

TEACHING WITH THE CIVIC MIRROR

RATIONALE

Standardized assessments (esp. heavy in content) require students to demonstrate their mastery of targeted understandings by responding to specific essay topics / projects. These high stakes assessments put pressure on incumbent teachers to ‘cover’ the material with their students.

As a result, there is a tendency in the profession to revert to what is safe and familiar; specifically, lecture-based, text-based learning. Although understandable, it decreases the likelihood for pedagogical innovation, frustrating teachers and students.

Brain-based learning experts are finding that the most effective instructional strategies immerse students in complex, interactive experiences that *challenge students to make meaning from (or sense of) the experience*. Other educational theories, like the experiential, constructivist, and emergent learning models, argue similar points. This is exactly what *The Civic Mirror* does: It challenges students to manage and survive in their own, collectively-shared simulated nation. It also challenges students to make difficult ‘life decisions’ (in a safe and simulated setting) that they otherwise wouldn’t be asked to make until much later in life.



In essence, students learn about the social studies curriculum by

- a) First learning about it via traditional means (reading text, listening to lectures),
- b) Then applying what they’ve learned to a life-like scenario that allows them to experience government, economics, and citizenship, and
- c) Reflecting on the experience and in order to make meaningful connections to the course material and their own worlds.

The justification, then, for *The Civic Mirror* is to provide teachers with an exciting and effective instructional alternative, one that allows them to tackle the social studies curriculum in exploratory and experiential ways, and one that allows students and teachers to develop 21st Century skills in the process.

QUOTES VALIDATING WHAT WE’RE DOING/LEARNING:

“Exposure to civics-related coursework is not enough to make more than a marginal difference for the vast majority of students. Far more important to predicting knowledge and discussion is whether students acquire a liking for the subject matter.”

- CIRCLE research finding
<http://www.civicyouth.org>

“Civic gaming experiences are strongly related to civic engagement. Educators have a real opportunity to reach students through games. Building on the one-third of teens who reported playing games as part of a class assignment, teachers might incorporate games with explicit civic content into their curriculum ... Take full advantage of these possibilities!”

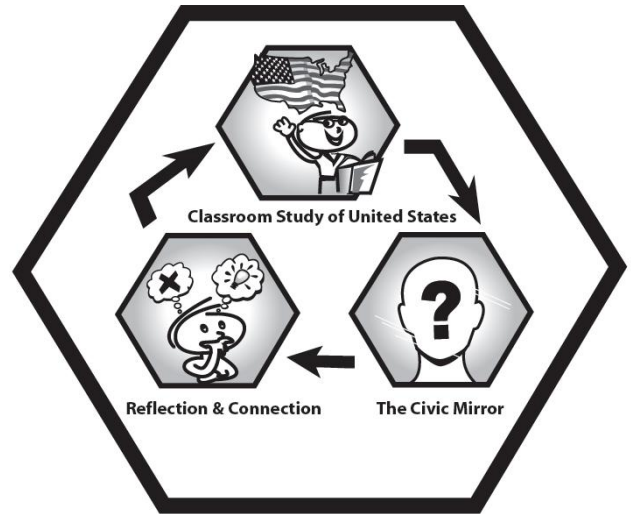
- Joseph Kahne, Civic Engagement Research Group
http://www.civicsurvey.org/White_paper_link_text.pdf

TEACHING WITH THE CIVIC MIRROR

As students work through their social studies readings, *The Civic Mirror* will challenge them to also work together to construct, manage, and survive in their own simulated nation. It's an ideal arena for students to "try out" and "make sense of" what the curriculum is asking them to learn.

HOW WILL MY TEACHING CHANGE?

The illustration to the right answers this question well. First your students will learn to master course content in the traditional ways: books, lectures, and videos. Second, they will be given an opportunity to use what they learned via *The Civic Mirror*. Finally, through structured discussions, assignments, exams, and/or assessments, students will think about what they learned and experienced and apply these 'lessons-learned' to their lives, the real-world, or specific aspect(s) of the curriculum.



HOW WILL MY STUDENTS' LEARNING CHANGE?

"Reading and listening" will not be the primary ways your students will be learning with this unit/course delivery. They will be doing much of their learning through experiencing and reflecting, constructing meaning along the way. In other words, because your students will be participating in a comprehensive set of *Civic Mirror* events and Reflection & Connection activities, the emphasis placed upon reading and memorizing will decrease. By the end of the course, however, your students will have lots of experience with economic concepts you want them to learn.

HOW DOES THE CIVIC MIRROR RELATE TO MY CURRICULUM?

1. It serves as a reference point for students to understand it.
2. Provides a cross-disciplinary experience that connects the various slivers of reality that our courses focus on.
3. It increases the chance that students will acquire a liking for the subject matter because it's fun, experiential, student-owned, and meaningful.

IS THERE REALLY TIME TO DO ALL OF THIS?

Yes and no. If you don't change your approach to teaching and learning *and also* try to include all of the *Civic Mirror* events, there will not be enough time to do everything. If, however, you are open to a few suggestions, you'll find that there will be an abundance of time.



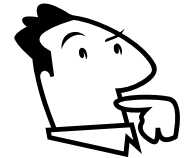
PICKING AND CHOOSING

You will always want to run another *Civic Mirror* year, there will always be a billion teachable moments you would love to stop and talk about, and there will always be a gazillion things your students will want to talk about. You will have to consciously pick and choose what to focus on with your unit/course goals in mind.



RETHINKING COVERAGE

You are also going to have to loosen your grip on the ‘coverage reigns.’ In order to free-up more class time to run *The Civic Mirror* events, more course content will need to be covered by your students than by you. Many teachers (including myself) find this a little disconcerting the first time through. Ultimately, however, it is our students – not us – who should be covering the course material. Furthermore, current research is suggesting that *our going over as much material as we can* is not the best way to ensure the majority of our students will understand it.



With all the above said, we’re now going to offer you some teaching strategies that will help your integration of *The Civic Mirror* be as effective as possible.

REWARDS / INCENTIVES

The Civic Mirror provides the teacher with a variety of incentive/reward mechanisms to help encourage students to complete in-class work. Specifically, before you give your students their Citizen Profiles, they will know that you will be using their attitude, participation, and work-completion marks to decide who gets how much game-start money and what hidden agendas. Afterwards, they will know that their continued hard work may be rewarded with either CM \$\$ and/or Well-Being Pts (given by you) ... or rewarded *and* punished via the Status Points Steals (described in the *Civic Mirror Manuals*). These methods work wonders to increase interest, motivation, and work-completion rates.



READING CHECKS

It’s highly recommended that you use homework reading checks for two reasons

1. To ensure your students are doing the course readings, and
2. To reward those students who are making efforts to do their course work.



If you hype-up *The Civic Mirror’s* incentive/reward mechanisms, it’s likely your students will be more motivated to read the course material than usual. And because your students will have a relevant arena to *use* what they are reading, you’ll likely find that they enjoy reading the material more than usual too.

CHEAT SHEETS

We recommend that you allow your students to bring in hand-written cheat sheets (notes) for the reading checks – as many pages as they like – as long as they are in their



own writing/printing. Note-taking is a highly effective study strategy for approximately two-thirds of the human population, and it doesn't necessarily 'hurt' the other third.

Some instructors find this component so successful that they allow their students to create one-page cheat sheets for the Unit Exams too. Nevertheless, by permitting your students to bring their own study notes for the reading checks, you will:

1. Increase the likelihood that your students read thoughtfully and attempt to make sense of it;
2. Communicate a message that *success* is not about how many random facts they can recall, but success is about how hard they work and prepare; which will
3. Increase the likelihood of your fringe students reading the material (i.e. those students who might otherwise think "There's no point, I'll never remember this stuff").

READING CHECK DISCUSSIONS

The reading checks can take from 5 to 10 minutes to complete, but we recommend spending as much time marking them as a class and discussing what was read in the process. This will require you (the teacher) to review the assigned reading beforehand and identify some of the key talking/discussion points ... always trying to think of ways to relate the course material to the happenings in your students' Civic Mirror country.

Also, with this set-up, we're certain you'll find your students will be 'tougher' markers than you would be ... especially when \$\$, WB PTs, and SP Steals are on the line.



ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS

It is also recommended that you take advantage of *The Civic Mirror's* online discussion forums to extend the dialogue outside the boundaries of the classroom walls. Note that the Instructor's Manual is full of discussion questions and prompts. Assign your students to *first* compose and post an initial 250 – 500 word response (like they would for a regular essay or paragraph response), and *then* post at least two replies to their classmates' responses. These interactive parameters can very easily instigate exciting online discussions that bring the course material to life. We highly recommend using this *Civic Mirror* feature.



WARNING! DO NOT TELL YOUR STUDENTS...



DO NOT inform your students when *The Civic Mirror* will end! Or at least try not to. The reason is quite simple: If students know when the game ends, an apocalypse (or end of the world) scenario arises. Certain students (usually the keen ones) will plan end-game strategies that they would otherwise not plan. In order to properly simulate life, do not tell your students when the last simulated year will be. What works best is letting your students think that the time you have set aside for another unit or a final Reflection & Connection Activity will be spent going through another year or two of *The Civic Mirror*.