Soft Power in the Early Republic: The U.S. and France

Learning Activities

Day 1:

Task 1: First, show the whole class the recommended portion of the video clip. Then, facilitate a class discussion around the guiding questions. Here are some potential answers:

1. Nye says, “Power is the ability to influence other to get what you want.”
2. Sticks: threats and coercion

Bribes: payment as a form of inducement

Soft power: attract so that both parties want the same thing

1. Top: Military relations (U.S. is most powerful.)

Middle: Economic relations (U.S. balanced with others such as China, Europeans, etc.)

Bottom: Transnational relations (No one is in charge. Includes issues like drug trade, transmission of infectious diseases, and transnational terrorism.)

Task 2: Next, divide the class into small groups of approximately 5 students. Give each student a copy of the first chapter of Nye’s book. Tell them that they do not have to read the entire packet, but they should look through it together for more detail on what soft power is. Then they should use a combination of quotes from the chapter and their own words to create a DETAILED definition of soft power that the group can agree on unanimously. When all groups are finished, they can choose a representative to share out their definition. As the teacher, you can facilitate at the front of the room and use a combination of all groups’ work to come up with ONE class definition of soft power. You might want to encourage students to use some key words from Nye’s book such as “co-opt”, “attraction”, “preferences”, and “persuasion”.

Homework: Finally, when explaining the homework, show students that there are six different reliable news websites they can search. It might be worth reminding them that they will not get results by entering “soft power” as a search term. They may have to read through a few articles before they find one that fits the assignment.

Day 2:

Task 1: Ask students to stand around the room in a big circle with their homework sheet and article from last night. Explain that only the “Top 3” examples of soft power will get to stand in the middle of the circle, so their job is going to be to persuade the class that their example is the best one. Students can be removed from the center of the circle and replaced by a better example during the process. Remind them that they are being challenged to use *soft power* to *persuade* their classmates to be *attracted* to their article as one of the “Top 3”. Once the “Top 3” have been decided, have the class return to their seats to record the information about each.

Task 2: Divide the class into 5 groups and assign each group one of the documents that is linked on the website. Display the guiding questions on the screen or board at the front of the classroom. Encourage groups to read through their assigned document together and then start discussing the answers to the questions. The discussion is the most important part of this task, but if you want your students to take notes encourage them to do so. Float through the groups and ask leading questions if students need help getting started or need reminders about some of the event surrounding the documents (i.e. American Revolution, impressment of American merchant sailors, French Revolution). See the Annotated Bibliography for information on how each document is an example of the use of soft power.

Homework: At the end of class, get the attention of the whole class to explain the homework. Show students where they can find the worksheet and encourage them to put down some of the ideas that were discussed in their groups in more detail. They should add quotes from their documents as evidence. Inform them that they will use what they record for homework to create a video project in class on Day 3.

Day 3:

Task 1: Ask students to return to the groups they were in at the end of Day 2. Using the homework worksheet that they completed, they will work together to develop the script for an interview. Encourage them to watch the video clip from Day 1 again to see how an interview should be structured. Provide them with an Interview Template worksheet so that they can write out their script together. Be sure to float through to groups to make sure they are providing the correct historical context, properly introducing the interview subject, clearly explaining how their document is an example of soft power using the key words referenced earlier (i.e. persuade, attract, and preference), and integrating evidence from their document.

Task 2: Instruct students to assign the roles described on the website. If a group has only 3 or 4 members, some roles may be combined. You may want to make arrangements for students to be able to use spaces around the school outside of your classroom for filming such as the library, a TV studio, conference rooms, empty classrooms etc. Groups will likely require more than one class period to write AND record their interview. You, as the teacher, may decide if you want to give them a fourth class period or ask them to do the recording on their own outside of school. You may also opt to use an additional class period to allow student to watch other groups’ interviews and facilitate class discussions about the differences between each situation and each document. The recommended rubric does not have point values. Use your own discretion and grading system to assign point values to each element.