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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Think of this book, and the other books in this series, not as a text, but as a menu. As a teacher, you select lessons from the menu. It was never intended that you would have everything on the menu—that would be overeating. **[**Take a look at the table of contents.**]** When choosing a lesson, look first at the problems on the student handout(s), and then at the student handout describing these problems' historical outcomes. If you like what you see, take a look at the lesson plan for ideas on using the handouts. You can teach all of the lessons by giving students a problem handout, having them discuss what they would do, and finally distributing the outcomes handout. You may also consult the "Quick Motivator" section of a lesson plan to use the handouts as a short introduction to class.

On the other hand, you can think of this book as a "how-to" guide for teaching specific decision-making skills while also covering significant events in United States history. The book posits a general guideline of ten distinct skills, organized under the acronym **P-A-G-E** to help students remember these skills. Take a look at the explanation of **P-A-G-E** in the introduction to this book, under the section titled "Guide to Thoughtful Decision Making." This section explains each of the ten skills and includes examples.

Every lesson in this series analyzes the historical topic in terms of **P-A-G-E.** Each lesson targets specific skills, letting the content and the actual decision in history determine the skills emphasized in the lesson. Take a look at the skills grid for each lesson on page 1 of this book. Handouts are frequently used to focus students on using specific skills. For example, many lessons include a list of questions designed to provoke more questions from students, as well as to give them ideas of the types of questions to ask. Other lessons give students a list of assumptions and ask which they assumed in making their decisions. The other skills have similar handouts.

Whether you try the problem-discussion-outcome approach or concentrate more on specific decision-making skills, I hope these books will help make you a more effective teacher and help your students learn United States history in a way that will help prepare them to make more thoughtful decisions as citizens.

Kevin O'Reilly

INTRODUCTION

RATIONALE: Hindsight versus Foresight

When we study history, it is all too easy to sit in judgment of those who came before us. We read it after the fact; we see it in hindsight. Given the benefit of such 20/20 hindsight, some historical figures seem to have been very misguided or downright silly in their decisions. Why didn't they anticipate the consequences of their choices? How could they have been so shortsighted? Sports enthusiasts call this sort of analysis "Monday morning quarterbacking."

However, it's not so easy to laugh at the follies of past decision makers if we are confronted with decisions in history before we learn the actual results. In such a situation, we find ourselves making some of the same mistakes that historical characters made, and we sometimes commit new errors they did not make. This method of studying history, which we might call "foresight history," is far more challenging—and engaging—than the traditional retroactive method to which we are inured.

In short, when we learn history by hindsight we risk becoming more arrogant and complacent. If, on the other hand, we learn history by *foresight,* by casting ourselves in the role of those historical figures and making decisions as they did—without knowing the outcome—we can learn humility and gain a great deal of empathy for them. Students in my classes constantly exclaim, "This is hard!" as opposed to, "This is boring!"

Foresight history also helps students improve key decision-making skills they will use again and again as citizens. Schools of law, medicine, business, and nursing, along with the military and many other institutions, use case-study methods, where students are forced to make decisions about a particular case and then analyze their thinking. If each of these varied disciplines values decision making so much, shouldn't we be training all our future citizens how to make good decisions?

History provides many benefits for those who study it. Historical knowledge can be liberating all by itself, letting us draw back the veil of ignorance and see the present with eyes enlightened by the past. The more knowledge of history we possess, the better we understand our societies and ourselves. Study and evaluation of primary sources, discussions of motives, debates about significance, analyzing causes and effects, and many other strategies are vital to history courses. The lessons here on decision making are meant to support and enhance these other methods of studying history, not replace them with a more "practical" type of history.

GUIDE TO
THOUGHTFUL DECISION MAKING
Student Handout 1

Welcome to "Foresight" History!

The problems in the *Decision Making in U. S. History* series will challenge you to make choices about events in United States history <u>before</u> you know what actually happened in those events. This is learning history in a foresighted way—first you decide, then you find out what really happened—rather than as hindsight history, where you just find out what happened. You will get at least two benefits from this method of learning history: First, you will improve your decision-making skills. Someday, when you avoid buying a "lemon" used car that would have wasted thousands of dollars, you can thank your history teacher for helping you build up your decision-making skills. Second, it's fun to learn history as though it's a cliffhanger mystery, where you're eager to find out if your decision worked or ended in disaster. But don't forget to concentrate on the actual historical decision that was made and how it turned out. You can learn a lot about your own decision making through these problems, but you're mainly in class to learn history and to understand what really happened, not what could have happened.

What is Decision Making?

You've learned about problem solving in other courses such as math and science, and you've encountered problem solving when you've tried to build something or fix something. Decision making resembles problem solving in some ways (for example, it involves defining a problem and thinking of alternatives), but it's different from problem solving in that there is no one right answer. The lessons in this book involve "messy" problems: even long after the event, people often disagree about what the best decision was or should have been.

Decision Making as Experience

Experience teaches you how to make good decisions. Every decision that you make—whether good or bad—better equips you to make good decisions in the future. For example, you would probably feel safer being treated by a doctor who had a lot of experience than by a brand new doctor. The historical problems your teacher gives you will provide you with experience in making decisions in general, and will help you become a better decision maker in your role as a citizen. You won't just have learned about history, you will have experienced it! For some of these lessons, you will feel that you made good decisions; for others, you may feel that you've made errors in judgment. As you go along, try to reflect on your experiences as well as on your thinking about decision making.

P-A-G-E Guide to Decision Making

While experience is the most important way to learn to make better decisions, it's also helpful to learn some basic decision-making skills so that you know what areas to target in order to improve your overall decision making. Handout 2 contains an acronym, **P-A-G-E**, that provides you with guidelines for making better decisions. These aren't rules you have to follow; they are just meant as helpful tips you can use to improve your thinking about decision making.

Handout 3 explains and gives examples for each part of the **P-A-G-E** guide to decision making. Keep it in your notebook for reference as you make decisions about situations in U.S. history. Every single **P-A-G-E** guideline will not necessarily apply to each decision-making problem you encounter. You (with the assistance of your teacher) will have to determine which guidelines will work best with which problems.

P-A-G-E ANALYSIS FOR DECISION MAKING

Decision-Making Analysis

P=Problem:
- Identify any **underlying problem:** What's really going on here?
- Consider **other points of view:** How do others see this situation?
- What are my **assumptions**? **Emotions**?

A=Ask for information (about):
- **Historical context:** What is the history and context of this issue?
- **Reliability of sources:** Does my information come from experts on this topic? Do the sources have a reason to lie? Is the information supported by evidence?
- **Historical analogies:** What has been done in the past about situations like this? In what ways do these other situations differ from this situation?

G=Goals:
- What are my main **goals**? Are they **realistic**?
- Generate **options** to help achieve these goals. Are they **ethical**?

E=Effects:
- Predict **unintended consequences.** What are some long-term effects?
- **Play out the options.** What could go wrong?

P-A-G-E EXPLANATIONS AND EXAMPLES

Student Handout 3

PROBLEM

Underlying problem:

Sometimes a decision-making situation will seem very difficult until you recognize that an underlying problem exists. For example, suppose two people come in for marriage counseling because they have been arguing a lot about money. The counselor is going to look for an underlying problem (such as unfulfilled needs) that might have led to spending more money. A student doing poorly in school might turn things around by discovering she needs glasses—the underlying problem. Please remember that you should not just repeat or rephrase the problem: instead, you need to look for what's behind it, for what's causing it. Underlying problems are not openly given as part of the decision-making situation—you have to figure them out on your own.

Another way to think of this skill is "the ability to see what is really going on." Some people call this "framing" the problem: in other words, by putting a "frame" around the heart of the problem and excluding unimportant parts, you discover what's really important. You need to call on your own personal experiences in order to see what's really significant. In history, you do this by making analogies. In a sense, you need to say, "The problem we are facing now is like a problem people faced before [this is an analogy], so I'd better do *this*." The way you see (or frame, or represent) a problem influences the decision you eventually make.

Example:
Bob's grades have been much lower for the last three months in history class. He says he's bored in class, and that he'll improve his grades when he really needs to.

List at least two possible underlying problems for Bob's lower grades. What's really causing his problems?

Other points of view:

Other people are always involved in decisions in history. We need to consider their points of view as we make decisions about history, just as we need to consider other points of view in our own lives today.

<u>Example:</u>
My brother Mark is angry with me for borrowing his car three times. But he's wrong to be angry. I needed to get to work each time I borrowed the car.

Rewrite this problem from Mark's point of view.

What are my assumptions? Emotions?

Sometimes after we make a decision, we realize that we had made an assumption that we didn't even know we were making until it was too late.

Emotions are part of being human, so they represent a legitimate part of the decision-making process. We do, however, need to be aware of our emotions during the decision-making process. Emotions, especially frustration and anger, can sometimes lead us to make irrational choices. People frequently become frustrated and say, "I've had enough of this situation. Let's just do <u>something</u>!" But they often come to regret the rushed choices they made under such circumstances. They would have benefited from saying to themselves, "Okay. I'm getting frustrated, but I still need to take the time necessary to make a good decision."

Studies have shown that when people feel pessimistic or are in a bad mood, they exaggerate the possible negative consequences of decisions; similarly, when they feel optimistic or are in a good mood, they overestimate positive consequences.

Emotions and gut feelings are unavoidable and natural, but thinking the situation through is crucial to making good decisions. We wouldn't want the President to decide about nuclear missiles in Cuba based solely on his gut feeling—we'd want him to gather information, consider several options, predict the possible consequences for millions of people, and so forth. As decision makers, we need to account for the role of emotion and gut feelings in our decisions and be aware of them as we choose.

<u>Example for assumptions:</u>
Player to teammate: "We'll have no trouble beating Central. After all, Central lost to Suburban, and we beat Suburban the first game of the year."

What is this player assuming?

<u>Example for emotions:</u>
Suppose you have two children and are trying to decide whether to buy life insurance. An insurance ad shows a boy who can't go to college because his father died and had no life insurance.

To what emotion does the ad appeal?

ASK

Ask about historical context (history of the issue; context in the world):

Asking questions about both the historical background and the present context of a problem are both essential for getting the information necessary to make a good decision. If you don't know the background, you will have difficulty deciding on the best solution. Every problem has a backstory, and we need to find out what that story is. The key is to ask questions that will help you obtain the necessary information.

Example:
You are 17 years old, and you have been thinking about buying a car. You work part time after school, about ten hours per week. Your parents have told you that you'll have to pay for the car yourself. You go to a used car dealership and the salesman shows you a used car that costs $2000.

What questions should you ask before you buy it?

Ask about reliability of sources:

Information is crucial to making good decisions, but we need know what the sources of our information are and consider the reliability of those sources. Basing a decision on bad information from questionable sources is a recipe for disaster. You can evaluate sources by asking if the person giving the information has a reason to lie, if the person is a primary source, if other sources support this information, if the person is an expert on the topic, what the person's bias is on the topic, or if the person has been reliable in the past.

You should always be probing for disagreements among sources. Be wary if no disagreements seem to exist. It might mean your advisers are engaging in "groupthink," where they all get pulled to the same option without thoroughly thinking through other options or considering what could go wrong. Always try to find people who disagree with a proposed option. If you can't find one, ask tough questions yourself.

Example:
The car salesman says this used car is in perfect condition.

How reliable is the salesman? What reasons might you have to distrust him?

Ask about historical analogies:

It's natural to compare the problems we encounter to other, similar situations that have occurred in the past. In fact, one reason we study history in the first place is to build a deeper understanding of our world today through learning about historical events/analogies. You should try to think of analogies to the problems you encounter. As mentioned above in the section on underlying problems, you derive your understanding of what is important in a problem (framing) from analogies. (Example: "This problem is

like that situation George Washington was in at Trenton during the American Revolution.") The more you draw on your knowledge of history, the more likely you are to fully understand a decision-making problem.

However, analogies are tricky because important differences often exist between the problems we encounter now and the historical cases we use to guide our decisions. We should always evaluate analogies by asking, "How do the two cases differ? In what ways are they similar? Are they similar enough to justify the conclusion?" We should also consider whether other, more appropriate analogies exist that could provide us with better guidance.

Example:
Suppose you drove in a race at a parking lot near a mall a month ago. You raced your five-year old Toyota Corolla, and your time was 36.8 seconds. Margaret told you that she drove in a race last Sunday and her time was 28.2 seconds. She says this proves she is a better race driver than you are.

What are two questions you could ask to determine whether Margaret is really a better driver?

GOALS

What are my main goals? Are they realistic?

We can't make good decisions if we are unclear about our goals. Once we establish goals, we can more easily set priorities and use them as a basis for choosing between options.

However, establishing goals isn't enough. The goals we set need to be realistic. Some decisions in history have been catastrophic because the decision makers didn't notice that they had unrealistic goals. It didn't matter how carefully they exercised their other decision-making skills—because their goals were unrealistic, they would never achieve them.

Example:
You're out of school and need a job, since you live on your own and have expenses (rent, car payments, food, heat, insurance, etc.). You've got two offers. The first one is close to where you live and pays a lot more money, but it's doing work you wouldn't like. The second job is farther away and pays less money (but enough to cover your expenses), but it's doing something that you really like.

What do you do? After you decide, list your goals and ask how realistic they are.

Generate options to help achieve my goals. Are they ethical?

After you've made a decision, you don't want to be stuck thinking, "Oh, I wish I'd thought of that option before I decided!" At the same time, though, you don't want to become paralyzed trying to think of every possible option, no matter how remote. Nevertheless, important decisions should spur us to take the time to consider a number of options. We should also consider whether the options we come up with are ethical.

Example:
You are 25 years old, single, work full-time ten miles from where you live, and drive your compact car to work. In recent months, gas prices have risen to very high levels. Your main goal at this point is to save money.

What options do you have for coping with these price increases?

EFFECTS

Predict unintended consequences:

Most of the time, predicting unintended consequences will be more important than any other thinking you do about a problem. For some problems, it may be enough just to see the situation from other points of view or to ask questions about background or context. However, considering consequences will do more to help you avoid that awful feeling you get when you've made a bad decision.

Example:
Suppose you are 35 years old and have a son and a daughter, ages five and two. The company you work for is asking you to move to a different state. You can refuse and take a pay cut.

If you make the move, what unintended consequences might it have on you and your family in ten years? Guess at what the effects of the move might be.

Play out the option. What could go wrong?

Here, you need to think about short-term effects, as opposed to predicting unintended consequences, which focuses more on long-term effects. For example, say you're playing the role of president and decide to get a law passed to help solve a problem. You have to take into account the fact that Congress has the constitutional power to pass laws, and thus to get your law enacted you need to convince Congress to approve it. By noticing that the approval of Congress is vital to the success or failure of your decision, you've identified something that could go wrong, and need to plan accordingly (overcoming opposition by talking to individual members of Congress, thinking of another option as backup, etc.).

Example:
Suppose you are 30 years old and working at a job you like pretty well. You get an offer to work at a job for higher pay that is further away.

If you take the job, what might happen? List two or more things that could go wrong.

DECISION-MAKING LOG

Student Handout 4

Topic	Actual decision	My decision	Why different/similar?	What I learned about P.A.G.E. from this topic (2 examples)

EVALUATING DECISION MAKING
Student Handout 5

The following paragraph shows the thinking of a union leader of textile workers in 1890:

"The company has cut wages twice in the last two years. People can't live on these wages! Also, the company keeps making skilled workers into unskilled workers. They just tell a skilled worker, for example, that his job is being eliminated. But he isn't being fired—he can take an unskilled job at lower pay. That's outrageous! Our union needs to go on strike to stop the pay cuts and stop the change of jobs from skilled to unskilled. Just in the past two years, the Knights of Labor have had two successful strikes against railroads in the Northwest. When we win the strike, we'll have better pay and more job security."

Evaluate the thinking of this union leader according to four criteria of **P-A-G-E**. Choose the most important aspects of **P-A-G-E** for this problem. List things that are <u>parts</u> of **P-A-G-E**, not **P-A-G-E** itself. For example, under "P" you could write down "Other points of view"; you could <u>not</u> write down "Problem."

P:

A:

G:

E:

THE GILDED AGE

Introduction

OVERVIEW

This volume on the Gilded Age consists of 13 lessons arranged in mostly chronological order, although the lesson on business (Lesson 1) is not limited to any particular point during the Gilded Age. The lessons in this volume deal with business, labor, government policies, farmers, taxes, and elections. Questions of race are not dealt with except as they come up incidentally as parts of the problems here; other volumes in the *Decision Making in U.S. History* series will discuss race-related issues in greater depth.

SKILLS GRID FOR THIS VOLUME

X = part of lesson
E = emphasized in the lesson

Skill	Lesson 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Underlying problem	E		E	X	E				E	E			
Point of view		E		E	E					E		E	
Assumptions/emotions			E		X	E							
Ask—context	E	E		E	E	E			E			E	
Ask—sources								E			E		
Ask—analogies													
Goals? Realistic?				X				E			E	E	E
Options	E	E	E						E				
Unintended consequences	E	E	E	E	E	E	E			E			
Play out option				X			E		E			E	