Teaching Global Studies With Interactive Text Games

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What are interactive digital text games?

In most common form, a c**hoice-based branching narrative** in the style of a "Choose-Your- Own Adventure" story

Authoring software for interactive texts enables designers to incorporate features suc as **variables, conditional logic (if/then statements), and randomness**. These elements make possible **more varied or complicated links between choices** and associated outcomes.

Using the interactive digital text format, game designers can create a variety of single-player simulations and games that are choice-based in nature, and can depart from the branching narrative structure (for example, the Axelrodia and Conflict in Cygnia example games mentioned in this presentation)

Games are published as HTML documents, and can be opened in any browser, posted on websites, or shared via online course management system.

Most well-known and accessible authoring tool: **Twine** (www.twinery.org). Free and cross-platform; downloadable and web-based versions.
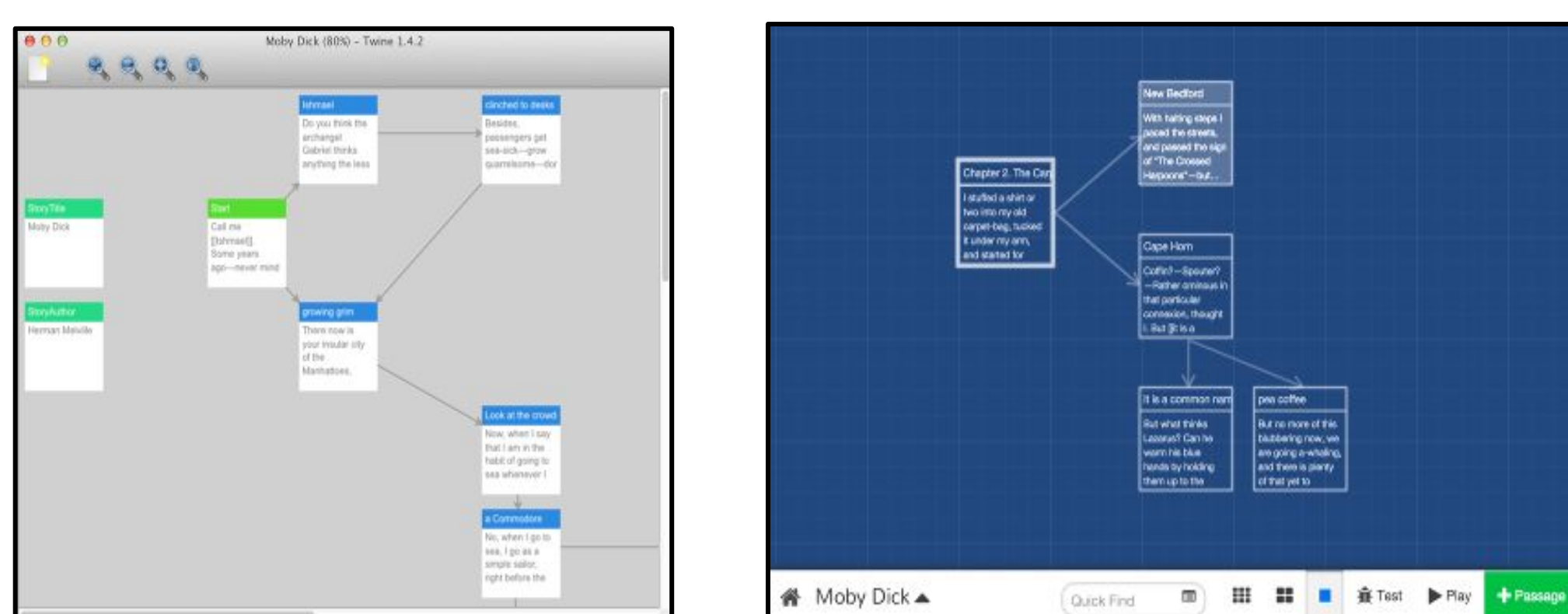
Using Twine or similar software allows teachers with **no programming experience** to **easily design and implement short digital games and simulations**.

(screens of Twine interface from www.twinery.org)

Why use interactive texts in teaching about world politics and international affairs?

Beyond the commonly hypothesized benefits of simulations as a whole, the use of an interactive text game may be an effective tool for teaching about certain ideas that are fundamental to the study of world politics. These ideas include:

Choice - The strategic calculations behind those choices made by political leaders and actors, and the manner in which existing structures shape available choices and potential outcomes.

Leadership - The challenges and dilemmas faced by leaders, and the impact of political leaders and their decisions on political realities

**Indeterminacy** - the nature and sources of uncertainty in political outcomes.

More generally, as an alternative or supplement to more traditional methods, the format of an interactive text game may provide a useful means of promoting:

Factual knowledge -students may be more motivated to learn factual information about unfamiliar topics and unfamiliar countries if such information necessary to inform choices within a in game-based structure.

Theoretical Understanding - Experiencing theories of politics through making decisions can make theoretical principles more comprehensible, as well as illuminate the links between general theories and specific facts.

**Example games can be found at: vaccaro.neocities.org**

Example game: *Mandela's Choices*
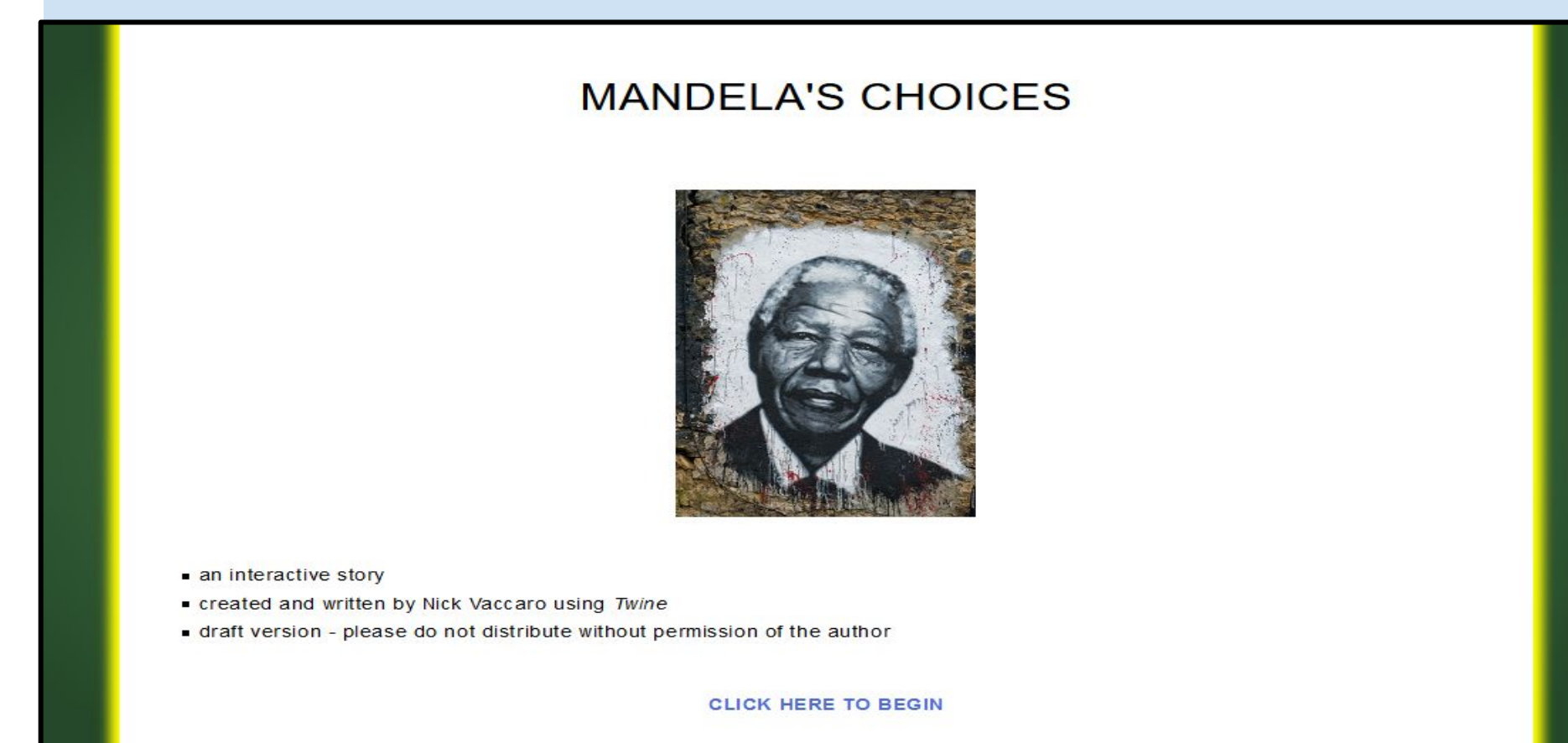
An interactive narrative based on **real-life choices faced by Nelson Mandela** in his promotion of democratization and racial equality in South Africa from 1985 to 1994.

Decisions involve balancing the demands of Mandela's allies (for black majority rule and the end of apartheid) with the preferences and fears of Mandela's adversaries and negotiating partners within the apartheid regime.

Key issues include: whether or not to support **violent opposition**, **whether to pursue negotiations** and what sort of **demands to make** of opposing leaders, what extent of **power-sharing or deviations from pure majority rule** to accept in a new constitution.
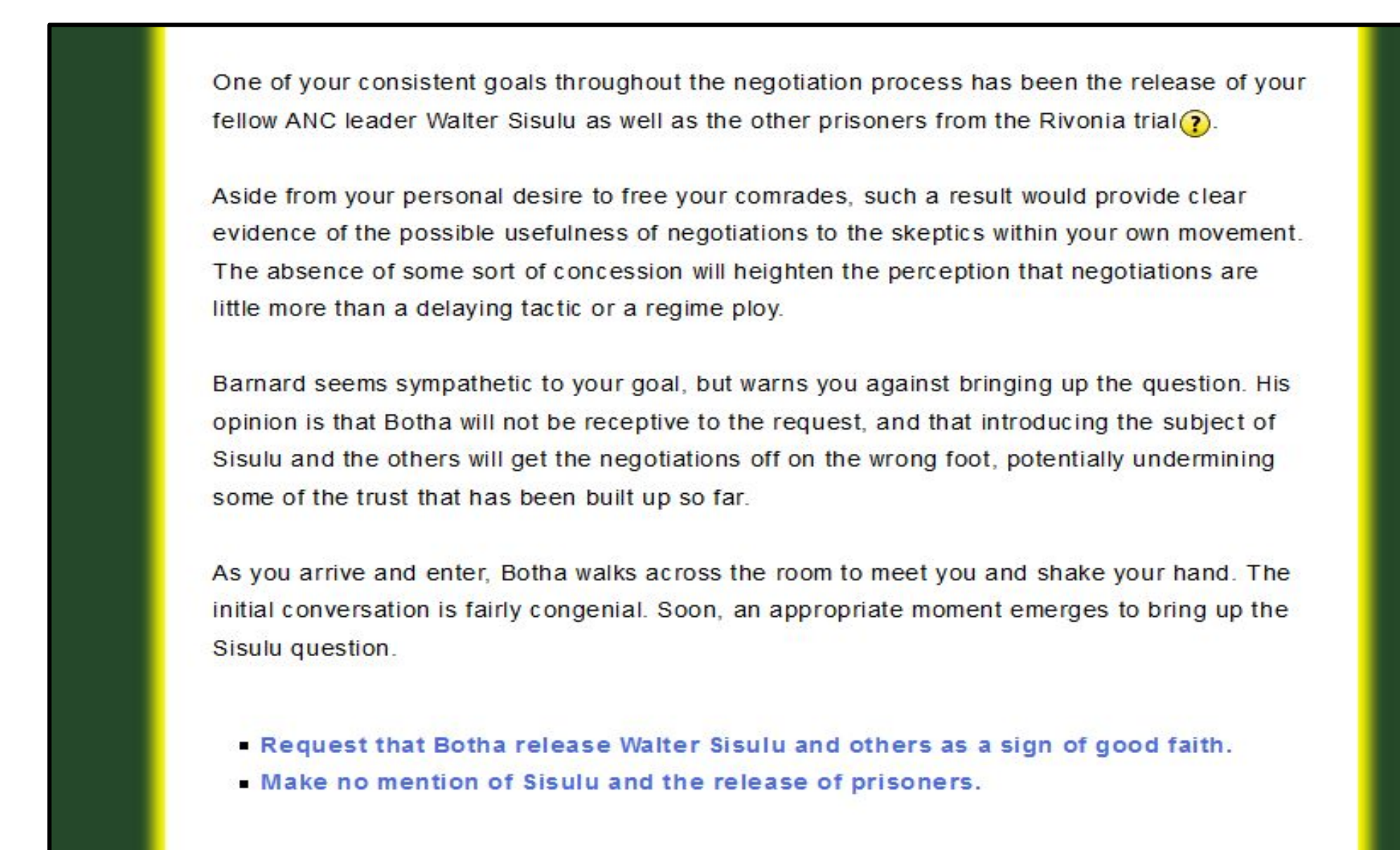

STUDENT SURVEY - INTRODUCTORY COMPARATIVE GOVERNMENT COURSE, FALL 2014:
Playing the game helped:
A. build factual knowledge of the time period and events (4.18)
B. understand the nature of political divisions and obstacles to democracy in South Africa (4.05)
C. understand the importance of the role played by Nelson Mandela and his decisions (4.47)

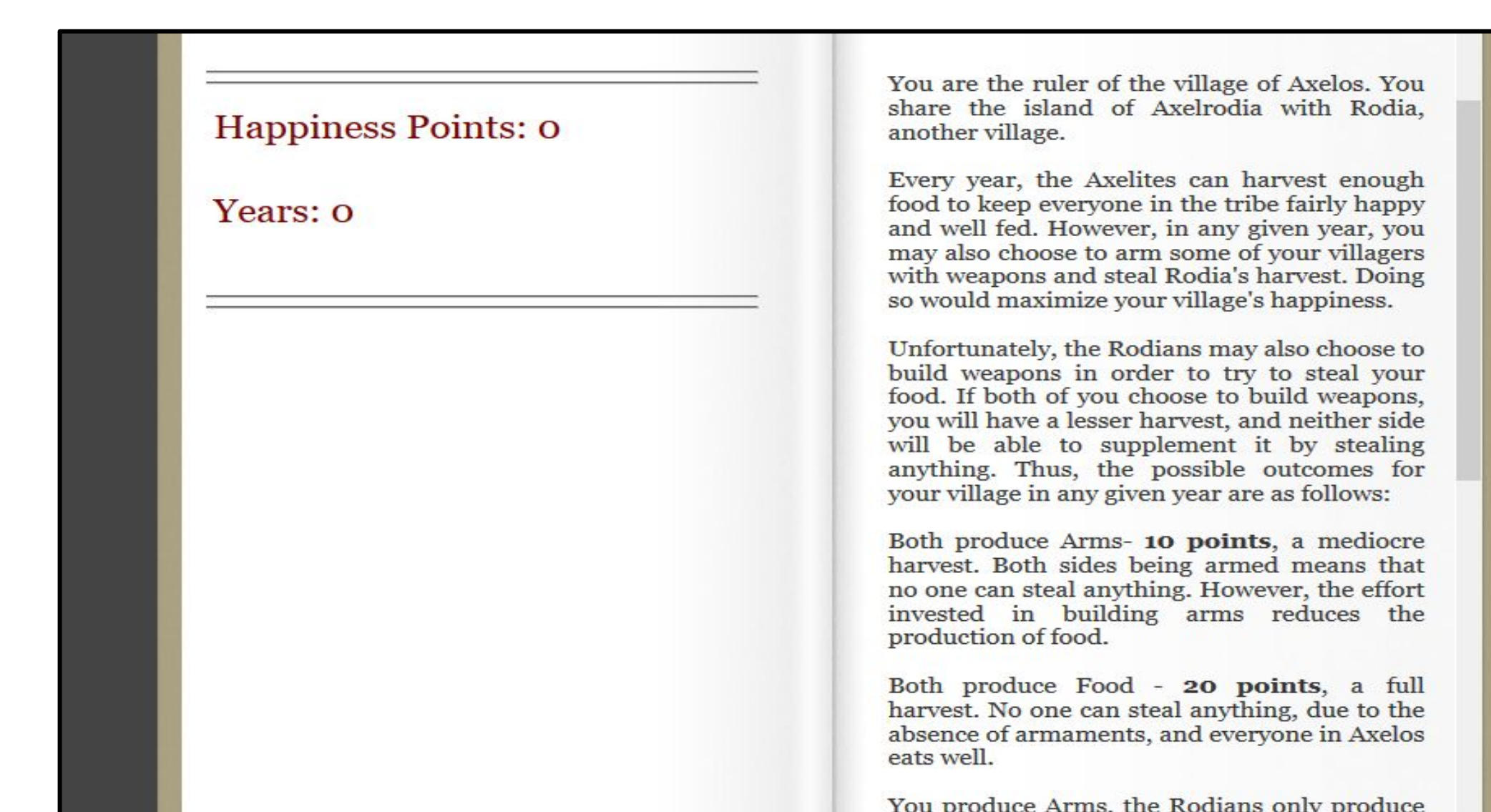1- Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3. Not Sure 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree;   n= 54
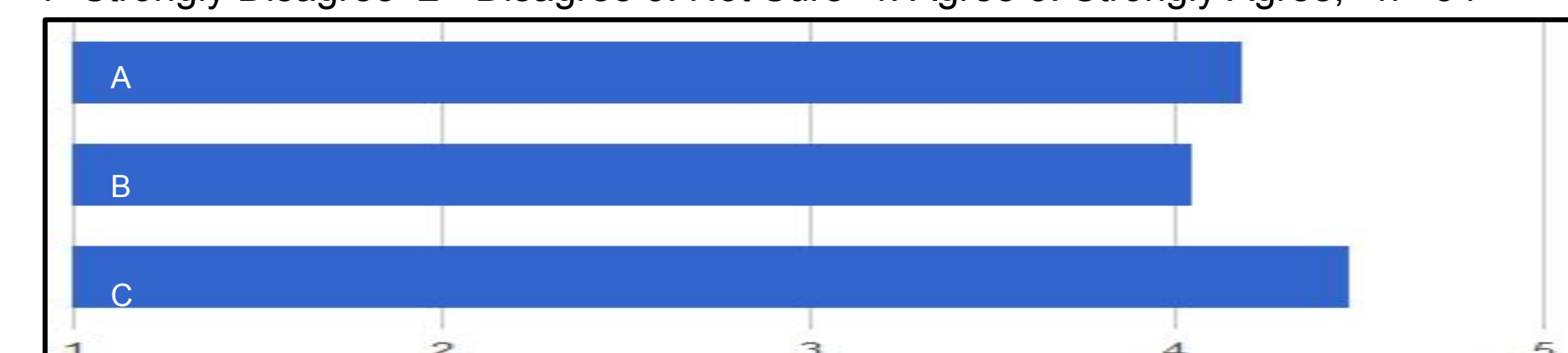
Other Interactive Text Games

***Conflict in Cygnia*-** A simulation of constitution-making in an ethnically divided, imaginary country
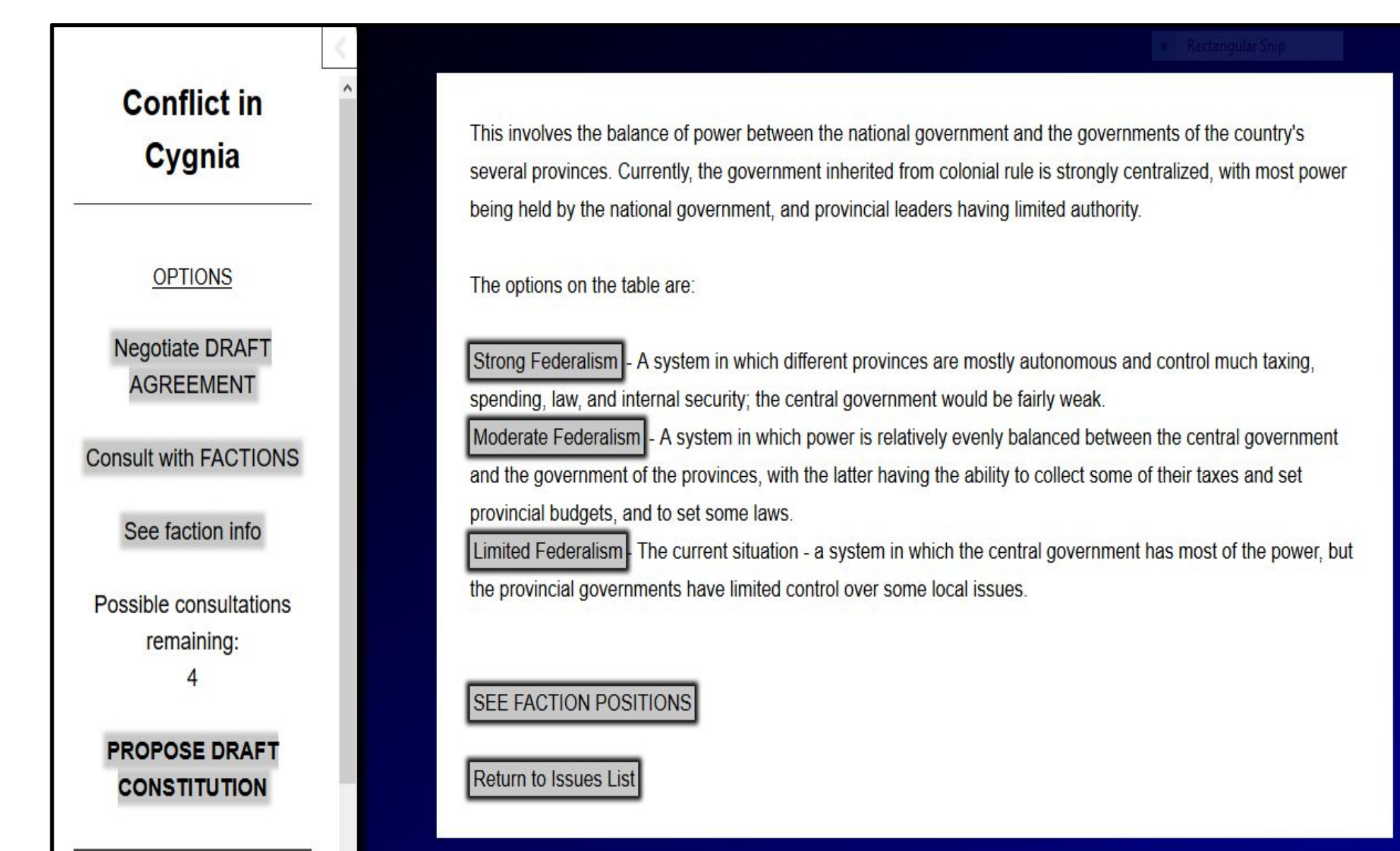
***Axelrodia*-**An interactive text version of the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma game (a central concept in studies of international relations)

***1962: Cuban Crisis* (in progress)-**A simulation of decisions made by John F Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis, including a broader presentation of Cold War history and key events