

## Final Lesson Study Report: Team Iguchi, Stovey, Weiskopf—History Department

<b>PART I: BACKGROUND</b>	
<b>Title</b>	Lesson Study Analysis of Primary Source Contextualization
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<b>Discipline(s) or Field(s)</b>	History
<b>Submission Date</b>	12 February 2014
<b>Course Name</b>	Global Transition and Change
<b>Course Description</b>	Global Transition and Change is a 100-level course and is one of the two options for the global history requirement in General Education. All sections of Global Transition and Change are thematically based, with this particular section focused on environmental history. Students come from a variety of majors, and most students are in their first or second year. This lesson, requiring students to analyze how historical context shaped primary sources, is the assessment process for these General Education courses. In this section, the students do this assignment four times throughout the semester with four different primary sources. There are both face-to-face and online components of this assignment.
<b>Abstract</b>	We approached this lesson study as a way to research how we as History Department faculty can better meet our goal of teaching students in freshman world history courses (HIS 101 and HIS 102) how to comprehend, interpret, and express relationships between given texts or content on the one hand, and the contexts constructing and informing texts on the other. This is the learning outcome that we assess for General Education. We often find it difficult to encourage students to engage texts in such a way that they produce meaning instead of merely repeating information. Using Julie Weiskopf's online (Fall) and hybrid (Spring) course as our laboratory, our first semester impression was that in order to meet the goal in question we need to primarily--nearly exclusively--focus on promoting students' orientation towards interpretation or analysis of texts, which is contrary to their overwhelming tendency to merely summarize. Our efforts were rewarded with better student writing during the second semester. As a result of our lesson study, Gerry Iguchi, Pat Stovey, and Weiskopf have a better perspective regarding how to advance our students' capacities to creatively and insightfully interpret rather than mechanically repeat information. In short, we have learned that we need to say, "don't summarize, analyze." We have also learned that we need to focus on better explaining and modeling what analysis is. We will share our insights and the results of our now increasingly inspired further experimentation towards these ends in courses at 100, 200, and 300-400 levels with the rest of the History Department.
<b>PART II: THE LESSON</b>	
<b>Learning Goals</b>	The overall learning goal for this assignment is also the official Student Learning Outcome of the department's two General Education global history courses: explain how content is shaped by the context in which it was created. In order to do this convincingly, students are also asked to formulate and support ideas with sufficient reasoning, evidence and persuasive appeals, another Student Learning Outcome for the General Education curriculum at UW-L.
<b>Lesson Plan</b>	<p>This lesson is taught four times throughout the semester utilizing primary sources from the specific time and geography on which the course currently focuses. On the two previous class sessions before the lesson itself, students have received a considerable amount of content to build up their knowledge about the specific time period. They have read a textbook chapter, listened to a lecture, and read and discussed a scholarly article.</p> <p>Before coming to class on the lesson day, students watch a D2L-based video explaining this assignment, which we titled Primary Source Analysis. This video walks students through the assignment sheet (Appendices A and B), which explains what historical context means and how it is likely to shape sources from a given time. It also explains the specific</p>

	<p>parameters of the assignment, a two-paragraph analysis that contextualizes the given primary source.</p> <p>In preparation for the lesson itself, students read the primary source and bring it to class. At the beginning of class, the teacher asks students if they have any questions from the video and then asks them to define what historical context is and what the assignment requires them to do. Following any needed clarifications, students are placed into small groups of 4-5 students. They discuss for 20 minutes how they can contextualize the primary source by noting features in the primary source that are products of their time. A spokesperson then shares two possible ideas for how they could contextualize the primary source, and we discuss as a class how well these ideas fulfill the assignment.</p> <p>As homework, students write their own two-paragraph analysis that contextualizes the primary source.</p>
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**PART III: THE STUDY**

<b>Approach</b>	We planned to “observe” by reading online student responses. During the Spring Semester, Iguchi and Stovey also observed an in-class discussion.
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<b>Findings/Discussion</b>	<p><b>Fall 2013 Results</b></p> <p>We judged the Fall 2013 changes made to the “Primary Source Analysis Guidelines” sheet ineffective because many students summarized the document rather than analyzed the role of context within the written source. In addition, the small group online discussion designed to elicit conversation over the level of support and analysis in the draft paragraphs was weak. Overall students were hesitant to critique fellow classmates’ work and qualified what suggestions they did make with apologies or statements such as, “I was under the impression” or “as I understand the assignment.” Other group members simply agreed with whatever the first respondent had written, or offered nothing of substance. For example, one group’s peer feedback consisted of, “I’m not really sure what you could improve on,” “I think that you have a good start to your primary analysis! You have good ideas. I just think you need to expand your primary source analysis,” and “I really have no criticism, sorry!” For these reasons we felt it was important to narrow the assignment objectives, and given the changed format (hybrid) with the spring class, revise the previous semester’s video lecture and schedule a face-to-face lecture specifically addressing context.</p> <p>The 2013 lesson provided valuable insight into how expectations of student work may differ substantially from the high school to the university level. In all sections of HIS 101 and 102 students are asked to use their knowledge of context to analyze a primary source document. We expect students to have a basic understanding of analysis, therefore the HIS 102 students in our study were told to analyze the document, but analysis was not explained. Historical context, however, was clearly defined, and indeed the definition remained unchanged throughout the guideline sheet’s various revisions. The students’ tendency to fall back on summary – as opposed to an interpretive analysis of any kind – demonstrated that many of our students lacked both skills. This outcome made us recognize just how complex historical interpretation actually is, and debate whether it may be a new skill for some UW-L students. We decided to limit the the lesson’s objective to introducing context and clarifying how contextual analysis contrasted with summary. In other words, in HIS 102 and 101, mastery of context/content analysis may be an end of the semester goal of which differentiating summary from analysis is simply one step.</p> <p><b>Spring 2014</b></p> <p>Early in the spring semester we met to rewrite the guidelines sheet with the intention of clarifying historical context and analysis. Also at that time we determined the objectives for the class observers. We decided to focus on three things: 1) Words used by students that demonstrated thinking; 2) Level of group participation; 3) Relationship between the discussion elicited in the small group and the information shared in the large group</p>
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	<p>discussion.</p> <p>The small group conversations revealed surprising results. One of the two groups observed had a single student dominate the conversation; virtually no other student spoke. Later when the observing professor asked if his presence had somehow inhibited other members from expressing their opinions, he was assured that that was not the case. In the second group, three of the four members participated, however much of their time was spent off topic or puzzling over the meaning of the assigned question. The group did not understand what was meant by context, and it was only when the professor pressed that one of the members confessed their confusion. Unfortunately there was little time left, and the group had nothing concrete by the time the large group discussion commenced. Ultimately the information shared by this group had not come out of their discussion. Indeed, it was the least participatory of the three active members who spoke in the full class session offering vague statements that the professor then fleshed out. As a whole, students in the large group discussion did offer insights into the role context played in the assigned primary reading and raised questions that demonstrated thinking beyond the two groups observed. This outcome made us wonder whether our observation accurately reflected the work done by the rest of the class.</p> <p><b>Conclusion</b></p> <p>This lesson study addresses a general education student-learning outcome (SLO) that the department has set for all the HIS 101 and 102 classes. In particular our goal was to better understand ways to improve students’ use of contextualization in primary source analysis. The Lesson Study impressed upon us the complexity of this outcome. For most students, comprehending the meaning of context, no less applying it across readings is a semester-long goal. Students’ tendency to fall back on summary – as opposed to analysis – was common and may have reflected a basic confusion over analysis as well as how to interpret the relationship between context and content. The process must be broken down into steps, and the contrast with summary made clear. Class discussion was a valuable part of the process, however the benefit of small group discussion was unclear.</p>
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**APPENDICES**

<p><b>Lesson Materials</b></p>	<p><b>Appendix A: Fall 2013 Assignment Sheet</b></p> <p>HIS 102 Primary Source Analysis Guidelines</p> <p>Over the course of the semester, we will examine five primary sources when we study the time period and geography from which they come. This not only will introduce you to the kinds of sources that historians work with to create their interpretations, but will also challenge you to deepen your understanding of particular time periods and subject matter. These primary sources mainly come from published collections of primary sources and will begin with a very brief introduction that has been written by a professional historian – you should treat these introductions as secondary sources.</p> <p>The five primary source analyses you will do consist of two paragraphs. These assignments will follow a textbook chapter, lecture, and D2L reading that are designed to help you understand the historical context from which these sources come. Historical context means the overall political, social, technological and economic structures as well as the environmental realities and the social climate or mood of a given period.</p> <p>Half of your task will be to examine the primary sources closely and write a paragraph explaining in what ways the source was shaped by the context in which it was created. Put another way, what dimensions of the primary source clearly resonate with what you know of that particular time and place from this class? You will need to bring in examples, quotations, or references from the primary source in order to do this and you should indicate</p>
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where your knowledge of the time period comes from (lecture, textbook reading, D2L reading etc). I strongly suggest that you compose a very clear and direct topic sentence, such as “This oral tradition was shaped by the medical ideas and spiritual beliefs of 19<sup>th</sup> century southern Africa.” Then it’s clear to your reader that you will focus on those two topics and how they shaped the source.

For the first paragraph, pay attention to what is stated outright and what you can infer by reading into the text. Quite often you should notice examples in these primary sources of the realities of the time that you’ve learned about in class but that aren’t explicitly spelled out by the creator of the primary source. Asking yourselves the following questions may be helpful, but don’t merely answer them one after another.

1. What is the purpose of the source? What is the author’s message or argument? What is he/she trying to get across? Is the message explicit, or are there implicit messages as well?
2. How does the author try to get the message across? What methods does he/she use?
3. What do you know about the author? Race, sex, class, occupation, religion, age, region, political beliefs? Does any of this matter? How?
4. Who constituted the intended audience? Was this source meant for one person’s eyes, or for the public? How does that affect the source? The form of the sources can be helpful here.

In the second paragraph, describe what further knowledge you’d want to have about that time and place that would help you to better interpret the primary source. Was there a part of the primary source that confused you, perhaps indicating that there is an underlying idea or reality that was unique to that time? Make sure that it is clear how knowing about this dimension of the past would help you to understand and contextualize the source better.

Your content in the second paragraph should consist of what can actually be known. So, if the introduction to the primary source tells you that the author was anonymous or that there is no record of the author besides his/her name, then you cannot suggest researching that author. You could, though, suggest researching people from similar classes or backgrounds, if that can be known (for instance, authors writing in early periods tended to come from the educated, elite minority, and we can know quite a bit about them as a group even if not much is known about some of them individually).

*Note: The above is Weiskopf’s initial assignment, which we used in Fall 2013. Iguchi and Stovey had no part in composing it and passively observed its implementation and results. Iguchi and Stovey took a more active role in helping to rewrite the Spring 2014 version of the assignment below. Note that in the above version, there is attention to defining a primary text, but not much with regard to explaining what context means or the relationship between texts or content and context.*

## **Appendix B: Spring 2014 Assignment Sheet**

### HIS 102 Primary Source Analysis Guidelines

Over the course of the semester, we will examine four primary sources when we study the time period and geography from which they come. This not only will introduce you to the kinds of sources that historians work with to create their interpretations, but will also challenge you to deepen your understanding of particular time periods and subject matter. These assignments will follow a textbook chapter, lecture, and D2L reading that are designed to help you understand the historical context from which these sources come.

These primary sources mainly come from published collections. In these collections, professional historians provide a brief introduction to each primary source. These introductions are not part of the primary source itself, you should treat these as secondary sources.

### **Historical Context**

Historical context means the overall political, social, technological and economic structures as well as the environmental realities and the social climate or mood of a given period. For example, in the 1950s, it wasn't unusual to see your doctor smoking cigarettes. Doctors even appeared in advertisements for cigarettes, touting smoking as a good way to relax. At the time, the state of scientific research hadn't yet linked smoking to health problems like emphysema and cancer. The context of the 1950s and 2010s are very different in terms of medical understandings and public health policies. Because of this, attitudes towards smoking are quite different in the two periods and laws and the way people think reflect this. In the context of the 1950s, you would have never banned smoking on airplanes, in bars, and in public buildings but the change in contexts (political, social, scientific) makes this acceptable and even common sense today.

You are analyzing primary sources in order to see how they are products of their contexts. This requires you to recognize how primary sources connect with social, political, and economic realities that are not explicitly in the text itself. The other course materials (lectures and secondary readings) are the resources from which you draw in making your analyses. You are not summarizing (simply rephrasing) primary sources.

### **Structure of Primary Source Analyses**

The four primary source analyses you will do consist of two paragraphs. Half of your task will be to examine the primary sources closely and write a paragraph explaining in what ways the source was shaped by the context in which it was created. Put another way, what about the primary source clearly resonates with what you know of that particular time and place? You will need to include examples or quotations from the primary source in order to do this and you should indicate where your knowledge of the time period comes from (lecture, textbook reading, D2L reading etc). You medical ideas and spiritual beliefs of 19th century southern Africa.” Then it's clear to your reader that you will focus on those two topics and how they shaped the source.

Asking yourselves the following questions may be helpful, but don't merely answer them one after

1. What is the purpose of the source? What is the author's message or argument? What is he/she trying to get across? Is the message explicit, or are there implicit messages as well?
2. How does the author try to get the message across? What methods does he/she use?
3. What do you know about the author? Race, sex, class, occupation, religion, age, region, political beliefs? Does any of this matter? How?
4. Who constituted the intended audience? Was this source meant for one person's eyes, or for the public? How does that affect the source? The form of the sources can be helpful here.

In the second paragraph, describe what further knowledge you'd want to have about that time and place that would help you to better interpret the primary source. Was there a part of the primary source that confused you, perhaps indicating that there is an underlying idea or reality that was unique to that time? Make sure that it is clear how knowing about this dimension of the past would help you to understand and contextualize the source better.

Your content in the second paragraph should consist of what **can actually be known**. So, if the introduction to the primary source tells you that the author was anonymous or that there is no record of the author besides his/her name, then you cannot suggest researching that author. You could, though, suggest researching people from similar classes or backgrounds, if that can be known (for instance, authors writing in early periods tended to come from the educated, elite minority, and we can know quite a bit about them as a group even if not much is known about some of them individually).

*Note: As is readily apparent, the main difference between the above version of Weiskopf's assignment and the earlier one is that this version has a paragraph that explains context through a concrete example. This example, furthermore, models an analysis of relationships between a kind of historical content or set of texts (medical discourse on tobacco use) and shifting historical contexts.*