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Athens Game Reflection

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Cultural Benefits of Athens Role-Playing

 When an actor is put into a role, they must fully immerse themselves in what their character’s mindset would be. This process includes putting aside biases and researching environmental or social factors from that character’s time period. With the developing technology in today’s culture, reliable historical resources are readily available to aid in setting the tone for the historical period that the class was expected to partake in. As a developing honors student, accepting my role and participating in discussions with that mindset forced me to monitor and shape my thought processes to how Thrasybulus would react to commentary and discussions. The skills that this historical Athens game encouraged in its players are similar skills that can make a student successful in observing cultural traditions or other aspects of culture. Portraying a character from another time was an active and involving way to learn some of these skills.

 When portraying Thrasybulus, my first question that I wanted to answer was “Why?” Why was my character important? Why did he call the Assembly? Why did he have goals to increase the voting population? The answers to these question are all questions that gave me a window into who he was. When you take on a role, or a personality different from your own, you must look beyond what is on the page of the sources. It is all based upon your ability to ask the right questions to uncover the real meaning behind another’s thoughts. There will be times when you as a student must synthesize the information you have collected to find your answers. There were times during the game where I found myself aghast at the differing views of my peers. I had read the primary sources and researched my information strictly through the eyes of Thrasybulus and hearing the other arguments made me realize how closed my mind had become to views that could be seen as normal in modern America. Without realizing it, I had lost my objectivity and started to become upset when I was opposed because I had come to believe that my views would be common among my peers. My objectives closely resembled the common American way of thinking. For example, one of my objectives was to give voting rights to metics and servants. When my peers’ characters opposed my views I was a little surprised by the arguments they presented because they were so different from the views we all grew up with, but they had researched what their characters would have supported just as I had.

We all used different sources to become more well-informed. Some of my classmates mentioned using sources to understand The Republic in greater depth and others read works written by their character to best imitate them. Adequate resources were given to us to find historical texts in order to support our arguments from our characters’ views. Some of these resources are primary documents and others tell of the recovered artifacts or structures that describe the ways of past people. When trying to become another character, I found myself looking for resources that told me about the social aspects of their time in order to personally integrate my hypothetical views with what they had been involved in. With so many translated documents from the Athenians and remains that have been uncovered, we have a very good representation of what had transpired in that specific city. Others may not be as well represented because of little records, but that is one strength of Athenian history: their written records.

The Athenian past can be closely related to the developments of modern America, just as the skills we learned while participating in their culture can teach us valuable skills to understand the existing cultures in our world today. Through this experience, I recognized when I became biased and close-minded to other views. I also learned techniques of immersing myself in a way of thinking that is different from my own. Both of these can be very useful when trying to understand a different culture that you coexist with. As a student here at Mankato State, I experience different cultures every day. I have talked with many students from different countries and social backgrounds that I have never had the chance to interact with before in the short time that I have been here. It is a very eye opening experience. Some skills that I have learned in this game, such as asking the right questions and keeping an open mind, will be very helpful in my future experience at MSU and beyond. This game has taught me some of the questions to ask when trying to understand another culture, whether it is historical or modern. It has also taught me that I can adapt a closed mind despite what I may think while in the moment.

Overall, the Athens game is an experience that I would choose to participate in again. It was a form of learning that got me involved and made me form my own questions to find the information I needed about a culture that existed over 2,000 years ago. Due to the relations between the development of Athens and the United States, some of the information deepened my understanding of American culture; other information taught me about ancient Athenian culture. Most importantly, I was able to evaluate my personal thought processes through a new lens. This game taught me that in order to put myself into another’s shoes I have to put biases aside and there will be some that you do not realize you possessed in the first place. After this game, I feel confident in my ability to recognize and put aside biases that have been a part of me for many years. Putting these things aside will help me to more fully understand a way of life that is different from my own, whether it existed twenty centuries, years, or minutes ago.