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INTRODUCTION

THE *DECISION MAKING IN WORLD HISTORY* SERIES

The lessons in the books of the *Decision Making in World History* series are meant to be used independently within a standard world history course in middle school, high school, or college. The lessons have four main goals:

1. **Make History More Interesting.** Simply giving students the problems, having them make decisions, and then telling them what the people involved actually did will keep student interest high. It's exciting to make decisions before you know what the historical characters actually did. It's dynamic learning and it's open-ended. Students enjoy comparing their decisions to those of their classmates and to the decisions actually made by the historical figures. Even if you decide to use the lessons without giving instruction on how to perform the skills involved in decision making, students will still enjoy learning history this way. This increased interest should also lead to increased reading comprehension. After all, when students read their texts, they will actively search for what actually happened and will want to compare it with what they chose.

2. **Improve Decision Making through Experience.** The primary way people learn to make better decisions is through the process of making decisions, both good and bad. Students therefore become more sophisticated decision makers with every choice they make. By giving students many chances to make decisions in which they can learn from mistakes and surprises, we can speed up the process of making them savvy decision makers. For example, students who decide to have a foreign government overthrown and then see many negative consequences of their decision will think twice before trying that again and will be skeptical of such a plan if proposed in the present day. Experience itself becomes the teacher.

3. **More Complex Ethical Thinking.** Ethical questions will arise regularly, and by discussing their positions students will develop more complex moral arguments and understandings. Note, however, that these lessons are not aimed primarily at ethical reasoning. To focus primarily on ethical reasoning, consult *Reasoning with Democratic Values* by Alan Lockwood and David Harris (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1985).

4. **Improve the Use of Decision-Making Skills and Reflection on Those Skills.** While experience is an important element in helping students improve their decision-making skills, they will develop those skills even more quickly if they learn specific subskills, which can then become guidelines for thinking through decision-making problems. The instruction is based on the skills of the **P-A-G-E** model, which is outlined later in this book. One of the teaching strategies emphasizes (in the section "Reflecting on Decision Making") journal writing, in which students reflect on the problems they encounter, including how they could improve their own decision making. If you can get

students to reflect on how to improve on decisions they've just made, they will learn to be more reflective in general. Ideally, we want to train our future citizens to approach decision making by asking insightful questions, carefully probing for underlying problems, seeing a problem from a variety of perspectives, setting clear and realistic goals, and imagining consequences.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Before taking a closer look at the lesson components, it is important to emphasize the following tips. It is best to use these lessons:

1. ***Before* students read about or study the topics.** If students read about the topics before they do the problems in each lesson, they may know which options worked well or poorly. That will spoil the whole decision-making experience!
2. **Individually.** These are stand-alone lessons. They are meant to be plugged into your U.S. history curriculum wherever you see fit. They are not intended as part of a sequence.
3. **Flexibly.** You can use each lesson either as a quick introduction to a historical topic or unit or as a lengthier in-depth study of the topic.
4. **To teach skills as well as history content.** These lessons focus on real historical problems and are often accompanied by pages of historical context; as such, they provide situations to challenge students' decision-making skills along with the historical background necessary to understand those situations.

LESSON COMPONENTS

Each lesson in this book includes the following components:

1. **Introduction.** The first section of each lesson includes an overview of the topic, content vocabulary, and decision-making skills emphasized in the lesson.
2. **Lesson plan.** The main part of each lesson offers suggestions for how to use the handouts, how to focus on decision-making skills, how to connect the decision problem to the larger historical context, how to use video and other supplementary sources, and how to troubleshoot problems, should any arise.
3. **Teacher notes.** This section includes notes for expanding discussion, along with information about outcomes (student versions of the outcomes are also provided—see item 6 below), references to historians and interpretations of the topic, and decision-making analysis.
4. **Sources.** This section lists the specific sources used in the lesson.

5. **Problem(s).** Each lesson provides reproducible handouts, including a vocabulary list of relevant terms and concepts, for students to use in analyzing the problem.

6. **Historical outcome of the problem.** In this section, students can read about what people in history actually did to solve the problem, along with the consequences of their decisions.

7. **Primary sources and visuals (if any).** These are integrated into the lesson itself.

Each individual decision-making challenge is referred to as a "problem." Some lessons have one problem to challenge students, while others contain numerous problems. The basic format of the lessons is problem, decision, outcome, discussion. In addition, each lesson offers handouts with several parts; you can use selected parts or an entire handout.

While decision making is the focus of the books, historical content is also very important. These lessons focus on real problems that convey powerful lessons about U.S. history, such as issues concerning taxation, foreign intervention, regulation of businesses and individuals, immigration, welfare, war, and so forth. In addition, not all of the problems come from the perspective of political leaders; many ask students to consider the perspectives of ordinary Americans, such as workers, voters, farmers, black business owners, Native Americans, and women. Including problems from the perspective of ordinary people prepares students for their roles as citizens in a democracy and encourages empathy for unfamiliar groups.

Most of the problems are brief—some as short as one paragraph—and can be used as class warm-ups that last no more than ten minutes. Even short problems, however, can be complex. Although the problems may look deceptively simple, the analysis can be complicated. You are the best judge of how much analysis to include for each problem and how much time you want to allot for each problem and discussion.

On the other hand, some problems are obviously more complicated. These problems deal with crucial turning points in history. Students will almost certainly need more background information before making decisions, and analysis of these problems could take several class periods. These more involved problems could form the organization for an entire unit of study. For example, in my classes the problem on the New Deal provides me with the bulk of the time and activities on my unit concerning the early days of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency. Students learn about the basic New Deal programs, including their advantages and disadvantages, while simultaneously working to improve their decision-making skills.

WHAT IS DECISION MAKING? *(Student Handout 1)*

Because making decisions is the focus of the lessons, it is important to look at what happens in the process of decision making. Decision making involves making a choice when there is no clear right answer. Students can derive important lessons about decision making from encountering "messy" problems like the ones in this book. Use Student Handout 1, "Guide to Thoughtful Decision Making," to introduce students to the decision-making process.

Decision Making as Experience

The most powerful way to teach good decision making is through offering students experience. People learn to make good decisions just by making decisions, period. Bad decisions are more instructive, perhaps, in making us more skeptical decision makers. Examples from the teaching profession illustrate this negative reinforcement aspect of decision making.

Teachers who place students into groups without giving specific direction quickly learn not to do that again. They learn to drop or modify those lessons that don't work well. Good teaching is basically good decision making, and good decision making is shaped rapidly by previous decisions.

Ordinary people, including students, have a tendency simply to assume their decisions will result in positive outcomes, rather than making an estimate of the probabilities of certain outcomes. Decision-making experts, on the other hand, have a much more realistic view of probabilities, due in part to their greater experience with the types of problems with which they often deal. Experience teaches us to be more realistic about outcomes. Simply encountering the problems and outcomes in this book, therefore, can help students improve their decision-making skills in general.

Targeting Decision-Making Skills

These lessons go beyond decision-making problems and their outcomes. They also provide a decision-making model and strategies for teaching the skills involved in decision making. Students learn a simple model, called **P-A-G-E,** that provides basic guidelines for making decisions. This model gives support and guidance for student decisions, allows for communication built around specific skills and a common vocabulary, and provides specific criteria for teachers to evaluate student progress on those skills.

You are crucial in this process; your role is to guide students as they encounter the decision-making problems, in what Reuven Feuerstein et al. (1980) refers to as "mediated learning." Your guidance and questions can help students make sense of what they are thinking when they make decisions about historical situations. The problems and lessons allow you to combine experience and instruction in the form of mediated learning (coaching).

Repetition in Order to Master Skills

These lessons are based on the hypothesis that several repetitions of decision-making problems and outcomes help improve decision making skills. That is, a person who has tried fifty problems will most likely have improved his or her decision-making skills more than a person who has tried only ten problems, simply because he or she has had more experiences making decisions. While you may not use all of the lessons in this book, it is a good idea to use them regularly (once or twice per week, perhaps) as warm-ups to start classes or units. The time spent on the problems will enhance students' experiences in problem solving and decision making.

Having experience with a large number of problems also provides students with more historical analogies on which they can draw. It is striking how often decision makers base their thinking on an analogy (usually a recent one) in looking for ideas to help decide a problem. Having a broader range of analogies allows students to be more skeptical of any analogy suggested, because students are more likely to think of different analogies than the ones offered.

Though many experiences with decision making will help, it is essential that you coach students and offer them time to reflect on their thinking during decision-making problems. According to a number of writers, metacognition (thinking about our own thinking) is vital to improving thinking skills, so it is important that you allow "postmortem" time after each experience for students to reflect on their thinking, either verbally or in writing. Teachers should consider having students analyze what might go wrong with their choices by asking them to consider problems before their final decision. You stop the class and tell them to imagine that it is two years later and the option they chose is a disaster. They are to discuss with their partner what went wrong. These "pre-mortem" strategies are included in several lessons. You may find it useful to take more time with some of the problems (1–3 class periods), giving time for more in-depth analysis of student thinking and the historical topics involved; perhaps two or three lessons could be used for in-depth analysis per semester.

Individual Choice Versus Historical Context

Research indicates that students generally view the role of individual choices as critical to historical events (for example, viewing Rosa Parks as an important catalyst for the civil rights movement), while professional historians stress underlying forces as more important (for example, African Americans fighting in World War II, the Cold War, etc., as important causes of the civil rights movement). Researchers argue that historical actors are constrained by historical context—much more than students probably think.

By focusing on decisions by individuals and by groups, these lessons may seem to perpetuate the overemphasis on the individual vs. historical forces. However, the lessons help students see more historical context, not less. To make good decisions, students need to learn a great deal of historical context. All of the lessons require students to ask questions about context. Each lesson includes a short outcome and a question about why students think that option was tried (e.g., "The Parliament rejected the idea of rent control. Why do you think it was rejected? What historical forces at the time led to this outcome?"). Each problem also asks students to think about the historical forces that made it difficult for the individual to make a good decision. In addition, many problems include multiple points of view, which enrich student understanding of context. Finally, students discuss the ways in which the actual decision made historically was similar to or different from the decision they made; this emphasizes the role of context in shaping individual choices.

P-A-G-E *(Student Handouts 2 and 3)*

Good decision making involves a number of subskills, but many of the subskills of decision making are difficult for students to master. To assist students in developing subskills, we have given many lessons a multiple-choice format. For example, to improve the "asking for more information" skill, some lessons include a list of questions from which students can select. To improve "identifying underlying problems," some lessons list possible underlying problems. To improve "considering other points of view," some lessons include handouts that put students in different roles (for example, looking at labor/strike problems from the point of view of workers but from that of the owners as well).

The more students can use the subskills, the more complex their thinking will be when they make decisions. A simple acronym—**P-A-G-E**—will help students recall the subskills involved in decision making. Research indicates that expert decision makers don't follow step-by-step models, so this acronym is intended to help students recollect the subskills but does not provide an actual formula for making decisions. Decision-making problems are too complex and varied for step-by-step formulas. For instance, in one problem, students need to focus on envisioning unintended consequences, while in another, historical context is more important.

Student Handouts 1, 2, 3, and 4 in the introduction will help you give students practice using **P-A-G-E.** Student Handout 1 offers a brief introduction to decision making. Handout 2 offers an explanation of the acronym as well as a short framework for the process of **P-A-G-E**. Handout 3 takes it all a step forward by giving students fuller explanations and examples of the uses of each part of the process. Handout 4 provides students a log with which they can track their decisions, thereby facilitating learning from experience.

The Problem

The first section of **P-A-G-E** focuses on analyzing the problem, explaining what some experts call "framing." Framing seems to have a variety of meanings for different people. The handout emphasizes finding the underlying problem in an attempt to keep things simple for students. It also asks, "What's really going on here?" to help students uncover underlying problems.

According to Gary Klein (1998), experts (people with a great deal of experience in a particular field, such as nursing, firefighting, or chess) "recognize" particular problems as being of one type or another. Once they make this recognition (i.e., once they frame it or represent it a particular way), experts can make very quick and successful decisions—that's why they're experts! Experts make these recognitions based on the large numbers of analogies they possess in their area of expertise. Thus, the section of the handout that discusses framing is related to the section on analogies. Experiments with expert chess players have shown that recognition is extremely important. When pieces were placed on a board in completely random fashion, experts were not better at remembering the placement than nonexperts. But when the pieces were placed in a way similar to placements in a game, experts could remember the placements with a single glance and project several possible moves.

How students see or frame a problem depends partly on how the problem is worded. To help students become more aware of wording, some problems are phrased in two different ways: for example, half the class could receive the problem worded in positive language, while the other half receives it in negative language. After students make their decisions, the class can discuss the effects of different wording on their decisions.

Was it a big factor? Political scientist James F. Voss (1998) believes that the way people perceive problems in foreign policy acts as a key variable in the decisions they make. He writes that problem representation (which is similar to framing) constrains what we do thereafter. For example, if we see a problem as a case of Communist aggression, we will make different choices than if we see it as a typical boundary dispute between neighboring countries. Questions included with some problems help students become more attuned to problem representation. The handout's section on assumptions is greatly simplified compared to the literature on assumptions, which delineates several different types of assumptions (presuppositions, working assumptions, etc.). The primary method used in these books to teach students to recognize their own assumptions is by asking them to identify which of a specific menu of assumptions they made. When they see a list of possible assumptions, they can better recognize which ones they've made. This strategy seems more effective than having students read a lengthy explanation on types of assumptions.

Ask for Information

Asking questions is crucial in good decision making. The more people know about background and context, the better they will understand the real problem. Student Handout 1 emphasizes asking questions about analogies ("How is the historical case different from this decision-making problem?"), but you should also encourage students to think of historical analogies in the first place. Students will often think about a problem in terms of a personal analogy; for example, "I don't like it when people criticize me, so it's wrong for a country to make a harsh speech against another country." Ask students where they got their ideas about what is really going on in a problem, probing for personal or historical analogies.

Goals

This section of the handout includes setting clear, realistic goals and generating numerous options for accomplishing those goals. Questions about morality have also been included in this section, because morality is related to setting goals.

Effects

The section on effects/consequences includes both long-term unintended consequences and short-term possibilities of what could go wrong. Gary Klein (1998) argues that the ability to run mental simulations—that is, to imagine what could go wrong and to imagine positive and negative consequences—is a vital skill in decision making. Every decision-making problem in this series emphasizes unintended consequences and things that could go wrong.

EVALUATION TIPS FOR STUDENT HANDOUT 5 *(Page 23)*

Here are some criteria to consider in grading the decisions students make on whether to build a new railroad in Belgium. Students need only get five criteria and need only to suggest ideas for each criterion. So, for example, you may give full credit to students who suggest any possible underlying problem or ask any reasonable question.

Recognize the Underlying Problem

1. One underlying problem is the world is changing rapidly. Countries that don't change to keep up with this changing world may be left behind.
2. A second underlying problem is the enormous cost of building a railroad. The cost is so high (several times higher than investing in a textile mill) that investors may stay away from railroad construction, even though it might be a good investment.

See the Problem from Other Points of View

1. How would ordinary Belgians see this problem? (Most Belgians would resent having to pay higher taxes but would like the increased mobility they got from the railroads.)
2. Exporters would love the railroad.
3. Neighboring countries, such as the Netherlands, might see the railroads as an economic threat to their shipping businesses.

Assumptions/Emotions

1. Students begin the problem with assumptions about the role of government. For example, some may feel that government runs things ineffectively and wastes a lot of money. Other students may feel that government actions are often the best way to address problems.

Ask about Context

1. Are there many businesses in Belgium that would use the railroad? (Yes. There are many.)
2. Are there enough potential passengers to pay for construction? (Yes. Belgium had the highest population density in Europe at the time, so there were many potential passengers.)
3. Has railroad construction been profitable in the past? (Sometimes.)
4. Has government railroad construction been profitable in the past? (There haven't been any long-term cases of that, so we don't know.)
5. How suitable is the geography in Belgium to building railroads? (It's fairly flat, but wooded with rivers.)

Ask about Sources

1. How reliable is the information in Handout 5 on costs?
2. How reliable is the information in Handout 5 on potential gains and losses?

Ask about Analogies

1. Other countries had tried railroad construction and it often failed, so it would be better not to support it in Belgium. Students should be looking for differences between England and Belgium. (The cases are different because the population density is much greater in Belgium than in Britain or other countries. Population density is a key to success of railroads. So, this looks like a bad analogy based on differences.)

What Are My Goals, and Are They Realistic?

1. Is it realistic to get prosperity to Belgium, partly by building railroads? (Yes. It isn't guaranteed to succeed, but it certainly is realistic.)
2. Is it realistic that the government can actually fund the railroad? (Yes. It did actually build the railroad.)

Generate Alternative Options

Only two options are offered in Handout 5, support the building of the railroad or oppose it. Students who think of different alternatives should tell you, and you can add those options to the list of choices. One other option is to build a canal.

Play Out the Options

1. Building the railroad will involve approval of the Belgian Parliament. Are there enough votes to pass a law authorizing the money? (Yes.)
2. What problems will be encountered in building the railroad? (Many. Building through the forest will be a challenge. Workers may go on strike. A war could break out.)
3. Not building the railroad could be a problem if a majority in Parliament wants the railroad to be built. That will cause political trouble.

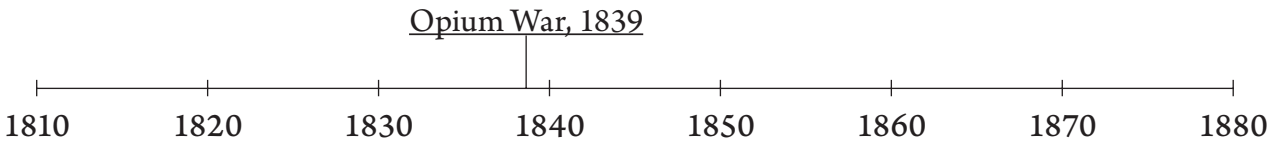
Anticipate Consequences/Effects (Long-Term)

1. Building the railroad may make Belgium into a leading world power. That feeling of power may lead Belgian leaders to try to take over colonies, say perhaps in the Congo, in order to keep up with other world powers.
2. Building the railroad may cause Belgium to become wealthy. That wealth could make it worse for Belgians not connected with construction or shipping or passengers. Some Belgians may feel left behind.

3. Not building the railroad may result in Belgium being left behind compared with other industrializing countries. It could leave Belgium vulnerable to attack.
4. Not building the railroad may lead to political opposition in the next election, funded by groups who would have benefitted from a railroad.
5. There may be corruption in the contracts to build the railroad and in the operation and maintenance of the railroad.

Belgium ended up building the railroad. It was a very smart decision and a turning point for Belgium. The railroad was extremely profitable, due to all the goods being shipped and people being moved. Other railroads were built, investors were attracted to Belgium, and the economy grew.

OUTCOMES—BRITISH DECISION ON THE OPIUM TRADE



The British cabinet, led by Foreign Secretary Palmerston, decided to send a naval force to attack ports in China and blockade other ports in what became known as the Opium War (1839–1842). After the decision was carried out, Parliament debated British policies in China, but most of the debate was about how the government had managed (or mismanaged) the situation with China, not about whether Britain should have gone to war with China.

The British won all the battles in the war. British ships went wherever they pleased—the Chinese were unable to stop them. When a fleet of steamships went up the Yangzi River to attack the major city of Nanjing, the Chinese gave up and agreed to British demands. In the Treaty of Nanjing, the Chinese agreed to:

British steamship (right) destroys a Chinese war junk.
Painting by Edward Duncan, 1843.

- Pay the £6 million to compensate the British government for the losses to the British merchants
- Pay Britain for the cost of the fighting of £12 million
- Open five ports to British trade
- Give the island of Hong Kong to Britain
- Eliminate internal taxes on British goods and eliminate the Cohong monopoly system of trading. British merchants could now trade with whomever they wished.
- Pay British merchants £3 million for bad debts from hong merchants

It was the first of many unequal treaties (in which China made all the concessions) for China. Later treaties opened more ports to merchants of other countries and put them above Chinese laws, insisting that they only be held accountable to their own country's laws.

Illustration source: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Most people in China did not see the results of the Opium War as a major problem. In fact, most people saw no effect at all. The money was paid and trade was expanded with the British. But the trade did not increase much, so most Chinese people still didn't see any British merchants. What Chinese leaders and people misunderstood, however, was the extent to which China lagged behind the West in terms of technology. A country from halfway around the world sent a force to punish the Chinese, and China could not prevent the attack. British steamships demonstrated that inland cities, not just coastal cities were now vulnerable to attack. The Middle Kingdom was no longer the center of the world. Other countries, especially nearby Japan, saw China as weak and stagnant. It would take decades before most Chinese citizens saw how fundamentally the position of China in the world had changed.

Most people in Britain were satisfied that a case of mistreatment of British citizens in China had been corrected and the cause of free trade had been defended. The opium trade went on as it had before Commissioner Lin had interfered. Some people in Britain thought it was unethical to fight a war to defend drug smugglers. Soon enough, however, the Opium War faded from the spotlight and the British public moved on to focus on other issues, such as urban sanitation, industrial growth, or policies in Africa.

Leaders on both the Chinese and British sides moved toward war because they believed they were the superior society compared to the other. "Why," each side's leaders reasoned, "should we give in to people who are inferior to us?" Leaders on both sides felt they needed to teach the other country a lesson.