CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN HIGH SCHOOL

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WORKING WITH PRIMARY SOURCES

- The biggest complaint that most universities have regarding incoming freshmen is that they lack the “Critical Thinking Skills” necessary to succeed at the university level.
- The question then becomes, “How do we help our students develop mastery of these skills at the high school level?”
- There are, of course, different types of “Critical Thinking Skills.”
- In our CP classes at JPII we begin at the 9th grade level and continue to develop these all the way through high school.
- In this presentation we will look at helping students develop the skills necessary to work with “Primary Source Documents.”
- We start at the basic level and work our way up to a complete analysis of the document.

PRIMARY SOURCE

- SAT Reading #4- The Bhagavad Gita Hindu Epic Poem, 4th Century CE
- This is the 4th document that we use in 9th grade CP World Cultures.
- It is the first one that is that we consider to be a real “Primary Source.”
- in other words, one that is not as much as an article as the first three that we use.
- We use this just after we have discussed the Aryan invasion of the Indus Valley, and looked at the development of the Hindu religion.
- We can also come back to this document as an actual “Primary Source Document” when we discuss the classical Golden Age of India.
- We will look at how this document can be used at the CP level, and how it can be used in a SOAPPS format.

PASSAGE

- Prince Arjuna: Seeing my kinsmen, O Krishna, I am standing here eager for war, but my limits drop-down and my mouth is quite dried up, a burden creeps over my body, and my hairs stand on end; the bow slips from my hand; my skin burns intensely. I see bad omens, and I do not perceive any good that will come from killing my relatives in battle. I do not wish for victory, nor sovereignty, nor pleasures, what’s a sovereignty to us, O Goudinda, what are enjoyments, and even life? Even those, for whose sake we desire sovereignty, enjoyments, and pleasures, are standing here for battle, abandoning life and wealth—teachers, teachers, sons as well as grandfathers, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law, and other relatives. These I do not wish to kill, though they kill me, even for the sake of sovereignty over the three worlds, how much less then for this earth? What joy shall be ours, O Krishna, after killing Dhuraneswartha sons? By killing these lions we shall only become sinners ourselves. Therefore, it is not proper for me to kill any of our kinsmen. For how, Krishna, shall we be happy after killing our own relatives? On the extinction of a family, the external ties of families are destroyed. Those ties being destroyed, impurity predominates over the whole family. In consequence of the predominance of impurity, O Krishna, the women of the family become corrupt, and the women becoming corrupt, O descendant of Vivasvan, interfering of cakes rounded, that interfering necessarily leads the family and its destroyers of the family to hell; for when the ceremonies of offering the bulls of food and water to the ancestors fail, the ancestors fall down to hell.

HIGHLIGHTING AND ANSWERING

- As part of their supply list students are asked to provide 2 Highlighters.
- They will read the passage and highlight what they perceive to be important information in one color and “words” or “phrases” that they do not understand in another color.
- After they do this individually they will work with one or two partners to clarify the information (as a class for the first one or two).
- At the first of the year they will then answer the questions in their group (later individually).
- As the year progresses they will highlight and answer on their own.
- The point value of each question also increases each quarter; 10 points, 12 points, 15 points, and 20 points.
HIGHLIGHTED PORTION PARAGRAPH 1

- **Prince Arjuna:** Seeing my kinsmen, O Krishna, I am standing here eager for war, but I see bad omens, and I do not perceive any good that will come from killing my relatives in battle. I do not wish for victory, nor sovereignty, nor pleasures. Even those standing here for battle, abandoning life and wealth I do not wish to kill, though they kill me. What joy shall be ours, O Krishna, after killing? By killing these felons we shall only become sinners ourselves. It is not proper for us to kill our own kinsmen. For how, Krishna, shall we be happy after killing our own relatives? On the extinction of a family, the eternal rites of families are destroyed. Those rites being destroyed, impiety predominates over the whole family. The women of the family become corrupt, and the intermingling of castes results; leads the family and the destroyers of the family to hell.

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HIGHLIGHTED PORTION PARAGRAPH 2

- **Hindu God Krishna:** He who thinks it to be the killer and he who thinks it to be killed, both know nothing. The self is not born, nor does it ever die, the self is not killed when the body is killed. Having regard to your own duty also, there is nothing better for a Kshatriya than a righteous battle, an open door to heaven! But if you will not fight this righteous battle, then you will have abandoned your own duty and you will incur sin. Warriors who are masters of great chariots will think that you abstained from the battle through fear. Your enemies, too, will speak much about you that should not be spoken. Arise, resolved to engage in battle, prepare for battle, and thus you will not incur sin.

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DEVELOPING QUESTIONS

- For non-AP students questions that require them to use the information that they have highlighted helps them understand the importance of the process.
- After students have started to master the skill of highlighting the questions will become more of a mixture, including recalling, making inferences, analysis, looking for the main idea, and applying prior knowledge to answer questions.
- Using the SAT Readings can also be used to help prepare students to work with Primary Source Documents.
- Using questions based on the SOAPPS format students can learn to apply the skills that they have developed to analyze the documents.

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DEVELOPING QUESTIONS

- Be sure that all questions have 5 Answer Choices with Two that are “harder” to choose from.
- The first few SAT Readings have a question that is used to show students how to search for the Main Idea of a Passage.
- Sample Question- #1. The Main Idea of the above Passage might best be described as which of the following:
  - Prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna are discussing battle plans.
  - OR...
  - Prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna are discussing how a member of the warrior caste should conduct themselves.

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DEVELOPING QUESTIONS

- On the first few SAT Readings there are also questions that ask students to discern relevant facts in the Passage, again with TWO Answer Choices that might seem that they could be correct.
- Sample Question- #2. Prince Arjuna is hesitant to fight because
  - He is a coward and is afraid to die.
  - He is only interested in fighting if he can gain fame and fortune.
  - He is ready to fight because Lord Krishna has assured him of victory.
  - He is not sure that this battle is one that should be fought, because even if he wins bad things might come from the victory.
  - Lord Krishna is telling him not to fight.

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DEVELOPING QUESTIONS

- Other questions that ask the students to draw on outside knowledge, preferably something that is studied at about the same time, are also useful in helping students to develop their Critical Thinking Skills.
- Sample Question- #3. Using this passage and your knowledge of the Hindu religion, which of the following is most likely true:
  - Prince Arjuna is trying to defeat the Aryan invaders.
  - Lord Krishna is a Aryan prince trying to defeat the Harappans.
  - Lord Krishna is trying to convince Prince Arjuna that he must lead his troops into battle or he will incur bad karma.
  - Prince Arjuna is afraid that if he fights this battle he will achieve moksha.
  - Lord Krishna wants victory so he will become the supreme god.
DEVELOPING QUESTIONS

• With younger students, 9th and 10th graders, the use of the SAT Readings is a good way to help them to begin the process of "Analyzing Primary Source Documents" another Critical Thinking Skill.
• In analyzing primary sources we use SOAPPS- Subject, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Point of View, and Speaker.
• Using questions that are worded just a bit differently can enable students to use SOAPPS without being intimidated.
• Using just a couple of questions from each SAT Reading Passage that are tied to SOAPPS will help the students to not only solve the intricacies of SAT Readings, but also learn how to read and understand Primary Source Documents.

The Main Idea of the Passage can often be "seen" as the Subject.

Question- 1. The "Subject" of this document is
• A battle between Prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna.
• A discussion between Prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna about how a Hindu must always carry out the duties of their caste.
• A discussion between Prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna before the epic battle of Kalinga.
• A discussion before the battle between the Aryans and Harappans.
• A look back at the Aryan invasion of the Indus River Valley.

Since Occasion is more than just date, but involves what is taking place at that time and in that location it is important that students have outside knowledge concerning the document.

Question- 2. Using your knowledge of events and the above Passage which of the following is the most likely historical context of the scene taking place in this passage?
• It is taking place during the height of Harappan civilization.
• It is taking place during the Aryan invasion of the Indus Valley.
• It is taking place as the Aryans are being driven from Asia Minor.
• It is taking place as the Aryans are establishing the Caste System in the Indus Valley.
• It is taking place after the Aryans are defeated by the Harappans.

The "A" stands for the "Intended" Audience or who is supposed to actually read this document.

Question- 3. The intended Audience of this document would most likely be
• Those who might be thinking about converting to Buddhism.
• Hindus who might be unsure of why doing one’s duty is so important.
• Harappans who want to become Buddhist.
• Indian traders on their way to China
• Members of the warrior caste who want to gain more land and cattle.

The first P in SOAPPS stands for Purpose, or "What was the goal of the speaker." What did the speaker want to achieve?

Question- 4. The statement that best describes the goal of the author of this document is?
• All Hindus must do their duty or bad karma will result in an increase in the need for Samsara, or rebirth.
• Hindus must kill all who do not follow their religion.
• Hindus may convert to Buddhism without fear of reprisal by other Hindus.
• Cowardice is an excuse not to do your duty.
• The warrior caste may do whatever they want because they are members of the highest caste.

The Second P stands for “Point of View” which can often be a stumbling block for students, but using it in SAT Readings can actually help students begin to acquire this skill.

Question- 5. Which statement best describes the possible the author’s point of view in this Passage?
• The author wants all people to convert to Hinduism so he will gain power and glory.
• The author is a member of the warrior caste who wants glory.
• The author is a Hindu who wants members of all castes to see that doing duty is important so that Aryan society will remain stable.
• The author wants Hindus to revolt so he will gain power.
• The author wants the Harappans to have a fair place in society because he is one.
DEVELOPING QUESTIONS

• The last S stands for Speaker or Author, who actually wrote, or spoke, the document itself; can be easy, or tricky, depending on the document.

• Question- 6. The author of this document is most likely
  • A Buddhist who was writing in a Buddhist Monastery.
  • A prince of Harappan royalty writing to preserve his position.
  • A member of the untouchables or “pariahs” trying to improve their position in life.
  • A warrior-prince trying to explain why he did not want to fight in an upcoming battle.
  • A Hindu leader who was trying to make sure that everyone understood the importance of doing their duty in life.