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The Age of Imperialism



About the author

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Welcome to ***The Age of Imperialism!***

Covers European imperial endeavors in Africa, southeast Asia, Latin America, and India. The class divides into six nations (Germany, Dutch, Great Britain, Portugal, France, and Italy), each of which tries to conquer and hold onto as many colonies as possible on a map of Africa.

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Preface

A couple of years ago, I found myself frustrated as a teacher. I wanted to push my students into deeper levels of thinking; however, they were not acquiring the basic knowledge they needed to get there. Most of my students know little of the world outside of inner-city St Louis, and little motivation to learn about people such as Julius Caesar, Simon Bolivar, or Saladin. So my task was to find a way to motivate them to learn while directing them towards a deeper way of thinking.

To solve this, I began to rely on my Peace Corps experience. Three years prior, I spent two years in Thailand teaching English. As in St. Louis, the students of Rong Rien Plu ta Luang were less than enthusiastic about learning English—especially the boys. To engage them, I began to use different “learning games.” These were simple, but pulled the students into the lesson and energized the material for them. The students became motivated to know the material so they could “win” the games. By playing the games regularly, the students began to learn the material in spite of themselves.

Using these experiences I was convinced that introducing review games into my classes would help increase the energy, motivation, and retention of my students. I began (as most teachers do) with the typical Jeopardy! and other such games available on the Internet. While these were effective at first, the novelty wore off quickly and I found myself back at square one.

I then decided to try and develop games of my own. Having a background in computers as well as history, I started simply, using PowerPoint® as my means of delivery. Simple hyperlink games such as basketball and volleyball seemed to hold my students’ interest longer, especially when used in a “tournament” style game, but students’ enthusiasm for these games also waned after a while.

Realizing the problem was that the students wanted something unique, I began developing games for each period of time we covered. My idea was to maintain the enthusiasm and anticipation the students had for each new game. I also began to reapply my programming experience from college, opening up a new world of possibilities through PowerPoint®. Now, while we studied the Romans, the review game put the students in the roles of generals vying for the throne of Emperor. When we studied the Middle Ages, students jousting against each other as knights. In addition, I began shuffling the slides so the questions would repeat throughout the game. This change allowed repetitive learning of basic facts without the struggle of rote memorization.

The response was spectacular. Each time we started a new game, I found practically all the students engaged. Even those who rarely studied or read the book would at least glean information while playing the review games. More importantly, the games provided students with a way to acquire basic knowledge that would provide the basis for a deeper understanding of history and its themes. All of this happened without students even realizing they were learning.

None of this would have been successful without the encouragement of my main advisors: my wife Sandra and daughter Sophia. In addition, the great staff at Cleveland, Dr. Susan Viviano, Deborah Schmidt, Heidi Binggeli, and everyone else has continually pressed me to go further and push my boundaries while offering excellent advice and recommendations.