

Archaeogaming Education in the Classroom Program Overview

Introduction

While many fields in STEM have developed increasingly effective ways to captivate students in the classroom, humanities education, particularly the study of the ancient past, has frequently been cited as lacking in these same “new” or stimulating teaching tools. The subject itself, our ancient past, also presents a unique set of challenges - how do we make antiquity accessible? How can educators portray ancient society in an empathetic and relevant way?

Video games are ubiquitous among current student populations. Educators have generally shied away from using them due to their sometimes graphic nature and attention-absorbing quality. Lost in the shuffle is the enormous educational opportunity they hold. But, if educators are provided the right tools to maximize their engaging aspects in connection with the educational content they contain, video games offer tremendous learning experiences. How can that potential be unlocked?

SASA has created the “Archaeogaming Educational Modules Program” to provide teachers with easy-to-use, engaging resources for bringing the Ancient World into their classrooms in a way that is both familiar and exciting to students today.

How is this different from educational games, what is Archaeogaming, and what is SASA doing with it?

Video games have been recognized as potential educational tools for decades. Studies suggest that video games carry significant benefits, from improving cognitive and spatial skills to increasing problem solving abilities. Numerous educators and education technology professionals have developed educational games aimed at learning specific information, known as “Serious Games.” Unfortunately, these education-targeted games have significantly lower impact on students than do entertainment-oriented video games. This limits their potential for student classroom engagement and for continued learning outside of the classroom. Additionally, the vast majority of video games used in educational contexts support STEM education, while their potential for Humanities education has gone untapped.

In steps “Archaeogaming.” Andrew Reinhard, the “father” of Archaeogaming, described it in his recent book as “a new field that integrates the methods of archaeological discovery and historical thinking in the environment of video games, using interactive and collaborative play

to teach and learn about the past.” This new concept contains vast possibilities for education in the classroom and beyond if properly applied.

SASA has developed a program that utilizes the power of entertainment-oriented video games for humanities education in the classroom. We work off of video games that students play for fun that are designed in lavishly detailed historical settings, such as the *Assassin’s Creed* series. We take content from these games and re-orient it in an educational fashion to produce classroom videos that teachers use in combination with our full suite of support materials. These “modules” purposefully dovetail with curricula across the United States. Already, the educational impact of our modules has scored remarkably high in early implementation with teachers during the 2021-2022 school year. As we continue to create more modules, adapt them to different learning levels, and grow our network of teachers implementing the modules, the positive effects in history classrooms will exponentially increase. Beyond that, students are being indirectly trained to *actually see* the content in the video games they play recreationally. We expect the impact on humanities engagement outside the classroom that this passive learning engenders will be truly staggering.

Program Description

SASA has been innovating this new technological approach to Ancient Studies education since the beginning of 2021. Our first batch of 6 Archaeogaming Educational Modules (AEMs) has been supported by grants from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities and the University of North Carolina’s Humanities for the Public Good initiative. Each AEM we create is an all-in-one single-lesson bundle for teachers. It provides for a holistic, integrated lesson, revolving around a 10-minute video-game-based multimedia lecture, along with interactive class activities and other supporting materials that teachers adapt to their teaching styles.

Our AEMs explore historical concepts and practices such as:

- Socio-economic themes, including religion, politics, warfare, and daily life
- Introduction to archaeology and excavation practices
- Identifying and discussing material culture, such as clothing, pottery, and architecture
- Exploring historical causation and personal agency by utilizing the games’ non-linear narratives

These topics stress the place of contemporary societies within the greater human journey, fostering inclusivity, empathy, and understanding of different cultures and communities.

Project Goals

SASA’s Archaeogaming Project is currently at the end of its initial development phase, in producing initial AEMs and working toward achieving proof of concept in middle school classrooms. Our first two modules have been used by over 50 educators. Early feedback from teachers has been overwhelmingly positive and the full slate of 6 AEMs will be complete for Fall 2022 roll out. Introductory webinars, both synchronous and asynchronous, are currently in development.

Our goal for the second phase in the next two years, 2023-2024, is to create a full series of 16 AEMs in line with the middle school Social Studies curriculum of the majority of US states. This will support a complete quarter of study, allowing teachers to employ this series as their major Ancient Studies teaching approach. The following phase, 2025-2026, will be spent extending and adapting the AEM curriculum to support a one semester high school class and one semester college course.

The Program's Value for SASA and Ancient Studies

Value for SASA:

- Growing our network of Ancient Studies teachers around the country and the world, who will engage students firsthand.
- Placing SASA at the forefront of the educational application of Archaeogaming, as we innovate in the application of educational technology.
- Expanding the study and interest in Ancient Studies beyond the traditional scholarly context, positioning SASA as a nexus between the academic world and young learners.

Value for Ancient Studies:

- Engaging young adult learners with Ancient Studies to draw them to humanities fields.
- Changing public perception of Ancient Studies fields and how history education can be applied inside and outside the classroom.
- Equipping teachers and instructors with tools that make Ancient Studies accessible, through content that is both broad and subject specific.
- Promote instruction methods that position Ancient Studies as an active and engaging subject.

Program Staff



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