

Graduate Student Project Implementation Plan

Although “TestThink” was devised largely as a critique of standardized testing, Nelson Maylone’s concept can be useful for teachers. Some students, Maylone argues, are TestThinkers; they “always simply focus on what the test-makers want – even though, without a stretch, at least two of the choices in this item make sense.”¹ While Maylone seems to consider this sort of skill to be innate or culturally acquired, teachers can also show students how to view items in this light. As Taylor and Walton contend, when students are subjected to a workshop drilling specific test-taking skills, their scores and attitudes about testing will improve. They argue for these workshops in absence of the social studies content area.² So, while Maylone is somewhat defeatist, Taylor and Walton embrace the notion that standardized tests affect students’ lives, so teachers have a duty to help student do as well as they can.

Royal Van Horn offers several suggestions for improving students’ scores on their standardized tests. Many of his suggestions are simply about good teaching, for example maximizing one’s resources and ensuring students are being productive with their time. However, Van Horn also notes that “teaching to the test” does not always mean teaching memorization tricks: “A skill-by-skill approach to raising achievement test scores is not wise... Educators who do not understand this principle are the kind of people who think it makes sense to go to an auto parts store and buy all the little pieces necessary to build a car.”³ Van Horn argues anecdotally that holistic approaches to education help students improve test scores: “I can always pick out the drill-and-practice teachers and those who use a more balanced approach that includes a lot of student writing and emphasizes children’s literature. Guess what, the students who write a lot and read a lot do much better on the tests than those who do lots of dittos.”⁴ This sort of ambitious teaching practice is touted by S.G. Grant, who argues that teachers “not let the curriculum and test dominate what [they] believe makes most sense for [their] students with regards to relevancy or engagement.”⁵ Grant assures teachers that if they continue their authentic lessons, students will do well on these tests. Van Horn also argues quantitatively to address the needs of exceptional students; high and low scores can greatly affect the average score of the class and also of the school. As teachers, we also hold the power to decide when we give students our benchmark exams, so Van Horn offers the obvious advice to avoid giving students several standardized tests in a row.⁶ If this requires coordinating with other teachers, do so; if this requires bartering with school administrators, do so with the knowledge that these tactics are now part of the profession of teaching.

¹ Nelson Maylone, “Testthink” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 85:5 (2004), 385.

² Kathe Taylor and Sherry Walton, “Co-Opting Standardized Tests in the Service of Learning,” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 79:1 (1997), 69.

³ Royal Van Horn, “Improving Standardized Test Scores,” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 78:7 (1997), 584.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ S.G. Grant, “The Road to Ambitious Teaching: Creating Big Idea Units in History Classes,” *Journal of Inquiry & Action in Education* 2:1 (2009), 8.

⁶ Van Horn, “Improving Standardized Test Scores,” 585.

The mission of getting students to pass standardized tests has become an integral part of the teaching profession. Realizing the benefits and flaws of tests, I will accurately use them to help students' learning in my classroom. I will use the district-wide benchmark multiple-choice tests to quickly assess how well students are following my lessons. On the other hand, I will be cautious about making long-term judgments about students' academic skills based on testing. Finally, knowing that student's lives are now decided by standardized testing, I understand that I must use strategies to help them succeed. This does not mean "teaching to the test" using lectures, but it means constructing an authentic curriculum based on the standards implemented by the state in which I teach. Ultimately, it is my task as a social studies teacher to balance the needs of students with the demands of the tests; these strategies and theories offer the best way of doing so.

I have highlighted Maylone and Van Horn above because I think their strategies would be particularly suitable for my school and students. Maylone's concept of "TestThink" can be seen as having a double meaning. First, the meaning he describes explicitly – that some students have a knack for multiple choice testing. Second, though, is the implicit admission that some socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds produce a greater proportion of "TestThinkers" than others. My focus is on his implicit argument because students in my school are certainly in high needs population groups. Therefore, my implementation plan is to make my students better "TestThinkers" by improving their recognition skills. While I do not think these skills have a value proportionate to the class time devoted to them, they are important for passing the test. I will bolster the "TestThink" exercises with the idea that Van Horn discusses – authentic teaching yields better results than simply teaching to the test. In sum, I hope to teach *how* to test using authentic application strategies.

Lesson Plan with Intervention:



**Phoebus High School
Lesson Plan Template**

Teacher: Mr. Quaratella

Date: February 20, 2014

Department/Course: Social Studies/World History I

Please note: Include time planned for activities to ensure appropriate pacing. Refer to the Effective Lesson Plan Checklist for required components and explanations of requirements for an effective plan.

SOL: WHI 9c The student will demonstrate knowledge of Western Europe during the Middle Ages from about 500 to 1000 A.D. (C.E.) in terms of its impact on Western civilization by explaining the rise of Frankish kings, the Age of Charlemagne, and the revival of the idea of the Roman Empire.

Learning Intention/Objective:

TSW write a warm-up activity applying the conditions of the Middle Ages to the present.

TSW understand the relationship between the Pope and the Frankish Emperors by completing Cloze notes during direct instruction.

TSW analyze a passage of the *Song of Roland* to clarify how Christianity was used as a justification for war.

TSW watch a film on Charlemagne's rise to power and answer questions on a worksheet.

TSW complete a activity with an article on Charlemagne.

Essential Question: How did Charlemagne revive the idea of the Roman Empire?

Resources:

Promethean Board

20 Cloze notes copies

20 Charlemagne worksheets

Dark Ages History Channel DVD

Warm-Up/Anticipatory Set: (15 minutes)

- **Imagine all of the schools, colleges, libraries, phones, and computers were destroyed.**
- **Now imagine all the doctors and teachers quit because nobody was paying them.**
- **What would the world be like? Take 5-10 minutes to write a five-sentence paragraph about this.**

Lesson Learning Activities:

A) Discuss the warm up activity with a partner to allow students an opportunity to

connect the world in which Charlemagne lived to our own world. After the partners have finished their discussion, commence a brief whole group discussion on their answers. (15 minutes)

B) CLOZE notes will be the bulk of the class. I will pass out the CLOZE packet at the start of class so students have a space in which to work on their warm up activity. Then, we will work on the PowerPoint notes with a fill-in-the-blank section. This should help students follow along with the lecture. Next, students will construct a letter from the Pope to his people about why he crowned Charlemagne. Next, students will have a brief discussion about the *Song of Roland* and how it relates to Charlemagne and the Frankish Empire. Finally, we will watch a short video detailing the life of Charlemagne and his efforts to brighten Europe. (40 minutes)

C) Charlemagne Worksheet – The goal for this worksheet is to reinforce the concepts introduced in the first part of this lesson as well as touch on some themes from earlier in the unit. One student will read each paragraph aloud, and we will summarize the information once we complete each one. Alone, students will work on the fill in the blanks activity and answer some questions about the worksheet on the back. (20 minutes)

D) Exit Ticket – Short response on the question below.

Assessment (include scripted questions):

Who were the Franks?

Who has more power – the Pope or the King?

What connection does Roland make between Charlemagne and Christianity?

What skills did Charlemagne acquire that were unusual for a king?

Closure:

Exit Ticket: Do you think Charlemagne was a true believer in Christianity or was he trying to abuse the power of the Church?

Assessment Plan:

Name: _____

Date: _____

The Age of Charlemagne

Warm Up Activity:

- Imagine all of the schools, colleges, libraries, phones, and computers were destroyed.
- Now imagine all the doctors and teachers quit because nobody was paying them.
- What would the world be like? Take 5-10 minutes to write a short paragraph about this. (Write your response below.)

For a bonus point on the packet and eternal glory, write your answer on a scrap piece of paper and hand it in the box in the front of class:

5 The peasants who were laborers in feudal society were called –

- A** serfs
- B** lords
- C** fiefs
- D** vassals

Who Were the Franks?

The Franks were a _____ tribe that was located in the _____
_____ of the European continent.

They used military might to expand their kingdom and emerged as a force in _____.

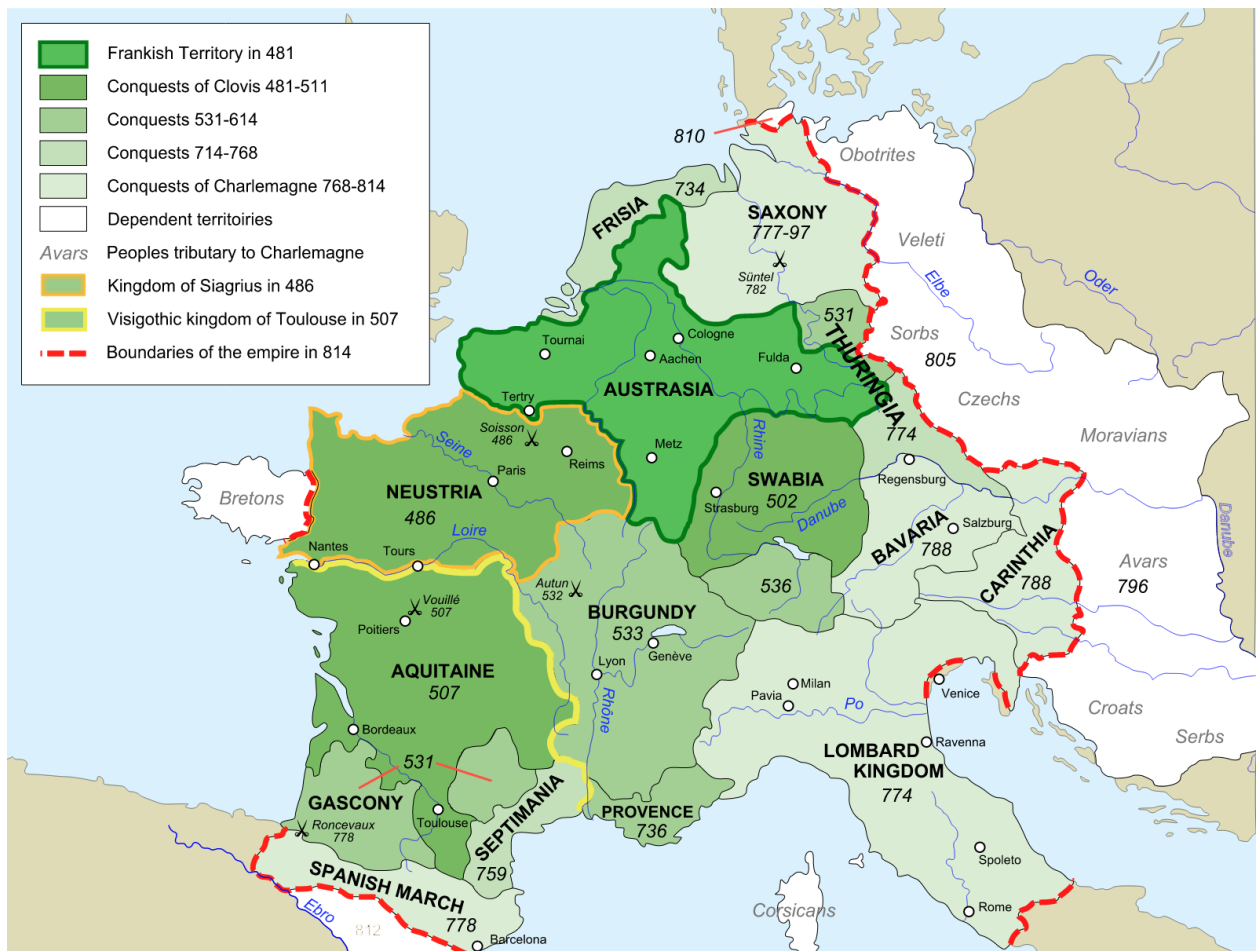
They were the first of the “barbarian” tribes to establish a bond with the _____ under the leadership of Clovis.

Age of Charlemagne

Charlemagne (Charles the Great) was a _____ King from 768 to 814.

Created the largest empire in Europe after the Roman Empire (see below).

He strengthened the bond between the _____ and the Frankish King.



Pope Crowns Charlemagne

On Christmas day, 800 C.E. Charlemagne is crowned Holy _____ Emperor by the Pope.

What was the main outcome of the Pope crowning Charlemagne? Outline a letter from the Pope to Roman Catholics describing why you crowned Charlemagne the Holy Roman Emperor (remember, most people could not read back then, so this will be read aloud by monks):

When you have finished your outline, come get a piece of construction paper and write out your letter. Keep in mind that the letter must be at least five sentences in length. Also, you should include two illustrations in your letter so that illiterate people of the Dark Ages can follow along.

Checklist for Letter

- 1) Is the letter 5 sentences in length?
- 2) Does the poster include 2 illustrations?
- 3) Did you describe why the Pope wanted to unify Europe?
- 4) Do you describe who Charlemagne is and why he deserved the crown?
- 5) Do you use the proper conventions of a letter?

Power of the Church

The power of the _____ was established in political life.

Through Charlemagne, _____ culture was reinterpreted.

Most of Western Europe was included in the new empire. Churches, roads and schools were built by Charlemagne to _____ the empire.

Song of Roland

Epic French poem recounting the Battle of Roncevoux.

Depicts Charlemagne battling his way through Spain to defeat the _____.

What connection does this have to the Pope and Christianity? (Write your response below.)

Video Questions

What happened on Christmas day 800 A.D.?

How big was Charlemagne's Empire?

How was Frankish property?

What happened to Charlemagne's brother, Carloman?

How did Charlemagne “save souls” and get converts to Christianity?

What happened to Pagans who continued to practice Pagan rites?

Who ruled the counties?

What skills did Charlemagne acquire that were unusual for a king?

Exit Ticket

Do you think Charlemagne was a true believer in Christianity or was he trying to abuse the power of the Church? (Write your response below.)

While I cannot post the whole Power Quiz online here, I have one question that is representative for how I choose to align my curriculum with the district wide benchmarks.

WHI.9a KBS1e K

2 What was the *main* significance of Pope Leo II anointing Charlemagne Emperor in 800 A.D. (C.E.)?

- F** Allowed for secular authority to increase
- G** Revived the idea of a united Christian Europe
- H** Authority of the Roman Catholic Church declined
- J** The Franks rejected Catholic beliefs and doctrine

The lesson I constructed above has at its core a moment of reflection for students. In the Cloze notes packet, I have included a section for students to write a letter from the Pope to his people about why he crowned Charlemagne. In their letters, I expect students to describe the Pope's decision in detail. They will step in his shoes and think about the decision that he made. I will post the checklist style rubric on the Promethean board for them to view as they work. I fully expect that students will be able to confront this question above without any trepidation because they have authentically considered the answer already. Simply recalling the answer should be relatively easy.

My plan for this implementation project is to highlight individual questions on the benchmark exams made districtwide and see if teaching them in an authentic manner yields better student performance on the benchmarks. With these first lessons, I intend to tackle just one question each time so that I can have fewer possible confounding variables at play. My process for evaluating the strength of my pedagogy will be simple. First, I will evaluate how well students completed the authentic assessment. If the authentic assessment did not resonate with some students, I will note their names in my grade book. Then, when students have finished their benchmark exams, I will do an item analysis and see how student performed. I expect almost all of them to answer the question correctly – if this does not occur I will employ TestThink strategies.

One area of my lesson above is designed to subtly teach TestThinking. Other teachers have had success with the process of simply asking multiple choice questions at various intervals during their class, so I have taken a slightly modified question from students' benchmarks and included it in the Cloze notes. My intention is for students to answer the question alone, and then we can discuss the answer immediately after. I will offer a bonus point to students who get the answer correct. This activity is intended to help students become more confident in their TestThinking ability if they get the answer correct, *or* to help students acquire better testing practices if they get the answer incorrect.

This project will be an ongoing effort. The benchmark exams take place on a biweekly basis, so for each unit I will work in one day of targeting teaching and two or more days with multiple choice analysis. In a typical unit, there are five instructional days including the summative assessment. The first three days of the unit I will do TestThink practice

and authentic assessments. The fourth day, I will leave open so that once I analyze the results of the TestThink activities and the authentic activity I will be able to address any lingering gaps in students' understanding. I do not intend the extent of my unit to be focused solely on the benchmark exam, so I have elected to use relatively efficient interventions. This will give me the freedom to perform this implementation plan while not hampering my ability to explore other content.

Analytic Reflection: Teaching in a high needs school, developing TestThink became an integral part of my curriculum and instruction. I taught one course that culminates in an SOL examination; for the last three weeks of my student teaching, we reviewed the content of the year for this test. During this time, I created a series of tests on www.socrative.com that my students were able to complete during class time using a laptop cart. While the example I used above was useful for lessons in which new content was introduced, when we had review days I found longer tests were needed to explore the fundamentals of TestThinking.

My general plan for these tests was to structure a testing competition (to try to replicate the pressure of an actual exam) and then immediately download and analyze the results with my students. Below I have attached an example of the data with which I worked. For confidentiality I have removed students' names from their responses. With longer tests, I would get long rows of data about students' performances on the test. I could see how individual students were performing as well as measures of class performance on each individual question. The most unexpected part of my implementation project was the extent to which students actually enjoyed working on their TestThinking. All of my students came to understand how important it was to pass the SOLs and most of them subsequently took their time on Socrative very seriously. As we progressed, I began to get results like those below on even the oldest, driest material in World History I – prehistory.

Team	Homo sapiens emerged between -
Yellow	100,000 and 400,000 years ago
Green	100,000 and 400,000 years ago
Yellow	100,000 and 400,000 years ago
Red	100,000 and 400,000 years ago
Green	100,000 and 400,000 years ago
Yellow	10,000 and 40,000 years ago
Red	10,000 and 40,000 years ago
Blue	100,000 and 400,000 years ago

Over time, students became more familiar with the format and content of these tests. Subsequently, their scores improved in both this medium and on their more official benchmark and post-test media. We saw students take more time on their tests to thoroughly read the questions, cross out answers they saw as distractors, and become familiar with the process of breaking down questions to get the most important language absolutely clear. For example, compare students' results across these two summative quizzes. In the first, no students earned a perfect score (or even a score in the 90s) – a telltale sign that high achievers were rushing. In the second, many students were perfect, and almost all students were above a passing SOL score (50%)

Test 1:

Number of correct answers (relates only to multiple-choice questions)	Total Score (0-100)
10	42
17	71
20	83
14	58
16	67
17	71
17	71
20	83
19	79
10	42
18	75
13	54
18	75
15	63
8	33
19	79
18	75
19	79
10	42
7	29
16	67

Test 2:

Number of correct answers (relates only to multiple-choice questions)	Total Score (0-100)
10	53
17	89
19	100
19	100
17	89
14	74
17	89
19	100
14	74
10	53
11	58
19	100
8	42
11	58
18	95
8	42
19	100
15	79
18	95
11	58
14	74

As is evident from the data above, students generally improved with the format of the questions – some performed poorly on the second (or both) tests, but as a whole there was improvement among my students. Those who missed many questions on the TestThinking assessments at least had the data with which to improve their scores. During our post-TestThink reviews, I would call on students who had missed the question to make corrections and use their logic to deduce the correct answers. Because the World History I SOL is a little like a game of Jeopardy, I wanted my students to be able to use context clues and logic to reason out which answers to pick if they were not sure because of a lack of content knowledge.

While working on these lesson plans, I constantly reflected on their utility. It was difficult to see immediate results during the first two times I incorporated TestThinking into my lessons, but as I stuck with it, I found that students were reading questions with a better eye for distractors and clues. I also saw students develop a better instinct for selecting the right answer – and I used quickly timed exams to encourage students to explore the possibility of trusting their first instinct. In the future, my only change would be to be more consistent with my implementation. I incorporated TestThinking every unit, but if I am working in another high needs district, I will be very sure to use it as a teaching strategy with even more frequency. Passing high stakes tests may not be the most ideal summative examination in my mind, but I see my duty as a teacher to help my students pass them as fundamental. I learned that even though I disagree with testing, it must (for my students' sakes) take a pivotal role in my classroom.