

Practical Demonstration Activities - Dr Ian Luff

Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)

Purpose: to illustrate this central concept of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Method:

1. Give a ball of rolled up A4 paper (or softer paper towels which don't fly quite so well but give less of a shock) to one student in the back left corner of the classroom and another identical ball to a student on the front right.
2. Explain that the one at the back is the USSR and the one at the front the USA.
3. Explain that each ball of paper represents a nuclear tipped ballistic missile.
4. Explain and demonstrate that the curvature of the Earth demands that such missiles are 'lobbed' into the edge of space before coming down on their target, rather than thrown direct. This took around 30 minutes in 1962.
5. Instruct the USSR and USA to watch each other like hawks. If one lobs their paper ball the other must respond immediately.
6. Tell the USA to lob. The USSR will respond a split second later.
7. The USA's missile will arrive first, but the USSR's missile is already in flight and also hits its target. Students see that if one launches, both targets are destroyed. This is MAD.
8. Then give both students their missiles back, take a paper ball yourself and kneel immediately in front of the USA student explaining that USSR missiles are based in Cuba, very close to the USA. Throw the ball directly at the pupil's upper arm before he or she has a chance to respond.
9. Discuss how this has changed the balance of MAD.

The English Church

Purpose: To make students from a secular age understand why religious change in the 1500s mattered to people

Method:

1. Explain to the class that this activity demands they all move their chairs to the other side of their desk and rearrange all equipment on it so they are facing the back of the room.
2. After the disruption has finished and all students are settled, move to the back of the room.
3. Apologise that the light is wrong and instruct them to move back to the original side of their desks, rearranging equipment again. Grumbling will ensue but they'll do it.
4. Move to the front of the room and apologise again saying they need to face the back and rearrange again.
5. Don't go through with this! Stop them and say 'You're getting annoyed now, aren't you?' The response will be an unequivocal 'yes' from the class.
6. Explain that if they have been annoyed and puzzled by moving position twice how might highly religious 15th century people have felt to have their very definition of salvation and hell fundamentally altered by Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I before settling in the compromise of the Elizabethan settlement!
7. They might at least now approach the study of the English Reformation with a little more understanding and enthusiasm than might otherwise have been the case.

The Machine Gun

Purpose: to illustrate why First World War attacks, particularly between 1914-17, were so costly in lives and futile by graphically demonstrating the relative power of the defenders' machine guns compared to the attackers magazine, bolt-action rifle.

Method:

1. Show a picture of a Lee Enfield Mk3 magazine rifle on the whiteboard. This was the standard allied rifle in WW1. The German Mauser was very similar in operation.
2. Demonstrate firing an imaginary Lee Enfield at the class. Fire – pull back bolt – push forward bolt – fire. Time this (about 2 seconds). Get the class to follow you in the firing action.
3. Show a picture of the Vickers Heavy Machine Gun and its German equivalent, the water-cooled Parabellum. Explain this could fire at least 300 rounds per minute (five rounds per second).
4. Using a whiteboard marker pen on a typical student classroom table bash out five rounds per second. This is surprisingly fast, and students will hear and see this.
5. Act out again the firing of the Lee Enfield to emphasise contrast in speed of firing.
6. Now stand up the whole class. Instruct students to sit down in turn from left front along the rows every time they here a bang on the desk.
7. Beat out again your five rounds per second rhythm but this time continue until all have sat down. This will take six seconds of firing.
8. Explain that the machine gun in 1916 was used in defence as it was too heavy to carry in attack. This meant attackers were almost always armed with rifles until much later in the war.
9. Study the battle of the Somme.

The French Revolution Football

Purpose: to show that the interaction of forces in the French Revolution led to an outcome and sequence of events that did not meet the exact objectives of any.

Method:

1. Stand up five students in a circle facing each other.
2. Ensure an equal distance between each in an even a circle as possible.
3. Explain that each student represents one of: the Girondins; the Jacobins; the Bourbon Army; the Paris mob; the King; the Peasantry.
4. Take a full sized football into the circle. Hold it at student shoulder height and ask each to place one hand on it to jointly hold it up.
5. Withdraw from the circle.
6. Explain that on your signal each student will try to push the ball horizontally away from them. This represents the desired direction in which they wish the revolution to proceed.
7. Give the signal to push.
8. The ball will rise upward going in a direction nobody wanted.
9. Go back to studying the machinations of the Constituent Assembly, 1789-91.

Constraints on Hitler

Purpose: to explain the concept of Gleichschaltung in removing the restraints initially placed on Hitler in January 1933. This also places later Nazi radicalisation of policies towards Jewish people in context.

Method:

1. Ask four students to stand behind a classroom table facing the rest of the class.
2. Stand at one end of the table holding a full plastic water bottle (still sealed).
3. Explain that you represent Hitler and that the water bottle is your intended policy to persecute Jewish people.
4. The closest student to you represents the Reichstag; the next the judiciary and legal profession; the third, President Hindenburg; the fourth, the Cabinet.
5. Explain that each student is opposed to the water bottle becoming law. If it reaches the end of the table furthest from you it will be deemed to have passed into law.
6. Roll the water bottle away from you towards the far end of the table. It will be stopped by the first student, the Reichstag. Explain that the Enabling Act of March 1933 removed the power of the Reichstag. Ask the student to sit down.
7. Roll the bottle again. This time it will be stopped by the second pupil, the Judiciary.
8. Explain that in April 1933 anybody practising law in Germany had to be a member of the Nazi party. Ask the second student to sit down.
9. Repeat for President Hindenburg who died in August 1934. Ask the third student to sit.
10. Repeat for the cabinet which never met after 1938. Ask the fourth student to sit down.
11. Roll the bottle down the empty table. It will reach the end of the table unopposed.
12. One can extend by designating another student as the SS who tilts the table away from you thereby accelerating anti-Jewish policy.