ORGANIZER FOR DECISION MAKING

One way many teachers use to assist students in their understanding of decisions made by historical actors is to use an organizer for decision making. This involves creating a matrix that combines the ranking of established criteria and cross-referencing the criteria to a set of options facing the historical actor. A classic example, used by many teachers, is to examine Harry Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.I have modified this model to incorporate historical thinking concepts. In the following exercise, I’ll lead you through the process of ranking criteria, establishing options, assessing information, and reaching a conclusion. In this case, I have chosen to examine the issue from Truman’s perspective at the time of his decision. This means that the criteria I normally use for deciding on the importance of the criteria has to be modified to avoid using “presentism” or a current lens in examining the decisions of people in the past.

Here’s the organizer I use:

**ORGANIZER FOR DECISION MAKING – DROPPING THE ATOMIC BOMB**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| FACTOR (Rank) | DROP THE BOMB ON HIROSHIMA | DEMONSTRATE THE BOMB ON A DESERTED ISLAND | LAUNCH A CONVENTIONAL WAR: DO NOT DROP THE BOMB |
| LOSS OF LIFERank: \_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| COST OF BOMB/COST OF WARRank: \_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| LENGTH OF WARRank:\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| MORAL ISSUES:Rank: \_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| INTERNATIONALREACTION:Rank: \_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| TOTAL |  |  |  |

In the left hand column, I have listed a number of factors Truman may have looked at before making his decision to drop the first bomb. They include: loss of life, cost (of the war, of the bomb), length of war, moral issues, international reaction. There are likely more but these are the ones I have chosen for the class. Along the top are three options Truman could have selected for action: drop the bomb on Hiroshima, demonstrate the bomb on a deserted island, or launch a conventional attack on the Japanese.

The first task of the student is to rank the factors for making his decision from most important to least important. Students rank the five factors from 1 to 5, 5 being most important in the left hand column.

The organizer now looks something like this:

**ORGANIZER FOR DECISION MAKING – DROPPING THE ATOMIC BOMB**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| FACTOR (Rank) | DROP THE BOMB ON HIROSHIMA | DEMONSTRATE THE BOMB ON A DESERTED ISLAND | LAUNCH A CONVENTIONAL WAR: DO NOT DROP THE BOMB |
| LOSS OF LIFERank: 5 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| COST OF BOMB/COST OF WARRank:3 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| LENGTH OF WARRank:4 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| MORAL ISSUES:Rank: 2 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| INTERNATIONALREACTION:Rank: 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| TOTAL |  |  |  |

Now a key reading or summary of key information is given to the students. (see attachment 2) From this reading, students examine the three possible option for dropping the bomb: a. drop the bomb on Hiroshima; b. drop the bomb on a deserted island; or c. do not drop the bomb. Students need to decide, for each of the 5 factors, which decision offers the best result. Students use information from the summary sheet given and place that information in the middle of the corresponding block. The selection of the best to worst option is then placed in the upper left hand corner of the corresponding block. The ranking is 3 for best, 1 for worst. Supporting evidence is placed in the middle of the box to support their conclusion. So the matrix now looks like this:

**ORGANIZER FOR DECISION MAKING – DROPPING THE ATOMIC BOMB**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| FACTOR (Rank) | DROP THE BOMB ON HIROSHIMA | DEMONSTRATE THE BOMB ON A DESERTED ISLAND | LAUNCH A CONVENTIONAL WAR: DO NOT DROP THE BOMB |
| LOSS OF LIFERank: 5 | **3** |  |  | **2** |  |  | **1** |  |  |
|  | **1 million US lives might be saved, but no guarantee** |  |  | **I millions lives may be saved, and 100,000 innocent lives maybe saved but no guarantee** |  |  | **100,000 innocent lives are lost in a bomb** |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| COST OF BOMB/COST OF WARRank:3 | **2** |  |  | **1** |  |  | **3** |  |  |
|  | **note** |  |  | **note** |  |  | **note** |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| LENGTH OF WARRank:4 | **1** |  |  | **3** |  |  | **2** |  |  |
|  | **Note** |  |  | **Note** |  |  | **note** |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| MORAL ISSUES:Rank: 2 | **2** |  |  | **3** |  |  | **1** |  |  |
|  | **Note** |  |  | **Note** |  |  | **note** |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| INTERNATIONALREACTION:Rank: 1 | **2** |  |  | **1** |  |  | **3** |  |  |
|  | **note** |  |  | **note** |  |  | **note** |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| TOTAL |  |  |  |

The numbers I have generated in my example are randomly selected. Your students need to justify them through their ranking and the research they have used.

Finally, the ranking numbers are multiplied by the numbers in in the upper left hand box and totaled at the bottom of the page.

**ORGANIZER FOR DECISION MAKING – DROPPING THE ATOMIC BOMB**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| FACTOR (Rank) | DROP THE BOMB ON HIROSHIMA | DEMONSTRATE THE BOMB ON A DESERTED ISLAND | LAUNCH A CONVENTIONAL WAR: DO NOT DROP THE BOMB |
| LOSS OF LIFERank: 5 | **3** |  |  | **2** |  |  | **1** |  |  |
|  | **1 million US lives might be saved, but no guarantee** |  |  | **I millions lives may be saved, and 100,000 innocent lives maybe saved but no guarantee** |  |  | **100,000 innocent lives are lost in a bomb** |  |
|  |  | **15** |  |  | **10** |  |  | **5** |
| COST OF BOMB/COST OF WARRank:3 | **2** |  |  | **1** |  |  | **3** |  |  |
|  | **Note** |  |  | **Note** |  |  | **note** |  |
|  |  | **6** |  |  | **3** |  |  | **9** |
| LENGTH OF WARRank:4 | **1** |  |  | **3** |  |  | **2** |  |  |
|  | **Note** |  |  | **Note** |  |  | **note** |  |
|  |  | **4** |  |  | **12** |  |  | **8** |
| MORAL ISSUES:Rank: 2 | **2** |  |  | **3** |  |  | **1** |  |  |
|  | **Note** |  |  | **Note** |  |  | **note** |  |
|  |  | **4** |  |  | **6** |  |  | **2** |
| INTERNATIONALREACTION:Rank: 1 | **2** |  |  | **1** |  |  | **3** |  |  |
|  | **note** |  |  | **note** |  |  | **note** |  |
|  |  | **2** |  |  | **1** |  |  | **3** |
| TOTAL | **31** | **32** | **25** |

Whichever score is the highest, is the one that provides the most appropriate response based on the student’s criteria. It is important to use the higher number when ranking (eg.5 for most important) because it should have the most impact on the decision making process.

Now you can use this as the basis for a 5 paragraph position paper for an essay. Students can use the criteria for decisions, selecting any three for their body paragraphs. They have analyzed the information and selected evidence to support conclusions.