Appendix 7

Learning Objective Assessment 5b

In the following exercise, students had to draw on a number of sources to construct an argument by extracting evidence from readings, abstracting their importance, and finding patterns in them. Students did this work in teams. All the teams were able to achieve high mastery in the skill, and many were engaged in the exercise because they found the topic and readings accessible, interesting and straightforward. Students also conveyed that they were more confident of what was being asked from them to do after the exercise. Later in the course I noticed, however, that the level of mastery varied when the course materials were more challenging, and when they had to execute the skill by themselves. Producing historical arguments is a very difficult skill for our students to fully master in one semester; this one will take a village.

Application Project 6: Presenting a Book Proposal for Publication

Goal: Using the readings “Zumbi,” “Beatriz de Padilla,” “Miguel Hernández,” “Ana Juana of Cochabamba” and “José Antonio da Silva,” your team will find evidence to produce a possible book addressing the ways in which common people challenged the rigid social and gendered order in colonial Mexico, Bolivia, and Brazil. In order to do this, your team will need to extract evidence from the readings, find patterns in it, produce the main argument of the book, and write a brief outline of two sample chapters. The book may be entitled “Weapons of the Weak”*; your team may add a subtitle or even produce a new title altogether. Your book proposal should include the book’s title, its main argument, the outlines for the two sample chapters, and briefly address the significance of the book.

Your team will then choose a representative to present the book proposal to an editorial panel. Taking into account that the editorial panel may not be well-versed on the subject matter, your team must produce a clear, concise and persuasive presentation that makes use of the most convincing evidence, and convey the importance your argument and your book will bring to the understanding of colonial Latin America. After each team representative makes an oral presentation of their book proposal, the editorial panel will decide which book they will publish.

* There is a famous book by James C. Scott (1985) with this title to denote the silent, hidden ways in which common people resist and challenge domination from above. He argues that
these silent, uncoordinated strategies of common people can help mitigate oppression and in the long run can lead to social change.

**Step 1: Find** all the **specific evidence** you can on Zumbi, Beatriz, Miguel, Ana Juana and José Antonio in order to answer following question:

- How did these people transgress or challenge the ideal social and gendered norms of Spanish and Portuguese social colonial society?

Use index cards to complete this step. Write the answer for each person in each card, along with where the information came from (first one or two words of the title and page number, i.e. “Beatriz,” 55). Use as many index cards as you need.

**Step 2: Describe the evidence in an abstract way.** What is each example evidence of? Or, in other words, what is the broader significance of the evidence to history? For example:

**What is this evidence of?** This is evidence of how disease created a vacuum of power among Aztecs and was one of the major factors leading to their eventual defeat by the Spaniards.

**Evidence:** After the Aztec King Moctezuma died, his successor Cuitlahuac died of small pox. (*Broken Spears*, page 43).

Write this answer in the space at the top right of the square for each piece of evidence.

**Step 3: Sort and group** your evidence in coherent **categories**. Cut out each square and sort the squares into different categories. After the team categorizes them the first time, go back and try to group the squares into fewer categories, until you come up with no more than 3 or 4 categories. For example:

In our unit on the Conquest of Mexico, some categories we could have used were: “disease and its effect on the downfall of Tenochtitlán”; “Spanish alliances with other native groups and how it gave them an advantage”; “Weapons and their effects in the conquest”; and “Aztecs’ cosmic worldview and their understanding of events during the conquest,” among others. The example on Step 2 would fall on the “disease” category.

**Step 4: What patterns does your team find when you consider all the evidence by categories?**

Taking into consideration the examples on Step 3, those categories, taken as a whole, may suggest that a question about whether European weaponry was the most important cause of the downfall of the Aztec empire may need to address all of the categories because all had an effect on the surrender of Tenochtitlán. Thus, one possible pattern is that all of these categories can be interpreted as factors contributing to the Spanish conquest of Mexico, some more than others.
Another possible pattern can be revealed by dividing the categories into those that had “an immediate, local effect” and those which were more “temporarily and geographically widespread.” Considered in this way, “weapons” and “alliances” can be placed in the “immediate, local effect” category, while “disease” and “cosmic worldview” could be associated with the “temporally and geographically widespread.”

Write the pattern(s) your team finds in the attached Worksheet 2.

**Step 5: What possible arguments can your team make and sustain with the evidence (patterns) you find?**

For example, in the first pattern shown above on Step 4, the argument might be that superior European weaponry is only one among many important factors that led to the fall of Tenochtitlan which helps to explain why at the turning point of the conquest, the siege of the Aztec capital city, it was disease rather than superior weaponry that led to the Aztec’s surrender.

In the second pattern above, the two major categories may lead to a similar argument, yet this time weighing the extent of the impact factors that lead to the downfall of Tenochtitlán: ‘While superior weaponry and strategic alliances with Native groups may have been perceived as what led to the Spanish success, these had very localized effects, while it was disease and the Aztec cosmic worldview what had a much wider and psychologically profound effect on the population of the Valley of Mexico and which led to its demise.” In this second argument, the Aztec worldview plays a larger role than in the first argument.

Your team will need to decide which is the most convincing argument you can make about how common people transgressed or challenged the ideal social and gendered norms of Spanish and Portuguese social colonial society.

Write this down in the attached Worksheet 2.

**Step 6: Organize your evidence into 2 brief outlines showing what each chapter will be about and the evidence that will be used.** Make sure that the two outlines clearly connect to the thesis of the book, and that your team selects the best possible evidence to support the argument.

Sample of a thesis statement and brief chapter outline (inspired by our last unit on the conquest of Tenochtitlán):

The 1521 conquest of Tenochtitlán has usually been attributed to European superior weaponry. This book demonstrates that other factors such as disease, Aztec cosmology, and Spanish alliances with local tribes provide a better explanation for the collapse of the Aztec Empire because each had a wider and more enduring debilitating effect than the immediate and localized use of cannons and arquebuses.
I. Chapter 1: Disease: The smallpox pandemic that reached the Aztec populations subsequently destroyed much of the Aztec’s potential to win the war

1. While the Aztecs successfully attacked and drove the Spanish away from Tenochtitlán during the Night of Sorrows, the arrival of smallpox right after this event killed thousands of Indigenous peoples, either through the disease itself, or from starvation (León-Portilla 64, 91). This affected the Aztecs’ ability to win the war during the siege of Tenochtitlán.

2. The death of the new Aztec leader, Cuitlahuac, due to smallpox, created a vacuum in power at a critical time (León-Portilla, 101).

3. The Spaniards were largely immune to these illnesses, giving them a distinct advantage when fighting sick and dying populations (Crosby 42).

II. Chapter II: Aztec’s Cosmic Order: The legend of the return of Quetzalcoatl had an effect on the leadership and on the catastrophic way some Aztecs eventually interpreted the events that led to the conquest:

1. Moctezuma’s belief that Cortés was Quetzalcoatl instilled a perpetual state of fear within the Aztec leader, rendering him weak and helpless in defending his people.

2. This ‘belief’ thrust Cortés into a position of power where he could manipulate and abuse the Aztec belief system (León-Portilla 64; Harris, 39)

3. The Aztec Calendar demonstrates how they were living in the era of the “fifth sun”, with the possibility that the era would be destroyed (“Aztec Stone”).

This book brings a perspective that has not been accounted for in many history books: that of how the Aztecs interpreted the fall of their empire and how disease, cosmology and Spanish alliances had a lasting effect in their downfall. It thus questions the accepted version that a handful of Spaniards were able to easily conquer Mexico because of their superior European weaponry. It demonstrates that this was an encounter of two complex civilizations, and that the account of the conqueror has silenced the complexities of this encounter.

Step 7: Write and prepare the proposal in a clear and persuasive way. Your team should produce 2-4 pages that cover these four elements: the title, the main argument, and the outlines of two sample chapters, as well as why the book is important and should be published (see an example in Step 6). A professional and attractive presentation is always a plus. The pages you produce will be projected so everyone can see them, using the classroom’s document camera. Remember: Your goal is to convince the editorial board that your team’s book is worth publishing: solid arguments based on the best evidence (substance), clarity, and persuasion based on knowledge will be the key to success.

Step 8: Select a representative to present the project to the editorial board. Help him/her prepare for the presentation. The presentation style will count. Be professional, clear, persuasive and knowledgeable about the subject matter. The presentation should be no more than 4 minutes long.

Step 9: Turn in your presentation and Worksheets 1 to our course assistant. This, along with your oral presentation, will be considered for this AP grade.