

Teaching About World War II

Using Student-Produced Newspapers

Andrew J. McMurray
Oakland City University

Abstract

This article demonstrates how student-produced newspapers can be used to teach students about the Second World War. A rationale for using this strategy is first offered, followed by an overall explanation about how to implement this task. In addition, a sample production schedule, an evaluative rubric, and a sample front page are provided.

Rationale

For many students, learning about the Second World War typically involves passively listening to lectures and trying to memorize the many dates, places, people, and events connected to this historical era. Not surprisingly, assessment related to World War II studies often involves objective tests over these course lectures and textbook assignments. While students might be innately interested in the dramatic aspects of the war, they may be turned off to learning in this kind of instructional environment. It is somewhat ironic, given the many popular commercial offerings of World War II, from film and television depictions of the conflict to quasi-realistic video games, that teachers so often put forth, as relatively uninteresting, portraits of this conflict

to students in the first place. Fortunately, teachers can consider activities and instructional strategies that are likely to have broad appeal among students.

Theoretical Constructs

One classroom project that can meet both theoretical and pragmatic needs when teaching about the Second World War would be a student-generated newspaper. Social studies teachers and educational theorists have, over the years and continuing to the present day, advocated and embraced conventional newspapers for use in the classroom (Berryman, 1980; Davey, 1985; Guenther, 1991; Lichtenberg, 1961; Morse, 1981; Rhoades, 1994; Segall & Schmidt, 2006; Street, 2002). Student-generated newspapers, specifically, allow students to learn in a way that acknowledges what educational theorists term “cognitive plurality.” Both Howard Gardner’s (1993) theory of multiple intelligences and Elliot Eisner’s (1982) cultivation of senses emphasize this cognitive uniqueness of students. Jean Lave’s (1988) conception of *situated learning*, the idea that learning is largely a function of the culture, the context, and the activity in which it occurs, is also a theoretical justification for student-produced newspapers. Also important is Lev Vygotsky’s (1962; 1978) social development theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction—a major component of this particular cooperative learning activity—in cognitive development. Teachers identifying with these views of learning may use student-produced newspapers to cater to the various “intelligences” of their students. In addition, using student-produced newspapers as an instructional technique allows for the ancillary learning that accompanies activities that require cooperation and collaboration.

Newspapers in American Society

As manifestations of popular culture and media, newspapers have long served to meet many of the daily informational needs of American society. Newspapers are the end result of a collective effort to gather, filter, edit, and disseminate pertinent “news.” Within a specific context of history, students can work cooperatively, as an entire class of few or many, to create a single newspaper that encapsulates the prescribed content. In doing so, students will not only be utilizing their many “intelligences,” but they will also be working together as active, discriminating seekers of information. Moreover, they will be creating their own cognitive experiences by gathering, scrutinizing, and ultimately choosing what information will be included in the final product and in what form it will be included.

World War II and the Compartmentalization of Content

The Second World War is an especially appropriate historical topic for the use of student-generated newspapers. In traditional narratives appropriate for the secondary history classroom, the content World War II is compartmentalized into manageable chunks of information, generally based on both chronology and geography. To describe these chunks of content, teachers often use terms such as “pre-war years,” “the European Theater,” the “Pacific Theater,” “North Africa,” and the “homefront,” among others. In much the same way that newspapers are divided into specific sections, the history of World War II lends itself to such compartmentalization, yet, like individual sections of a newspaper, each section does not stand alone. Rather, each battlefield and each specific time frame must also exist in the minds of

students as a part of the greater history of the era. In creating their own newspapers dealing with World War II, students can better understand how and why the history of the Second World War is traditionally divided into manageable chunks and how these smaller components fit together into the broader historical narrative.

Introducing the Project

To adequately use student-generated newspapers for units dealing with World War II, teachers need to first provide an overview of the project. Students should be informed of the basic rationale for such a project, including the need to engage multiple intelligences as well as the notion of the compartmentalization of World War II history. The length of time prescribed for the activity as well as all due dates should be well-defined before students begin work. Additionally, all tools that teachers may use for assessment of the product, including a project rubric, should be given to students at the beginning of the activity. Taking the aforementioned steps will most likely reduce the level of apprehension that some students may feel as they begin such an endeavor. Also, these measures will encourage students to view the classroom teacher as a partner, rather than an adversary, during the activity.

Students should be allowed a considerable amount of time in order to satisfactorily complete the project. Of course, the amount of time spent on the student-generated newspapers is dependent on the relevance of the subject matter to relevant academic standards, the amount of time allotted to the history class during the instructional day, and, possibly, the size of the class (as extremely small classes may need more time to complete the various requirements). Some teachers may prefer to offer students a general time frame, allowing them to choose a specific due date for submission of the final product.

Materials

Depending on availability, several technologies and/or materials may be used during the production process. For teachers able to provide students with substantial access to computers, printers, and software, newer technologies may make traditional materials such as scissors, easel paper, and markers obsolete. Various page-making programs provide students with the necessary tools to create their own newspaper-styled documents. Some free online resources do the same. The National Education Network's [Making the News](#) website enables students to use templates to draft their own headlines and stories.

For those without such access to technology, other materials will suffice for the construction of the newspaper. Specifically, standard 27" x 34" easel paper provides an authentic dimensional representation of a newspaper. By folding each sheet once lengthwise and once widthwise, each sheet can be used exactly as one traditional newspaper sheet. From this point, the sheets can be easily fitted together into sections. Each section can then be combined with others into a realistic finished product with the look and feel of a real newspaper.

Pictures and other primary historical resources are another important consideration. If access permits, students may choose to use pictures retrieved from online sources. The history department at the [University of San Diego](#) has a substantial collection of available images available for download. The [United States National Archives](#) also provides a plethora of pictures for those seeking images of the Second World War. Many other online resources for World War

If pictures also exist. Schools without access to the Internet and printing capabilities may choose to offer a limited number of hand drawings in lieu of photograph images.

Production and Editing

Once the actual construction of the newspapers has been properly addressed, students should be made aware of the importance of the editorial process and the veritable division of labor in the creation process. Editing a student-produced newspaper can occur in many ways, and teachers should be sure to use their own knowledge of their students and discretion when determining how the product will be edited. Each student should also be cognizant of his or her own distinct and unique role or roles in the process of creating the newspaper. It is suggested that students have more than just a single responsibility in the creation process. A student completing an expository story on the Allied invasion of Normandy, for example, may also be responsible for gathering pictures for the story as well as assisting another student in the general design of the “European Theater” section of the newspaper. Given more than one responsibility for the project, students will start thinking about such issues as time management and working well with others and will, even many times unbeknownst to themselves, be engaging multiple intelligences.

Teams of students should work to complete particular sections of the newspaper. A student-generated newspaper dealing with World War II may require that teams of students work exclusively on specific sections of the newspaper. Particular “assignments” for the project and the general creation of “teams” should be determined as a result of consultation between individual students, the editors, and the classroom teacher. In addition, within each team, tasks should be divided according to student talents as well as interests. For example, a student with a particular interest in the topic may choose to write an editorial column on the American internment of Japanese-Americans during the conflict that would be included in the “Homefront” section of the paper. Students who are especially artistic may choose to draft political cartoons for the paper. A student with a family member who served in combat or worked on the homefront may choose to conduct an interview her or his relative for inclusion in the paper. By considering student talents and interests, teachers will increase the likelihood that each student will fully engage in the creation process.

After student responsibilities have been determined and each student has been assigned particular tasks, the actual creation process begins. It is vital that students be familiar with basic research strategies that save time and ensure the retrieval of accurate information. While the World Wide Web is oftentimes utilized for these purposes, teachers allowing students to obtain historical information from this resource should be careful to make sure that students can differentiate between viable, historically correct, reference sites as well as sites that are not appropriate for conducting such research. The school or public library, forgotten in the minds of many students, is still an excellent source for information that could be used in the creation of a World War II newspaper. Archived periodicals, relevant books, speeches, and interviews are all sources of information found in libraries. From these sources, students will collect the “who, what, when, where, and how” related to their topic and will, from time to time, find deeper historical interpretations dealing with “why” (of which there are oftentimes competing historical interpretations, making for a very interesting editorial page as students may offer position essays on topics like the decision to use atomic weapons against Japan).

During the creation process, it is vital that classroom teachers be aware of any significant problems or difficulties that students may encounter. Serving as a type of additional student

resource, teachers are integral to the creation process, as they can put students' minds at ease by pointing out overlooked resources or making general suggestions. Teachers may also require that students provide periodic progress reports, including sources of information, page numbers, overviews of the topics, and personal reflections upon the process at that particular point in time. By doing this, teachers will have a better knowledge of who is and is not fulfilling their responsibilities for the project.

Production Schedule

Students will need to know an approximate timeline for this project. In providing a specific production schedule before the project begins, teachers can provide students with information that can assist groups as they plan and delegate tasks. Table 1 provides a sample timeline for a student-generated newspaper project dealing with World War II for schools operating on 70- to 90-minute block schedules. Adjustments can be made according to the length of class periods and the frequency of class meetings, as well as other factors that may influence the amount of time that can be spent on the project.

Table 1

Sample Time Line for Task Schedule

World War II Newspaper Production Schedule		
Production stage	Class periods	Tasks
Preproduction/ production	Monday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project will be introduced. • Expectations will be expressed. • Teams will be formed for each section of the newspaper, and an editing team will be assembled. • Initial research and production may also begin.
Production/ editing	Tuesday & Wednesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will work in the production process. • Significant editing will also occur during this stage. • Revisions to original work will be expected in many cases, and each section of the newspaper should take form.
Editing/ revisions	Thursday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final editing and revisions will happen during this stage. • By the end of Thursday, each section should be ready for submission.
Submission/ reflection	Friday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each section of the newspaper will be submitted for instructor assessment and peer review on Friday. • In addition, students will reflectively write about their experiences in producing the World War II newspaper.

Assessment

As with any assignment that is not inherently objective in nature, the World War II newspapers will need to be assessed according to a rubric. Table 2 represents a potential rubric for this project that was created from [RubiStar](#) a free rubric-generating website. The rubric below can be used to assess the performance of each team of individuals involved in the production process. However, teachers may choose to assess student performance in other ways. Peer grading or the use of individual performance rubrics may work better in some classrooms.

Also, student-produced newspapers may work more effectively as a project designed to supplement the regular lectures, activities, assignments, and discussions related to the Second World War. In other words, if this project is presented as the sole instructional strategy associated with World War II and students are responsible for the content of the entire newspaper, additional steps (as well as assessment methods) to ensure that students get both the depth and *breadth* of coverage will need to be utilized. Furthermore, it is recommended that each student receive either a photocopy (if only hardcopies are being solely produced) or an electronic copy of the newspaper (if available) to serve as a study resource.

Table 2

Rubric for Assessing Student Production

World War II Project

Student Name: _____

Project Title: _____

Category	4	3	2	1
Layout – Headlines & Captions	All articles have headlines that capture the reader’s attention and accurately describe the content. All articles have a byline. All graphics have captions that adequately describe the people and action in the graphic.	All articles have headlines that accurately describe the content. All articles have a byline. All graphics have captions.	Most articles have headlines that accurately describe the content. All articles have a byline. Most graphics have captions.	Articles are missing bylines OR many articles do not have adequate headlines OR many graphics do not have captions.
Contributions of group members	Each person in the group has contributed at least two articles and one graphic without prompting from teachers or peers.	Each person in the group has contributed at least one article and one graphic with a few reminders from peers.	Each person in the group has contributed at least one article with some minimal assistance from peers.	One or more students in the group required quite a lot of assistance from peers before contributing one article.

Knowledge gained	All students in the group can accurately answer all questions related to (a) stories in the newspaper and (b) technical processes used to create the newspaper.	All students in the group can accurately answer most questions related to (a) stories in the newspaper and (b) technical processes used to create the newspaper.	Most students in the group can accurately answer most questions related to (a) stories in the newspaper and (b) technical processes used to create the newspaper.	Several students in the group appear to have little knowledge about the facts and the technical processes used for the newspaper.
Spelling and Proofreading	No spelling or grammar errors remain after one or more people (in addition to the typist) read and correct the newspaper.	No more than a couple of spelling or grammar errors remain after one or more people (in addition to the typist) read and correct the newspaper.	No more than 3 spelling or grammar errors remain after one or more people (in addition to the typist) read and correct the newspaper.	Several spelling or grammar errors remain in the final copy of the newspaper.
Articles – Purpose	90-100% of the articles establishes a clear purpose in the lead paragraph and demonstrates a clear understanding of the topic.	85-89% of the articles establishes a clear purpose in the lead paragraph and demonstrates a clear understanding of the topic.	75-84% of the articles establishes a clear purpose in the lead paragraph and demonstrates a clear understanding of the topic.	Less than 75% of the articles establishes a clear purpose in the lead paragraph and demonstrates a clear understanding of the topic.
Articles – Supporting Details	The details in the articles are clear, effective, and vivid 80-100% of the time.	The details in the articles are clear and pertinent 90-100% of the time.	The details in the articles are clear and pertinent 75-89% of the time.	The details in more than 25% of the articles are neither clear nor pertinent.
Graphics	Graphics are in focus, are well-cropped and are clearly related to the articles they accompany.	Graphics are in focus and are clearly related to the articles they accompany.	80-100% of the graphics are clearly related to the articles they accompany.	More than 20% of the graphics are not clearly related to the articles OR no graphics were used.
Who, What, When, Where, & How	All articles adequately address the 5 W's (who, what, when, where, and how).	90-99% of the articles adequately address the 5 W's (who, what, when, where, and how).	75-89% of the articles adequately address the 5 W's (who, what, when, where, and how).	Less than 75% of the articles adequately address the 5 W's (who, what, when, where, and how).
Articles – Interest	The articles contain facts, figures, and/or word choices that make the articles exceptionally interesting to readers.	The articles contain facts, figures, and/or word choices that make the articles interesting to readers.	The article contains some facts or figures but is marginally interesting to read.	The article does not contain facts or figures that might make it interesting to read.
Editorials – Worthwhile	The information was accurate, and there was a clear reason for including the editorial in the newspaper.	The information was accurate, and there was a fairly good reason for including the editorial in the newspaper.	The information was occasionally inaccurate or misleading, but there was a clear reason for including the editorial in the newspaper.	The information was typically inaccurate, misleading, or libelous.

Conclusion

Escaping the monotony of lectures and objective assignments in the history classroom has a theoretical base. Engaging as many students as possible in the educational process, regardless of what “intelligences” they are strongest in, is an important goal for history teachers. From Gardner and Eisner, history educators have come to understand the theoretical value of class projects and should also recognize the practical value of project-based instruction.

Fortunately, student-generated newspapers engage multiple intelligences. As a classroom project used when studying World War II, this project requires that students take compartmentalized content and represent information in both a divided and unified manner through the format of a traditional newspaper. Creativity and originality are encouraged using this approach, yet content and scholarship need not be compromised. It is hoped that this article provides needed information and resources for helping teachers to realize these goals.

As a 22-year-old, newly hired social studies teacher, I was fully aware of the fact that becoming an effective teacher would take some time. During the first academic year, I was especially unsure of my lecturing abilities. Both out of necessity and a philosophical belief in varying instruction to reach and engage each “intelligence” and utilizing cooperative learning activities, I implemented a student-produced newspaper project as a way to make history interesting for students and to reduce the amount of time that students would be resigned to listening to my lectures. The project was an immediate success among the students and even drew commendation from the building administrator. More importantly, I found that students truly learned and other, more traditional assessments validated my suspicions. As years passed and I became more effective as a classroom teacher, I came to understand that out of the initial desperation of my first year came an activity that would prove to be an effective instructional strategy over the course of my career in the public schools.

References

- Berryman, C. (1980). Newspapers in the social studies: Effective citizenship education. *Indiana Social Studies Quarterly*, 32, 43-46.
- Davey, C. (1985). The newspaper as a textbook. *Geographic Education*, 5, 22-26.
- Eisner, E. W. (1982). *Cognition and curriculum: A basis for deciding what to teach*. New York: Longman.
- Gardner, H. (1993). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.
- Guenther, J. (1991). *Using the newspaper in secondary social studies*. Washington, DC: American Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation. Retrieved August 12, 2007, from ERIC database. (ERIC No. ED344804).
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1988). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lichtenberg, M. (1961). Utilizing newspapers in the social studies. *Journal of Educational Sociology*, 35, 91-92.
- Morse, J. C. (1981). The newspaper in the classroom: An important social studies tool. *Curriculum Review*, 20(4), 405-406.
- Rhoades, L. (1994). Quick start ideas for teaching current events with newspapers. *Social Education*, 58(3), 173.
- Segall, A., & Schmidt, S. (2006). Reading the newspaper as a social text. *Social Studies*, 97(3), 91-99.
- Street, C. (2002). Teaching with the newspaper. *Social Studies*, 93(3), 131-133.
- Vygotsky, L. (1962). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.



WORLD WAR II TIMES

December 8, 1941

WAR!

-Pearl Harbor

On December 7th, 1941, Japanese military forces attacked the American military base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The tensions between the United States and Japan had been festering for some time prior to the attack. In addition, American officials had recently declared an embargo on steel and petroleum trading with Japan.

The Pearl Harbor attack both shocked and angered the American people. The day following the attack, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave a famous . . .

CONTINUED A3



The USS Arizona

America Mobilizes!



Following the US entry into WWII, Americans worked feverishly in the war effort. Millions of women entered the workforce. The image to the left, Rosie the Riveter, was promoted to symbolize the American woman during the wartime era.

Manufacturing also increased as many private firms shifted their primary focus by manufacturing goods for the war effort.

Millions of war bonds were sold and citizens were forced to adhere to strict rationing guidelines for items such as beef, gasoline,

and rubber.

American films and newspapers depicted the heroism of U.S. soldiers. Many stars of American sports (including the most prominent baseball players) quickly volunteered for duty.

CONTINUED A4

PACIFIC THEATER

See Section 2 for full coverage

EUROPE

Axis Powers Attack! Section 3

Appendix A

Online Resources

Teaching/Production Aids

National Education Network, *Making the News* http://kmi4schools.e2bn.net/news_template/

Making the News provides users with the opportunity to utilize templates related to the digital production of newspapers. Various fonts, colors, and designs are available for use. Use does require a simple and free registration process.

RubiStar, a free rubric-generating website that is available at <http://rubistar.4teachers.org/>

Digital Images of World War II

University of San Diego, Department of History's Collection of World War II Images

<http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/WW2Timeline/start.html>

United States National Archives, Online Collection of World War II Images

<http://www.archives.gov/research/ww2/photos/>

United States Library of Congress, Web Guide to World War II Materials

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/WW2/WW2bib.html>
