

# **Responsibilities of Peer Mentors and Introductory Faction Advisories**

Reacting to the Past classes are different from most classes; one of their most unusual features is the central role of student peer mentors. Your first task is to send an introductory email to your "faction" about one week before the game begins; you will need to consult with your instructor about this. More details on your introductory email appear below. Your chief responsibility is to work with the students who are playing the game and the course instructor. This is not an easy job--but most peer mentors find it fascinating and fun. I hope you do, too.

## **General Behavior & Guiding Your Faction**

You have been chosen as a peer mentor because you have demonstrated a capacity to lead. But in Reacting, remember that your leadership is to be unobtrusive; your "students"—not you—should shine.

When you're in the classroom, you may wish to try to keep your conversation with students in "game mode" as much as possible. Often you will need to pass notes to your students to help them navigate the strategy of the game as it unfolds. That is fine, but try not to undermine the authority of the instructor as you do so.

Your goal as a peer mentor is to guide the students—some of whom may be unprepared at the beginning—into their roles and the game, under the direction of the instructor/Gamemaster. You will mostly work with a faction and you should want them to do well. But understand that you, the other peer mentors (if others are assigned to your course), and the Gamemaster are working as a team. Your goal is not for your faction to win, but for the entire class to have a satisfying Reacting experience. Thus while you should offer suggestions to your factions, and especially alert them to pertinent passages in central texts, be careful not to play the game for them. You may need to watch silently as your charges walk into a rhetorical minefield. As we all have learned: often we learn more from our failures than our successes.

Remember, too, that the instructor/Gamemaster is the sole determinant of what rules will be applied and how they will be applied. "Your" class may have done things differently; that is irrelevant. The GM is the ultimate arbiter of the rules. Nevertheless, the GM will be interested in your thoughts and suggestions, which are best conveyed discreetly. Also alert your GM to potential problems. If your faction is planning a goofy strategy that might screw up the game, let the GM know (and perhaps gently nudge "your" team back on track).

Try to chat individually with each of your faction members; if the group is not bonding, perhaps you should encourage them to meet together at the MLC for a coffee and a strategy session. (Or perhaps the group is not bonding because you are doing everything for them.) You know you have done your job well when your group is working well, participating animatedly, and you can sit unobtrusively in the corner.) But if one of your group is silent or disaffected, try to find out why. If he hasn't read the material, try to show some pertinent passages that might inform his remarks; if he's disgruntled for some other reason, let the GM know.

## **Sending an Introductory Email to Your Faction/Students**

The week before the game begins, it is often useful to **send introductory guidance to your factions via email**. Consult with your instructor about this and about the time; if you decide to send an email, copy the GM on it. Your notes should be brief—simply introduce yourself, encourage your charges to begin the readings, perhaps give some strategy advice “in character.” You were selected as peer mentor because you have proven adept as a communicator and leader. So your communications to “your” faction(s) should convey your distinctive style and personality. Please understand that your students—especially at the beginning of the game—will be confused, nervous and probably unprepared. Your job is to help them over that threshold so they will become engaged with the game.

*ILLUSTRATIVE INTRODUCTORY E-MAIL ADVISORY* (Note: the following is merely illustrative.)

**For: Radical Democrat faction in *The Threshold of Democracy: Athens in 403 B.C.E.***

Subject: Long Live Pericles, or, Radical Democracy Forever!

Dear Radical Democrats,

My name is Z. I’ve been assigned to help you play the Reacting to the Past game in this class. We have much to do in the coming weeks. Athens is in trouble. Despite the brilliant leadership of General Thrasybulus (I DO look forward to meeting him), Athens is burdened with the legacy of 29 years of war and ultimately defeat to Sparta. Thrasybulus and our democratic army may have driven away the Spartans and most of the Thirty Tyrants, but the enemies of the democracy remain at large. People like that pompous windbag, Socrates, who claims that we’re all a bunch of dunces, or the wealthy oligarchs, who say they’re too poor to feed their slaves. Ha! We must prove them wrong!

To that end, I encourage you to read as much as possible in the game packet. Try sampling Socrates’ DANGEROUS notions in the *Republic*. You may wish to bring to the Assembly highlighted passages that we can use to weaken his case and those of other opponents of Athenian democracy.

I look forward to meeting you. We’ll have a faction meeting at *agora* at the beginning of the game. If you have any questions about the game, let me know. You can reach me at xxxxx.

[Your name and email]

(Again, be sure to send a copy to your GM).