

Textura – Telling (Hi)stories

A modular game concept for the promotion of narrative competence in history lessons

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1. About the game

“Textura – Telling (Hi)stories“ is an attempt to develop a game for history lessons which, due to its modular structure, can be used with numerous historical themes in different grades. “Textura” helps:

- to depict historical connections
- to make developments comprehensible
- to focus on specific questions
- to contextualize abstract concepts
- to structure historical narratives
- to support pupils in the development of own stories
- to illustrate the complexity of history

“Textura” is an approach to promoting the narrative competence of pupils in history education while also deepening their content knowledge. Because of its modular structure, “Textura” can be customized to match different thematic approaches or historical periods, so that the game can be used in different school types and classes. Because of its standardized game principle, “Textura” can be used in different grades or with different topics. Once students know the basic principles, time-consuming explanations are no longer necessary and the focus can be placed directly on the topic.

2. Elements of the game

"Textura" consists of a collection of square tiles divided into 2 categories:

- Content cards
- Connection cards

2.1. Content cards

Content cards display the period-specific content of the history lesson. This includes:

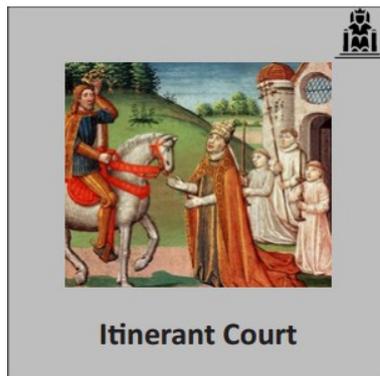
- Persons, groups or other “actors”, e.g. “Bismarck”, “Napoleon”, “Charlemagne”, “USA”
- Events, e.g. "Storming of the Bastille", "Treaty of Verdun", "Kapp Putsch"
- Historical concepts, e.g. "Monarchy", "mercantilism", "Baroque"

The front sides show an actor / event / concept with a matching image.

The back sides provide explanatory information, such as:

- Dates
- Contents of treaties
- Short bios of persons

The example shows the front and back of the content card "Itinerant court".



- The Kings and Emperors in the Holy Roman Empire had no capital but were traveling with their family and court
- Royal palaces and monasteries were used as accomodation.

2.2. Connections

The connection cards are smaller than the content cards. They consist of a set of images and symbols that can be used with all historical periods. They can take on different meanings depending on the context and interpretation of the symbol. The players use them flexibly in order to tell history and develop connections between the content cards. The illustrations on the connection cards refer to different word associations which are central to historical narratives and which can stand for nouns, verbs, or adjectives.



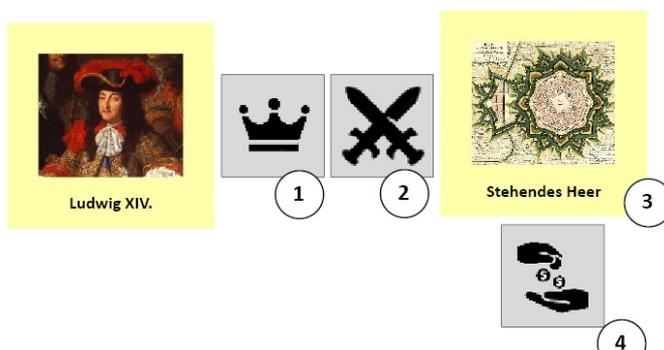
The meaning of the crown, for example, can be “crown”, “king”, or “ruler” but also “ruling,” “governing,” or “royal”. The context and interpretation are determined by the players.

3. The basic gameplay

The basic objective of the game is to link the content cards with the help of the connection cards.

There must always at least one connection card between any two content cards.

While the content cards have a fixed historical content, the meaning of the connection cards is more open. The players form short history narratives using their knowledge and their ability to form abstractions and associations.

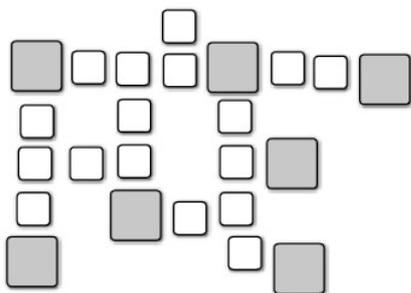


Starting card is „Louis XIV“:

1. A player says: „Louis XIV was King of France.“
2. The next player: "One instrument of his rule was war."
3. The next player explains: "To be constantly prepared for war, he established a standing army."
4. The next player: "The maintenance of the army was very expensive "

Each content card can be the starting point of up to 4 narrative strings. A connection card can be placed by each of the four borders. Starting with “Louis XIV”, for example, it is possible to create links to the content cards “Absolutism”, “Sun King” or “Versailles”, but other links are also possible.

In the course of the game a branched and interweaving structure is created, which shows one possible representation of relations between historical persons, events, institutions etc. These relations are simultaneously structured and visualized. By this, students develop a sense of history and they realize that much of history is interrelated and interwoven and the results of mutual interactions.



Above is an example of a more complex structure that can be created when playing.

4. Application scenarios for different teaching phases

Below are four ideas for lessons, to be presented and used during three different teaching phases: previewing material; processing material; and reviewing, reinforcing, and consolidating material. These teaching ideas are just initial suggestions of different ways to use the cards.

4.1. Previewing material

Lesson idea 1: What do we already know? - Introduction to a new topic

The “Textura” cards can be used to introduce a new topic in history lessons. The pupils are formed into small groups and receive the content cards for the upcoming topic as well as the standard set of connections. Similar to a “MindMap”, the learners now include the terms, persons and events they already know in a network and connect them with the connection cards. In addition, pupils can supplement with their own prior knowledge by using blank cards.

Pedagogical notes

Through discussion by the learners in small groups, their prior knowledge is activated, checked and connected. By photographing the narrative network and then presenting it via interactive whiteboard or projector, a group can share their results. The ideas of the different learning groups can be then compared by the class as whole. At the same time, there are many points to connect back to later, during the unit that follows. Everyday concepts and historical misapprehensions which come out during the introductory lesson can be addressed and focused on in subsequent lessons, with the goal of developing stronger student understanding.

At the end of the teaching unit, one of the structures developed in the introductory lesson can be revisited (see 3 and 4), though it is also possible that learners will create a new "story network." Their oral presentations can show - especially in comparison with the narrative networks from the start - whether and where and how an increase in depth of understanding has taken place.

4.2. Processing material: reading comprehension with "Textura"**Lesson idea 2:**

The pupils read the text in the book. They sit down in small groups and put the content cards in front of them. They scan the text for terms and personal names that are found on the cards. They select these and put the other cards aside. With the help of the content and connection cards, they now create a narrative network summarizing the most important points of the text.

Pedagogical notes

For many pupils, the understanding of texts in history lessons is a considerable problem. The above-described method can help pupils to understand difficult texts better. The text is made accessible in several steps. Through the cards, students visualize and structure the content and thus achieve a better understanding. This playful approach can be used both to support weaker pupils in middle school, as well as to support pupils in secondary school to read more challenging texts.

In the first step, similarly to underlining key words in the text, learners first search for the important terms on the content cards. The limited choice of possible terms on the cards simplifies the first scanning of the text.

In the next step, these terms are connected with the help of the connection cards: an important step towards preparing a summary of the text. In addition to the structuring of the historical narrative, a translation of the text into a different symbolic system takes place, which can then be turned into an oral presentation. While the visualization supports the understanding of the text, the network structure and the double transformation help students to more strongly embed, link and memorize new content. It should be noted, however, that this method - compared to other methods of the text comprehension – represents a very time consuming approach.

4.3. Reviewing, reinforcing, and consolidating material***Didactic-methodical notes (to lesson ideas 3 and 4)***

In order to learn and practice historical storytelling, pupils have to be able to decide between different forms the narrative might take. Therefore they must learn to (re-) tell history; to differentiate relevant from less relevant aspects (in other words, to select information relevant to a particular narrative); name historical actors; and link various historical elements or facts, whether temporally or causally. These skills can be practiced with "Textura" in a playful way. By collaborating in small groups and presenting the results to the other learners, students will not only be motivated with the help of the gamification elements (competition, points, etc.) to retell history again and again, but they will also do encouraged to discuss the interpretation of historical events, their connections and the meaning of individual actors, while justifying their opinions. The first idea especially provides much room for intensive discussions about the "right" linking of the cards to a possible narrative.

The learners discover that there are different but equally possible and plausible ways of depicting history and of linking events and content. They are also encouraged to justify their own interpretations in small groups or to the class as a whole, based on standards of quality and plausibility and – especially in the second idea – to reflect on and critique the interpretations of fellow students.

For teachers, “Textura” creates an instrument that facilitates not only assessing students’ knowledge but also gaining insight into the students’ understanding of complex relationships.

Lesson idea 3: Cooperative story telling - repetition and consolidation

The class is divided into small groups of 5 or 6 students. The game will be played within these small groups. The goal is to use the content cards as nodes and the connection cards as links between them in such a way that it is possible to retell history. When placing a card, at least one correct sentence that connects the two cards together must be formed. However, students may also use several sentences to explain the connection.

One student in each group draws a content card at random and places it as a starting card in the center of the table. All groups start at the same time and have 10 minutes to play. Their task is to use as many content cards as possible. Between any two content cards at least one connection card has to be placed. The group that manages to create the most connections and to correctly represent the resulting history in a historically sensible structure wins.

Lesson idea 4: Competitive storytelling: the fast story (consolidation and repetition)

For this approach, in addition to the “Textura” game elements, students will need a sheet of paper and a pen in order to note the points. The pupils play against each other. All content cards are laid face-down on the table and mixed. Afterwards, a card is drawn randomly and placed on the table as a starting card. After that, all remaining content cards are revealed and placed on the right side, all connection cards on the left side of the table, so that all players can reach the cards. The youngest player starts.

The pupils play clockwise one after the other. Each player has 30 seconds. (One player keeps time.) The aim is for the student to use as many cards as possible and to connect them meaningfully and correctly. When putting down a card a player has to make at least one sentence that links the two cards with each other. They may also make more than one sentence. The player gets one point for each connection card, two points for each content card.

When the 30 seconds are over, the group discusses whether the player has explained something incorrectly. The decision is made by a majority vote of all players. Should the majority decide that connection was incorrect, the corresponding connection card is removed. If as a result of this two content cards lie directly next to each other, the newly placed content card is also removed. The player loses the relevant points.

If the majority finds that the statement was correct then the player who has questioned the statement loses a point. However, you can not have less than zero points. The game ends when only 3 or fewer content cards remains on the table. The player with the most points wins.

4.4. Transfer

Lesson idea 5: think and retell history counterfactually

In an existing structure created by learners or teachers a content card or a connection is removed and replaced by another. Now the class considers which additional cards would have to be changed and in which places the history would have been different if the starting condition had been different.

For example, the conflict between the US and the USSR after World War II which led to the division of Europe and the "Cold War": What would have been the result if there had not been a break between the Allies, and what consequences might this have had for German as well as European history?

Pedagogical notes

In history lessons, it is not customary to tell history counterfactually. However, the method in the above teaching idea starts from a precise intervention at a particular point in the narrative. Through the cards the structure of the narrative, and thereby the significance of the intervention point, can be seen. This process allows the teacher to highlight the importance of individual events, alliances, actors, or constellations of actors. The key point is that learners will be enabled to recognize and justify possible effects which are result from this one changed condition. This requires an extensive knowledge and a deep understanding of the relationships, something that can be practiced with the help of this methodological approach.

In this approach it is also possible not only, with a strong learning group, to exchange a card and to discuss with the class as a whole the consequences for the remainder of the structure, but also to work in small groups, in which one card is changed and all possible further consequences are depicted by means of changes in the network structure.

5. Structuring the game material

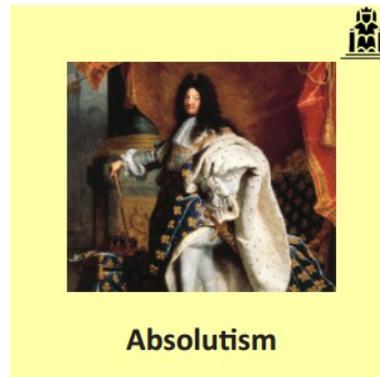
The game material is divided into content cards and connection cards. The content cards are divided into sets, each covering epoch-specific subjects. These sets, in turn, are subdivided thematically into several categories, which are located in the various subareas of the study of history.

5.1. Epochs

Epochs are temporal divisions, for example:

- “Middle Ages”
- “Baroque and Absolutism”
- “National Socialism”

The affiliation of a content card to an epoch is symbolized by different background colors, as in the following examples from the epochs “Middle Ages” and “Absolutism”.



5.2. Thematic categories

Thematic categories are understood as aspects of history that can be found in every epoch.

Categories could for example include: _

- Power (politics, military, abstract ideas such as "absolutism")
- Economy (trade, currencies, economic systems, for example "mercantilism")
- Society (cohabitation, roles, nutrition, everyday life)
- Ideas (religion, philosophy)
- Technology (inventions, tools, machines)
- Art (music, architecture, etc.)

The individual categories are represented by small symbols on the cards:



The previously given example "Itinerant Court" supplemented by the symbol for the category "power". The card is now assigned to the period "Middle Ages" (background color) and category "power".

Thanks to this modular design "Textura" offers many customizable teaching and learning scenarios. By selecting the content cards:

- a thematic and temporal focus can be set, e.g. "Power in the Middle Ages"
- thematic longitudinal approaches are possible, for example economic or gender history
- the transition between two periods can also be taken into consideration, e.g. from Middle Ages to Modern Times
- the adaptation of the game to particular curriculum and content is possible, since individual cards can be selected or put aside. For additional content, blank cards are included in the game, so that the teachers or learners can create their own cards if necessary.

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