

## **Dear Bess: What is Truman's tone when he writes to Bess about major world events compared to the tone used in classified or unclassified documents?**

### **Lesson Procedures**

#### **Step 1: Setting the Stage**

Lesson Hook: Propose this situation to students: You got caught cheating on a test in math class. Before class you wrote answers on the back of your hand, and were peeking at the answers. The teacher caught you and sent you to the principal's office.

With a shoulder partner, brainstorm with your friends how you would explain the situation to your parents. Share out and brainstorm possible answers on the board in T-chart format.. Then, have students explain to their shoulder partner how they would explain the situation to a friend. Share out and brainstorm possible answers on the board. Once these have been shared, ask students why they think they may have explained the situation to their parents and friend differently or not at all. Explain that sometimes we may alter our tone or story depending on who we're sharing information with.

Continue with telling students that they will be reading a series of letters written by President Harry S. Truman to his wife, Bess, during major events of his presidency and then looking at documents to Truman's advisors about the same events. They will examine and analyze how Truman communicates with his wife during major presidential events.

Ask: What is tone, and why might an author use changes in tone to impact his/her writing? Write the definition of tone on the board, and have students copy it into their journals.

#### **Step 2: Making Real-World Connections**

Have students think of a time in their own life when they've explained a situation differently to two people. Have them answer the following questions in their journals:

1. What was the situation?
2. Who did you tell?
3. What did you tell each person?
4. Why did you tell each person about the situation differently?
5. What was your tone from one person to the other?

Since these might be personal situations, students will not be required to share out loud, but may if they choose. This would be a great time for the teacher to do this activity as well and share his/her situation with the class.

### Step 3: Framing the Inquiry

1. Students should restate the inquiry question in their own words, establishing exactly what it is asking. Students might work with a neighbor to predict what possible perspectives might be available on the question.
2. In addition to the framing question, students should generate a list of questions that they need to know in order to proceed. These questions should include background knowledge they anticipate needing or related questions that they find interesting. Students will use these questions to help guide how they examine the sources and what additional resources they might request.

Essential Question:

*“What is Truman’s tone when he writes to Bess about major world events compared to the tone used in classified and unclassified documents?”*

3. Together as a class, brainstorm the kind of sources that might be important to examine to answer the question. This lesson includes several types of sources but that doesn’t need to limit instruction to just those sources.
4. Use the background essay (and other sources if desired) to give students context for the inquiry. Consider the following strategies to make this effective:
  - a. The students or teacher might read the essay aloud, establishing the main point of the reading.
  - b. Revisit the question. How does this information change or expand our understanding of what the question is asking? How does it affect our initial understanding?
  - c. Students should re-read the essay individually, looking for information that might provide answers or clues to their original questions. Students might be asked to record their questions and answers in a class notebook.
  - d. Other activities might involve:
    - i. Opening up the document- research topics that are new or confusing.
    - ii. Using context to infer meaning of new words/phrases
    - iii. Compare the essay to other sources (textbook, articles) on the same topic.
  - e. Create a graphic organizer that might help organize evidence collected from the sources.

### Step 4: Go to the Sources

**Note- each source should be looked at separately for information that will help reveal perspectives on the question. Consider the following steps with each source, understanding that students will need less assistance as they repeat the process.**

1. All sources have a story. They were produced by a person at a time and place in history. The instructor should model how to analyze these circumstances in order to predict their influence on the content of the source.
  - a. Students should be in groups, and the teacher will distribute a newspaper heading for one of five events to each group. The group should analyze the newspaper heading and brainstorm potential questions that the heading may generate.
  - b. Distribute the background paragraph and source set that accompanies the event.
2. Students should view sources like a detective looks at a crime scene. Each source should add information towards the questions established in step 1. To support student success consider the following steps:
  - a. Students will participate in a jigsaw activity in which they will examine a specific event and headline within an “expert” group. They will read and examine the documents, and then answer the document questions that correspond with the event.
  - b. Students will then return to their home groups and report on their findings. They should discuss the event, the answers to their questions, and what they noticed about the tone.

### **Step 5: Reviewing the Evidence**

**Note- By reviewing sources, students should have gathered many ideas that are relevant to the question. This step allows learners to look at this evidence and decide what it actually reveals. What is the best interpretation based on the evidence?**

1. Go back to Step 1 and review the possible interpretations of the answer predicted by the class. How many of those panned out? What additional interpretations were exposed through the rest of the learning?
2. In groups, students should use evidence collected to identify multiple or competing interpretations to the question.
3. Direct students to create a [graphic organizer](#) the clearly reveals the multiple perspectives, components of main ideas of the evidence. All important evidence collected in the sources should be accounted for.
4. Facilitate a more open socratic seminar using framing questions to allow students to share their thinking on the topic. Points to highlight during this socratic seminar are:
  - How the tone and content of Harry’s letters to Bess often change quickly from political to personal.
  - The fact that Harry sometimes omits top-secret information from his letters to Bess.
  - The honesty with which Harry describes certain events, places, and people, when he is writing to Bess.
  - Consider using [thinking stems](#) to provide students with language to help focus their comments and questions.
5. At the end of this step students should have the information they need to write a letter demonstrating their knowledge of tone to different audiences. There are many resources

available to help students construct this statement so use the strategy you like best or consider [this strategy](#). Even if the ultimate product of learning may not be a writing activity, the thesis should still be written to guide what students say or produce related to the question.

## **Step 6: Reviewing the Sources and Communicating a Conclusion**

**Note-** By communicating an answer to the framing question students are accomplishing several thinking tasks at once. The teacher does not have to assess everything a student does but should be aware of the importance to model and/or provide quality examples so that this format doesn't get in the way of students sharing what they have learned from the documents. If you have been working specific types of writing or speaking, consider working this step around those goals.

1. Provided in the materials for this lesson is a resource entitled *Answering the Question*. In determining the product of learning for this lesson consider the following criteria.
  - a. What is the skill level of my students?
  - b. What literacy goals can I support with this product?
  - c. Does the format of the product allow students to communicate a claim and use evidence from the sources to support it?
  - d. Can students have a say in what they produce to show their learning?
  - e. Do all students need to have the same product?
2. Construct a rubric for the product, careful to assess student proficiency towards your class learning goals. A sample rubric is provided following this step.
3. Provide students time to create their initial product in class allowing collaboration as needed. Consider having students get feedback from peers at multiple points in this process. When soliciting feedback from a peer a student should first identify what he/she would like help with, then be prepared to ask for help and input.
4. Before collecting student work, consider having students self-assess their work using the rubric. This is an important step that will help them take more ownership in their ultimate grade.
5. Students will be given the following scenario as President Truman:
  - a. **You are president of the United States. You have just been informed by your top military advisor that a foreign country is planning to invade US territory and use nuclear weapons on American citizens. You have had off-record conversations with your family regarding the possibility of this attack, and feel that you need some advice about how to proceed. You have been instructed that you write to only one person asking for advice. You must choose to write to either a family member or a military or State Department advisor.**

## Answering the Question

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Truman Presidential  
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*Because document-based activities begin with a question, the most natural way to assess students' learning is to have them answer the question. Typically this involves structuring and organizing evidence in order to complete a formal essay writing. While the informational essay is certainly an important skill in a social studies classroom there are also many other valid ways to have students create well-reasoned explanations based on available evidence. Consider the following options for students to answer the guiding question.*

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1. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the tone used by Harry Truman when he wrote home to Bess regarding important presidential, political, and world events. Students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of when and why Truman either included or left out specific details of events, and how he either covertly or overtly described events to Bess. Students will also show an understanding of the tone used in political/military documents and memos either written by Truman, or written to Truman, and compare how this tone differs from the letters to Bess.

2. Students will presented with the scenario:

**You are president of the United States. You have just been informed by your top military advisor that a foreign country is planning to invade US territory and use nuclear weapons on American citizens. You have had off-record conversations with your family regarding the possibility of this attack, and feel that you need some advice about how to proceed. You have been instructed that you may write to only one person asking for advice. You must choose to write to either a family member or a military or State Department advisor regarding the situation.**

3. Using what they have learned from reading Truman's letters to Bess, as well as classified and declassified documents during Truman's presidency, students will create a letter discussing the possible invasion. Depending on who they choose to write to, they will use either more or less detailed information, and will adjust their tone accordingly.

	<b>Tone</b>	<b>Craft</b>	<b>Content</b>
<i>Advanced</i>	Advanced understanding of tone is demonstrated throughout letter.	Appropriate elements of a letter are present and student uses punctuation to enhance the letter.	Advanced use of the current event is used to enhance the tone of the letter.
<i>Proficient</i>	Appropriate tone is used throughout the letter based upon the chosen audience.	Appropriate elements are present and used throughout the letter.	Appropriate use of the content is used throughout the letter.
<i>Basic</i>	Appropriate tone is used in some parts of the letter, but is lacking in other parts.	While some elements of a letter are present, there may be elements that are missing, and the letter contains some grammatical/punctuation/spelling errors.	The student uses the current event in their letter, but some information may be incorrect or inappropriately used.
<i>Below Basic</i>	Student does not demonstrate an understanding of using appropriate tone in their letter.	General elements of a letter are not present and grammatical/punctuation/spelling errors detract from the letter.	The content of the letter is irrelevant to the scenario posed to students.