

Teaching Tactics

Describe a successful assignment, exercise, or teaching tactic that could be replicated by other instructors.

RESPONSE ESSAYS

The context: I wanted to find a uniform way to have students formally articulate their own thoughts about God in written form as well as be prepared to listen to others' thoughts.

The pedagogical purpose: The purpose was to help students "Do Theology" as well as learn from their own peers' thoughts (and ideally learn how to dialogue with one another).

Description of the strategy: At least once per unit, my students have a "Response Essay." The essays are about one and a half pages, and on the day they are due we have a "Class Discussion" where the students dialogue about their own response to the prompt. I am not a part of the discussion. Here are examples of the prompts I use for my Bible course:

Torah: If it is smart to learn from your mistakes, it is wise to learn from others' mistakes. Use the mistakes of Adam and Eve, Cain, the people in Babel, and/or Abraham to set three goals for yourself of things you will NOT do.

Torah #2: Remember that Torah is about the nation of Israel discovering their identity. As we come to the end of Torah, (1) give a one sentence description (in your own words) of what Israel's identity is, (2) support your description using at least a few stories in your explanation, and (3) explain how this relates a 21st century teenager.

Prophets: Remember that the prophets spoke for God to the nation of Israel. What would the prophets say about our own nation? What would they praise/condemn/give advice about, based on what they told Israel? (Use at least 3 direct biblical references in your answer)

Wisdom Literature: Which book's theme do 21st century teens most need to understand better?

Gospels: Which of the three roles of Jesus (Teacher, Healer, or Prophet) personally appeals to you most and why? What are two specific actions you will do in your own life to follow through on these lessons? Use at least two gospel stories to support your answer.

Why it is effective: Students often have trouble putting their thoughts into words and dialoguing those thoughts with others. This forces them to do this. Also, ideally, they can learn something from one of their classmates rather than listening to me all the time.

Attachment (if appropriate): The Rubric will be displayed on the screen. The rubric never changes, so each successive time the students write a response essay, they improve since they know what mistakes they made last time.