while still employing an active learning strategy.

With this active learning in mind, the content of my courses is provided electronically through the university's course learning management system (Canvas). On this site, I provide students access to the historical background information that is the core of the class. I use the video series *The Great Courses* to serve as the "textbook." These videos have proven very helpful for the diverse student body that comprise my courses, as they allow for closed captioning and provide a printed coursebook as well. Through this inverted classroom approach, students can then interact with the content through seeing, hearing, and reading. In addition to this material, students also interact with historical information by reviewing posted PowerPoint lecture slides, The Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, and selected primary and secondary sources.<sup>11</sup> Students in my class could not play the game if they did not have any means to access the historical context and information that was listed on the individual game cards, all of which directly mirrors the content on the course site. During gameplay, students can pull up and review all of this content in their teams to work on the best strategies to play their game cards. From semester to semester, the game cards I use in the same courses can vary slightly to reflect the trajectory of the discussion and content reviewed in class for that particular section.<sup>12</sup> This allows me to tailor the game to focus on the connections and contexts that we have been working on together in class up to the point where we begin playing the game.

My courses also focus on chronology, which is why I always embed the *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* into course modules. This timeline is a great online resource, as it lists key events and has wonderful material artifacts linked to the information for students to use as part of the class discussion. Because my courses generally cover a large time period, it is helpful for students to be able to place particular people, events, and concepts within a specific context. For the game, chronology is also important, which is why I included the "time machine" card as part of gameplay. While the "time machine" card functions to help move the game along, and reduce the chances that many teams are stuck with cards they cannot play,

it also emphasizes that historical events are not timeless. Rather, the actions of people and events are dependent on the historical context of a particular moment in time.

Similarly, the blank cards function to encourage discussion and strategic thinking in relation to history and the gameplay. As per the rules I have set, the students can choose to use this blank card in any way. Students can choose to create a “time machine” card out of it, so that they are not left with cards at the end of the round and penalized. Or, students can create any historical event, figure, or idea and play that card on the board. Often, students choose this option to create self-alliances with cards their team has previously played so they can maximize their points by creating historical connections. Notably, the blank card was a later addition to the game rules, inspired by students. When I first started to use this game in the Spring 2015 semester, I routinely asked for feedback from my students regarding game rules—what worked and what did not. I allowed them to vote, and to make a case for why certain rules should be changed or why additions to the rules should be considered. The blank card was part of the feedback, and it has proven to be very successful as it allows the students to be more creative and respond to the historical context of the game board.

I use this game in multiple ways within my classes, and I generally game my content between four to seven times per semester. This allows for the students to practice the game multiple times, which is important because the game helps the students work on creating contexts between historical events, ideas, and people. During these games, I constantly visit each team to ask them how they are organizing their cards, and how they are reacting to the other teams’ plays. This allows each team to ask me questions, and I can point them in the right direction to find the types of information that could be strategically beneficial for their team’s position in the game. If a team seems at a loss as to where to find this information, I will give them some hints as to where to look. This ensures that they can duplicate this process when they are on their own with a written assignment or a take-home exam. It also allows me to get a good sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the class’s understanding of the material, and of individual students’ gaps as well. With this information, I can tailor courses to address these gaps in understanding.

In addition to gaming content as a way to bring together course materials, or to review for an exam, I have also used the game as part of mid-term and final exams. In order for the game to work as part of an exam, the class period needs to be an extended one. Ideally, the class time should allow for two hours and forty-five minutes. The class prior to the exam is a practice game, with students playing with the material that will be on the exam. Students choose their teams by randomly pulling *Game of Thrones* house cards, and once a house team has been formed, the students play the game as usual. However, this team becomes the same one that will play together for the exam in our next class meeting. When I first introduced the game as part of the exam, I did not keep the teams the same on the exam day. However, I have discovered that for the majority of the students, keeping the teams the same encourages group study sessions. Teams that study together come in very well-prepared and very excited to employ their knowledge during the game itself.

To implement the game as part of an exam, the students play the game for the first half of the class session. The game is used to provide the content that the students will use to answer the questions on the exam. While the winning team is still eligible to earn bonus points, whether a team wins or loses the game does not impact their score on the exam portion. The written exam follows the conclusion of the game and is conducted in class as an individually graded exercise. Questions on the written exam ask the student to discuss how their team played the game, and how their team interacted with the materials and plays deployed by other teams.<sup>13</sup>

During the exam portion of class, I keep the game board up so students can remember which teams made what moves. Each team uses a different color marker to indicate plays, so it is easier for students to recall the plays that other teams made. In addition, I allow students to take notes during the game, which can be used in the exam portion. This keeps students engaged with the content, as they will need to know not only how they played their cards, but also how they reacted to plays made by other teams. The exam questions push the students to reflect upon the cards their team had, how those cards interacted with the plays made by other teams, and what types of cards they wished they had to complete additional plays. By framing these historical questions within the context of an active game, and gaming strategy, students are able to view their

historical knowledge as part of this endeavor. Answering history questions is not just about recall, but rather becomes about how the students used and connected their historical cards to the larger context of the game board. It also reinforces that there is more than one play, or more than one historically significant connection, to the cards they held as a team.

Students have had a positive reaction to the game and have indicated that gaming the content has reinforced their learning. One student noted:

Things I found useful for this course was that it was interactive. It's always a discussion-based class but we also have fun with it by incorporating our learning into games.

Additionally, students in the class consistently discuss the ways in which the game allowed for more nuanced understanding of the historical material. As an example, a student stated:

The classes were very interactive with students to students and student to professor. This was extremely perfect to help discussions form and allow a deeper understanding for students. Also, the *Game of Thrones* applied to our subject was extremely helpful to retain the information.

Consistently, students have given feedback that working in teams has really helped them understand course material better. For example, students stated that they “thought the Educational game was a great way for students to understand the material in a fun competitive way. It makes you want to better grasp the material in order to do better in the game and forces you to think about the material,” and that they “found this course to be very engaging and it practiced my ability to communicate the lesson with classmates through group work.”<sup>14</sup>

Gaming my history survey courses has been a way to encourage peer-to-peer interactions while also providing a method in which to ensure that students develop the skill sets that create good historical thinking. Below, I will discuss how gaming my classroom connects to the goals of active learning strategies within the history classroom and the development of key skill sets for students.

### **The Pedagogy of Gaming the Class**

The goal of my classroom is to allow the students to become historians. This means that they begin to understand how to

put together the larger historical context of any time period, and then assess primary source material within this context. Gaming the course content allows students to practice working with the historical information in a way that promotes their problem-solving and creative thinking skills. It also builds on traditional methods of testing students' understanding of the content in the history classroom, but in a more dynamic way. The results of this method have been that students tend not only to feel more confident in their understanding of the material, as noted above in their comments, but also that they see gains in their performance on class assignments.

The gamification of my classroom is an extension of the desire to engage students in meaningful ways in the classroom. While many history instructors will likely agree that lecturing every class does not help students approach material creatively, there is the problem of having students learn and understand the foundational historical information from which they can then analyze individual historical problems more in-depth. Definitions of student engagement are broad and can include items such as group collaboration, group testing, and concepts described as active learning.<sup>15</sup> In my classroom, gaming the material has utilized all of these methods, and, for the most part, I have put the traditional lecture format aside. Instead, I have focused on a constructivist approach to history, which requires students to engage with historical sources and information in order to build their own arguments and create their own connections based on the historical evidence at hand.<sup>16</sup> Rather than receiving this content from me in a passive way during a lecture, they work through the historical material with their peers. This assumes that they have put in the requisite time outside of class to then practice what they have learned in the classroom together. Even when this does not happen perfectly, students have the opportunity to revisit this material in an active way. Gaming my content is based on this constructivist approach. Students engage with historical material through pulling game cards, and they work together in teams to build connections between game cards and gameplay on the board.

Gameplay has also worked to reimagine a more traditional history exam question—the historical identification. In a traditional historical identification question, a student is asked to provide either the “who, what, when, where, and why” of the historical term, or to provide a discussion of how to place that term in its historical context.<sup>17</sup>

Essentially, students need to articulate what came before the term, how the concepts that define the term changed over time, and how the term impacted future developments. Placing a historical idea, person, or event in its context is a very helpful tool for students, but only if they can start making more meaningful connections between multiple ideas, people, and events. The problem of the historical identification is how to assist students in creating these flexible ways of thinking about historical issues and begin to create meaning from them, which is something that historians do when reviewing the individual pieces of the past. As one of the stated goals of my class is to help students become historians, my students must move beyond memorizing a term to understanding its variable contexts and historical significances.

To resolve the problem of using a testing method that does not help students learn how to create flexible and dynamic views about historical events, people, or ideas, I have gamed the historical identification. Rather than students seeing these terms on a history exam as stand-alone ideas that they must work through, they instead pull game cards and think about the best way to actively apply that card to the game board's historical context. The game cards, and the game board, create specific situations where historical actors and ideas intermingle with tangible results for the students' teams and the outcome of the game.

When gaming the exam using the *Game of Thrones* setup, the students who see the greatest gains are the students who were initially struggling the most. The exams that are not games in my classes are take-home, so students have access to course materials to assist them. However, even with the materials available during the exam, some students still struggle initially. Gaming the content, and the exam, has helped these students improve their exam scores. In my "Western Civilization" course, the majority of the students are lower division and are non-majors. While I have employed gaming techniques in all of my courses, it is in this course that I have consistently used the *Game of Thrones* gaming method for the final exam. Between the Fall 2017 semester and the Spring 2019 semester, the average enrollment in this course was twenty-nine students. During these four semesters, 44% of the students in the course scored below 80% on the first exam. For those students who scored below 80% on the first exam, 73% of them demonstrate at least a one letter grade improvement on the final exam that is conducted in the *Game of Thrones* format.<sup>18</sup>

## Conclusion

Gaming my classroom has allowed students to be creative, teach one another, and consistently receive feedback from peers as well as from me, the course instructor. Using the pop-culture connection between the *Game of Thrones* television series, and its historical nods and narrative arc, in my history courses has proven a useful tool to motivate my students to own the course material. Gaming my classes has allowed students who do not see themselves as interested in history to begin to have a stake in it. All students have the opportunity to become course leaders, and to construct meaning from the course content in a flexible and dynamic way. Gaming the course content has also pushed me as an instructor to be creative and to consistently reinforce active learning strategies in my classroom. In this way, I can show my students that history is not memorization, but an active process of evaluation, discussion, and—perhaps most importantly—fun.

## Notes

1. For the demographics of the institution, see “Perspectives: The Marymount University Factbook,” Marymount University, <<https://www.marymount.edu/Home/Faculty-and-Staff/Office-of-Planning-Institutional-Effectiveness/Official-Data/Perspectives-The-Marymount-University-Fact-Book>>. For the mission of the university, see “Our Mission, Vision, and Plan,” Marymount University, <<https://www.marymount.edu/About-Mu/Our-Mission-Vision-Plan>>.
2. For information about Reacting to the Past, see “Reacting to the Past,” Barnard College, <<https://reacting.barnard.edu/>>.
3. Similar issues have also been explored by others working to confront negative attitudes towards certain courses. See Niels Eichhorn, “Teaching the Survey Non-Traditional Style,” *The History Teacher* 46, no. 3 (May 2013): 435-454, 435. Marymount has an extremely diverse student body. Forty-four percent of students are from minority backgrounds, and seventeen percent are international students. See “Perspectives: The Marymount University Factbook 2018-2019,” Marymount University, <<https://www.marymount.edu/Home/Faculty-and-Staff/Office-of-Planning-Institutional-Effectiveness/Official-Data/Perspectives-The-Marymount-University-Fact-Book>>.
4. The content of the show has been both criticized and praised for the ways in which it presents historical elements. For example, see Kavita Mudan Finn, “*Game of Thrones* is Based in History—Outdated History,” *The Public Medievalist*, May 16, 2019, <<https://www.publicmedievalist.com/thrones-outdated-history/>>.
5. Medieval historians have assessed the ways in which the historical feel of *Game of Thrones* connects to actual historical context and content. For example, see Carolyne Larrington, *Winter is Coming: The Medieval World of Game of Thrones* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2016).
6. For a discussion of the non-western elements of the show, see Larrington, *Winter is Coming*, 147-224.
7. See Appendix A and Appendix B for an example of full game instructions, and for sample game cards.
8. For full instructions, see Appendix A.
9. In general, I would describe my classes as flipped classroom experiences. There are, for the most part, a combination of video content and short readings to perform prior to class, and the class itself is usually an activity that seeks to help students put the material together and to make arguments and connections from it. For a discussion of the flipped history classroom, see Judy E. Gaughan, “The Flipped Classroom in World History,” *The History Teacher* 47, no. 2 (February 2014): 221-244.
10. For more information about the curriculum and background of this pedagogical model, see “Reacting to the Past,” Barnard College, <<https://reacting.barnard.edu/>>.
11. I do not use a traditional textbook, and work to find publicly available information for the students. As an example, I routinely use timelines available on The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s website. See *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art*

*History*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <<https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/chronology/>>. The university library has streaming services available with video content from the *Great Courses* series, which are also assigned. For more information about this series, see The Great Courses Plus website, <<https://www.thegreatcoursesplus.com/>>. The Internet History Sourcebooks Project, hosted by Fordham University, is also an invaluable tool. Paul Halsall, "Internet History Sourcebooks Project," Fordham University, <<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/index.asp>>.

12. See Appendix B for sample game cards.

13. See Appendix C for sample exam questions.

14. All quotations are from student evaluations from classes where I have used the game at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia between 2015 and 2019.

15. For example, see Davida Bloom, "Collaborative Test Taking: Benefits for Learning and Retention," *College Teaching* 57, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 216-220; and Vishal Arghode, Jia Wang, and Ann Lathan, "Exploring Professors' Engaging Instructional Practices: A Collective Case Study," *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 17, no. 4 (October 2017): 126-149.

16. For an example, see Michael Henry, "Constructivism in the Community College Classroom," *The History Teacher* 36, no. 1 (November 2002): 65-74.

17. For use of this type of exam question, see Robert Blackey, "IDs: Memory or Meaning? A Guide for Answering Identification Questions that Encourages Thinking Historically," *The History Teacher* 47, no. 3 (May 2014): 451-458, 452-456.

18. I have used the results in my "Western Civilization" courses from Fall 2017 through Spring 2019. While I use the game in other courses, it is in this course that I consistently use it as the final exam. I taught four sections of this course with a total 115 students.

## Appendix A

### **Game of Thrones: Ancient Mediterranean World Edition Rules of Engagement**

*Civilizations have become established, and the Ancient Mediterranean World is becoming more interconnected. People are on the move, and rival kingdoms are rising and falling. Which ancient Bronze Age civilizations will succeed and have a future in the Iron Age—and sit on the Iron Throne?*

**Objective:** The object of the game is for your group to successfully navigate the historical context of the Ancient Mediterranean World. To do so, you will have to employ your knowledge of the age, and the accomplishments and disasters that befell its people.

**Gameplay:** Each round of the game will include 4 game cards. Each team will choose 4 game cards to play during the round at their turn. There will be 3 rounds of play. Each team will receive 5 minutes at the beginning of each round to devise a strategy and discuss their cards. When it is a team's turn to play, the team has 2 minutes to get to the board and play their card. If they cannot play a card within 2 minutes, they skip their play.

**Using Game Cards:** Game cards can be played in numerous ways:

1. If you get a card with a place name or group name, you can play that card to claim that place or group if you correctly identify the place or group. In addition, if you want your group to take action in any way, and you can correctly identify a historical action in which they were involved, you can choose to play your group in that way. You will earn 1 point for this. If you attempt to identify a place or group but cannot do so, you will lose 1 point.
2. If you get a card that “destroys” an area/person/group, you can choose to play that against its correct city/area/person/group. You will earn 1 point for this. If another team has already claimed that area/person/group, you can choose to destroy them during your turn. You will receive 1 point for the destruction, and the opposing team will lose 1 point for the disaster that befell them.
3. If you have a card that can make an alliance with another card already played by another team, you may create this alliance. If you play it correctly, you will gain 1 point, and the team with whom the alliance was created will get a ½ point. If you play it incorrectly, you will lose 1 point. You can make a “self-alliance” with one of your previously played cards to earn 1½ points on one play.

4. Cards that state specific persons, places, or events must be played in a way that relates to that specific person, place, or event.
5. You do not have to play a card during your turn if you think you cannot play it correctly.
6. If you have any cards remaining at the end of a round, you will have a  $\frac{1}{2}$  point deducted from your score per un-played card.
7. Remember, chronology matters! “Time Machine” cards can be used to reset the entire board to an earlier date. “Time Machine” cards must be played with another card, resetting the chronology to the era corresponding to the person/place/event.
8. Blank cards are also in the playing deck, serving as a type of wild card. Groups can play a historically accurate event/person/place, etc. of their choice, or play the blank card as a “Time Machine” card.
9. Only material from the Canvas course site may be used to play the game. No Googling or using Wikipedia!
10. Teams may interact with one another in any way they see fit to discuss cards, make deals, trade, etc. You are bound by your team honor (or lack of it) in all side-deals.

**Winning the Game:** The team with the most points at the end of all rounds wins the game, and will receive 5 bonus points.

**Additional Rules:**

1. Dragons cannot be used.
2. No coins from Braavos will be accepted.
3. Jon Snow knows nothing, so don't ask him for help.
4. The North Remembers everything—do you?

## Appendix B

### **Game of Thrones: Ancient Mediterranean World Edition Sample Game Cards**

Old Kingdom	Neo-Babylonians
Pharaoh	Hebrews
Nobles	Assyrians
Priests	Sennacherib
Slaves	Sargon the Great
Middle Kingdom	Hammurabi
Nubia	Persians
The Hyksos	Sea Peoples
New Kingdom	Climate Change
Hittites	Minoans
Battle	Mycenae
Cities	Troy
Babylon	Assurbanipal
Trade	Nineveh
Specialization	Blank / Wild Card
Innovation	Blank / Wild Card
Phoenicians	Time Machine Card
Carthage	Time Machine Card

## Appendix C

### Sample Exam Questions for Game of Thrones

- 1. Discuss 4 plays your team made. Be sure to:**
  - a. Discuss the historical importance of the play.
  - b. Discuss the general chronology (what time period you are in) with accuracy.
  - c. Discuss why your team made this play at this point in the game, as well as the result of the play in the game.
  
- 2. Discuss 2 plays an opposing team made. Be sure to:**
  - a. Discuss the historical importance of the play.
  - b. Discuss the general chronology (what time period you are in) with accuracy.
  - c. Discuss how this play impacted a play that your team decided to make (you must discuss the historical importance of your play, the chronology, and whether your play—or potential play—was affected positively or negatively by the other team).
  
- 3. If you could change any 2 plays your team made, what are they and why? Be sure to:**
  - a. Discuss the historical importance of the play you would have made with this change to strategy, or what card you wish your team had and how you would have played it (include its historical importance in the context of what was going on in the game at that time).
  - b. Discuss the general chronology (what time period you are in) of the play with accuracy.