

## TASK 1: PLANNING COMMENTARY

Respond to the prompts below (**no more than 9 single-spaced pages, including prompts**) by typing your responses within the brackets. Do not delete or alter the prompts. Pages exceeding the maximum will not be scored.

### 1. Central Focus

- a. Describe the central focus and purpose of the content you will teach in the learning segment.

[The learning segment will be covering the Byzantine Empire and will be looking at the reign and leadership of Justinian and Theodora more specifically. This is required by our school district and it is important that our students learn about the fallout of the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the resulting kingdoms and empires. To summarize the central focus in one phrase it is the “Byzantine Empire at its peak”. ]

- b. Given the central focus, describe how the standards and learning objectives within your learning segment address
  - facts and concepts
  - inquiry, interpretation, or analysis skills
  - building and supporting arguments or conclusions

[The standards and the learning targets both support work with factual information, inquiry, interpretation of those materials, and building supports off of those materials. Our facts are required every day for us to analyze. We use inquiry into documents both due to the standards and our learning objectives and we use interpretation to analyze the maps that we will be working with. Finally, our assessments require that students build arguments and support their conclusions. ]

- c. Explain how your plans build on each other to help students **make connections** between facts, concepts, and inquiry, interpretation, or analysis skills to build and support arguments or conclusions about historical events, a topic/theme, or a social studies phenomenon.

[We began with a lesson about geography so that our students understand the locations that we will be discussing. To understand Justinian and his motivations it is important to understand where the Byzantine Empire was located and what their struggles were as an empire. As such, we began with a direct instruction and discussion based lesson on the geography that we will encounter. By using Direct Instruction and discussion as a mix, we are able to cover lots of material while allowing students to interact with their peers and with the material and the sources, in this case, a series of maps. The second lesson uses more inquiry based learning to show some of the negative aspects of Justinian, such as his code of laws and the confusion and frustration they helped to cause which contributed to the Nika Riots. The third and final lesson uses a jigsaw method to construct opportunities for students to learn effectively about a wide range of related topics. By using inquiry, students are able to gain a deeper understanding of the impacts and lives of Justinian, Theodora, Belisarius, and Justinian’s main goal in life, his attempted re-conquest of the west. ]

### 2. Knowledge of Students to Inform Teaching

For each of the prompts below (2a–b), describe what you know about **your** students **with respect to the central focus** of the learning segment.

Consider the variety of learners in your class who may require different strategies/support (e.g., students with IEPs or 504 plans, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students).

- a. Prior academic learning and prerequisite skills related to the central focus—**Cite evidence of what students know, what they can do, and what they are still learning to do.**

[Students are coming out of their unit on Ancient Rome. Test scores for this unit were higher than the year average, as it was an 80%, compared to the previous semesters average of a 73%. Students learned about Rome from the founding of it until its split. This unit began with a lesson covering the last 150 years of Rome and having the students make predictions about what would happen during this next time period. This previous test shows the background knowledge that these students have. Students are well versed in AVID reading strategies which help them to better understand the texts that we will be working with. This will allow for challenging texts to be used while being broken down. An example of a few of the most common strategies are: numbering the paragraphs making it easier to cite claims based off of the readings, underlining key points, circling difficult words, and writing in the margins. We use these strategies throughout and we use them with Justinian's code of laws. We circled words that we do not understand, we wrote in the margins, and we also underlined key phrases for the laws that we went through. This school district has heavily invested in this program, so these strategies are used in all subject areas.

Additionally, the assignment known as a constructed response, from lesson 1, is a type of a response that is used across all subject areas, so we are able to use readings and constructed responses to easily help our students grasp onto information and assignments. This writing skill and these reading strategies will also assist students in figuring out the information around our central focus of the Byzantine Empire at its peak. The writing and reading skills come in handy for figuring out the generally confusing Byzantine Empire as it opens doors for the students to make connections and clearly communicate their thoughts.]

- b. Personal, cultural, and community assets related to the central focus—**What do you know about your students' everyday experiences, cultural and language backgrounds and practices, and interests?**

[The students are a unique mix. Some are exceptionally high achieving, with some who are really struggling. Attendance is a struggle. An example of this is from my 4<sup>th</sup> period the day that I filmed. I filmed my 2<sup>nd</sup> hour, but my 4<sup>th</sup> hour was missing 10 of 25 students and that is fairly common for all my classes. However, if our students know that we will be discussing or doing an activity they are more likely to come. A good chunk of this focus class are athletes. This impacted our choice of focus with the Nika Riots and the tie in to the modern world as we were able to use something our students are interested in. As such, they want to finish out their winter sports while being eligible which helps to offset the attendance issues. With that being said, tardies are often an issue so opening activities can be very difficult as students do not show up in time to participate, which is shown by a few students in the video who arrive late. A good number of our students are working long hours, with multiple students who are living by themselves and are working two jobs or more to support themselves. We also have multiple English Language Learners (ELL) students. In the focus class a few have graduated off of the plan but there are some still receiving assistance. By way of IEP's, the focus class does not technically have any, but it does have multiple ELL students who in many ways are similar. These students bring a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, viewpoints and experiences with them which allows for these students to have a large, positive impact on the class. This impacts

the central focus of the learning segment as we want provide an opportunity for these students to showcase their experiences and share what they know to be true with their classmates. ]

### 3. Supporting Students' History/Social Studies Learning

Respond to prompts below (3a–c). To support your justifications, refer to the instructional materials and lesson plans you have included as part of Planning Task 1. **In addition, use principles from research and/or theory to support your justifications.**

- a. Justify how your understanding of your students' prior academic learning and personal, cultural, and community assets (from prompts 2a–b above) guided your choice or adaptation of learning tasks and materials. Be explicit about the connections between the learning tasks and students' prior academic learning, their assets, and research/theory.

[I knew that students at SHS tend to be lower in the reading level rankings than the average high school student. As such, I used easier readings and additional reading strategies to assist these students. Additionally, I used assignments that students were familiar with as it provided some form of continued familiarity with the material as we move into a rarely covered unit taught by a new teacher. Also, I modeled my classroom in a similar way so as to keep that similarity running through the change in teachers. This continuity has been cited as important by multiple educational writers, but one good example of this is from not research, but a law passed. The *Every Student Succeeds Act* is designed to make sure that students are put in a stable environment at school even when home life is turbulent, in this case with foster care. Although this may seem unrelated, I think it is related. Many of my students have tough home lives and so for me to be able to apply portions of this act to the classroom I think is important. Also, I think this act created an awareness around the importance for not just young kids but also older ones to have stability at home.

As additional research, I think that, B. Rubin's work on Essential Questions and civic learning also ties in here. Rubin uses the example of social studies being presented as a place where, "Learners memorized past events and considered issues that were presented as resolved."<sup>1</sup> Obviously, social studies educators do not feel that way, but it is easy to see why students feel that way. As such, questions and more specifically the Essential Question for a lesson are critical. However, I want to focus this more on questions inside the lesson. The objective used for the video taped lesson was about analyzing the Byzantine Empire under Justinian. This is worded so that it is not an answered question, but rather it is still an open-ended question and it is a challenge to the students. Rather than being worded as, "Here are three ways that Justinian impacted the Byzantine Empire" it is instead worded to encourage students to wonder, "How did Justinian impact the Byzantine Empire?" or, "What was the Byzantine Empire like under Justinian?" which engages the students beyond just questioning but rather it also includes opportunities for students to disagree and to really dive into why they think what they think.]

- b. Describe and justify why your instructional strategies and planned supports are appropriate for **the whole class, individuals, and/or groups of students with specific learning needs.**

Consider the variety of learners in your class who may require different strategies/support (e.g., students with IEPs or 504 plans, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students).

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<sup>1</sup> B. Rubin, *Essentially Different: Using Essential Questions and Themes for Civic Learning*, p. 25.

[I am covering material in a variety of ways. My ELL students are able to receive the same material through easier readings, yet also participating in the discussion. I am admittedly fortunate that I have a series of higher level ELL students, yet we still are able to make slight changes to the material and the curriculum so that they are readily included. The same applies to struggling readers. We also have some more challenging readings for the gifted students. During direct instruction and vocabulary time we will be having students paraphrase the definition. This allows for students to have a base for their knowledge and then to use their language skills, whether a strength or weakness to build off of it. Some examples of questions are, “How could we define this term?” or “Why did you choose to use that particular word or phrase?” or even, “What could you draw as a visual for this term?” All of these questions are designed to open doors for the students to make connections and to come up with their own original ways to remember these terms. ]

- c. Describe key misconceptions within your central focus and how you will address them.

[There is a tendency to think that this concept may not be applicable to the real world. We are addressing this by looking at modern day soccer riots in comparison to the Nika Riots, modern day laws compared to Justinian’s code, modern day and ancient maps, and looking at Empress Theodora’s lasting impact on what we now call feminism. Those are just a few of the ways this will be addressed. Another misconception is that we are not covering the Byzantine Empire from multiple points of view. Although to an extent that is correct, we are looking at many sources and different aspects of the Empire while it was at the peak of its existence. ]

#### 4. Supporting History/Social Studies Development Through Language

As you respond to prompts 4a–d, consider the range of students’ language assets and needs—what do students already know, what are they struggling with, and/or what is new to them?

- a. **Language Function.** Using information about your students’ language assets and needs, identify **one** language function essential for students to learn the history/social studies content within your central focus. Listed below are some sample language functions. You may choose one of these or another more appropriate for your learning segment.

Analyze	Compare/contrast	Construct	Describe	Evaluate
Examine	Identify	Interpret	Justify	Locate

[Our learning segment is really focused around the concept of Analyzing information. I am choosing to look at analysis because I feel that history should be taught based off of inquiry which I feel requires analysis to be done properly. ]

- b. Identify a key learning task from your plans that provides students with opportunities to practice using the language function identified above. Identify the lesson in which the learning task occurs. (Give lesson day/number.)

[Lesson 1 provides students with an opportunity to analyze vocabulary in the form of their constructed response. Additionally, our discussion requires that students use the correct vocabulary throughout and that the students are processing what is required. Also, these terms are now expected to be applied throughout the remainder of the learning segment and the unit as a whole. The vocabulary is critical as students must understand what these words mean. Students are also able to use this tool of analyzing information and concepts in lesson 3 as they create their mini-posters on their various people. These posters require analysis of the

historical figures lives and of their actions. This analysis is then shown both with the students writing and also with their visual representations which provides for multiple ways to show their learning and growth in the area of analysis. ]

- c. **Additional Language Demands.** Given the language function and learning task identified above, describe the following associated language demands (written or oral) students need to understand and/or use:
- Vocabulary/symbols
  - **Plus** at least one of the following:
    - Discourse
    - Syntax

[Students are required during this lesson (lesson 1) to use vocabulary and also to use syntax. As students write their syntax becomes clear. I work down the hall from a few English teachers and so I have the opportunity to collaborate with them and we can work together to further our students learning in various ways, whether it is in something like syntax, or if it is in something like research and inquiry. We are using syntax and are measuring it through the daily assignment. Every assignment during this learning segment has to do with writing as we want to be improving our students writing skills to meet our school improvement goal. As such, syntax is a good demand to measure as we are going to be able to assess it every day. Additionally, syntax ties in with our goal of inquiry as it will help students to discuss and to write good questions for further exploration.]

- d. **Language Supports.** Refer to your lesson plans and instructional materials as needed in your response to the prompt.
- Identify and describe the planned instructional supports (during and/or prior to the learning task) to help students understand, develop, and use the identified language demands (function, vocabulary/symbols, discourse, or syntax).

[One of the major ways which I help the students instructionally in using and learning this vocabulary is by working through definitions with students. In other words, maybe there is a tough key word. We will look at that word together as a class and then we will come up with what the definition is. However, students are not to write down word what is on the board. Rather, they are to take the definition and write it in their notes using their own words. Additionally, this requires analysis for students to come up with the correct synonyms and way of saying this word. Vocabulary is also written down in vocabulary sheets at times, especially for tough terms, i.e., Feudalism, Manor system, etc... which includes a space for a picture. This picture may seem juvenile but it is another way for the students to interact with the material first hand, which allows them to learn the material in an additional way. This also serves as a great check for learning, especially for ELL and struggling students as we see what they are picturing when they hear a word and think of what it means. This allows us as teachers to assist students quickly and to use this illustration as a formative assessment which is very helpful to our teaching process. ]

## 5. Monitoring Student Learning

In response to the prompts below, refer to the assessments you will submit as part of the materials for Planning Task 1.

- a. Describe how the planned formal and informal assessments provide direct evidence of how students learn and use facts, concepts, and inquiry, interpretation, or analysis skills to build and support arguments or conclusions about historical events, a topic/theme, or a social studies phenomenon **throughout** the learning segment.

[The constructed response provides a very formal and very straightforward assessment. This is a paragraph response so it is easy to see whether the students can apply their analysis to writing or if they are still struggling to get it from their head to their paper. We had an in class discussion which allowed for me to assess student learning. This allows for me to check in and make sure that they are properly forming these conclusions and these webs of knowledge. Day 2 used a hands-on, fun activity with some direct instruction, a video, a discussion, and then a creative assignment to assess the ability of students to comprehend the Nika Riots. The fact that it is creative forced students to move beyond simply restating actions and events and forces students to begin to explore what was going on and to analyze what people's reactions may have been. By doing this we opened doors for students to climb inside the minds of your average citizen of the Byzantine Empire and to reflect both on what happened and how they feel. An informal assessment in this lesson was once again the discussion and looking for students grasp on understanding, but another is the partner share that we will be doing with a friend as a brain break. This mirrors a think-pair-share and so we will have a few students share out what their partner and them have talked about. This allows for me to further my understanding of where the students may have holes in their knowledge and where they have a complete understanding. Finally, in that third lesson we are using those posters to allow students to showcase their ability to analyze and to make connections between people and events. This does also incorporate a creative aspect but it is focused on students' content learning and knowledge. Another informal assessment from this lesson is the time which students have to return to their original groups and to share out. As I walk around and monitor what the students have learned I am able to assess what students may not have grasped yet which we were hoping that they would pick up on. This also allows for me to check for vocabulary usage and understanding.

Even more specifically, in the assignment from the video-taped lesson, (a one-pager), a summary is required which is then graded out of two points. One point is for having some correct knowledge, but for their to be two points, it has to be readable and correct. It does not have to be perfect, but it needs to be understandable. If it is not, then the student will only receive one point. This adds on an important aspect to the assignment that obviously the focus is on the content itself, but it is important that the students understand the importance of it being clearly understandable also. ]

- b. Explain how the design or adaptation of your planned assessments allows students with specific needs to demonstrate their learning.

Consider the variety of learners in your class who may require different strategies/support (e.g., students with IEPs or 504 plans, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students).

[I have designed these assessments to include some verbal, some written and some artistic. Some students will enjoy all of these types, others will not, but it allows me to gain a full understanding of my students learning. In particular, for our ELL students the second and third assessment, the "Instagram post" and the poster will provide opportunities for these students to showcase their learning in non-written ways. Also, these provide great opportunities for students who are underperforming or are struggling with gaps to easily show me their knowledge. Gifted students understand the challenge to make these assignments as good as

possible and that these assignments can always use a little bit more information, especially the poster as this is presented to their classmates. All of these assessments require application of the vocabulary that we are learning and they require inquiry as students must inquire into the documents and the maps to answer the questions and complete the assignments. These lessons also are all designed so that there will be some form of emphasis on syntax to go along secondarily with the emphasis on correct content knowledge.]

## Bibliography

B. Rubin, *Essentially Different: Using Essential Questions and Themes for Civic Learning*, p. 25.