

RPGs in the Classroom, by Carrie Biermann

As a professor of 10 years at Temple University, I've discovered that there's more than one way to teach a text. When teaching Machiavelli's *The Prince*, I realized that there were ways that were more concrete – and more fun – to engage the rules and realities of the author's world and ideas. RPGs were just becoming an important part of my life, and I've found that much of the story and development, as well as the structure and rules, can help one engage more fully than just reading words on a page. So, I invented a classroom RPG that would let my undergrad college students challenge each other as they learned. I've since gone on to create other curricula using RPG and LARP for other age groups and texts, but as my first try, this one is among my favorites. This game is heavily influenced by both Sid Meier's early Civilization games (I once conquered the world at the level of muskets!) and my excellent friend Jen Deslaurier, who introduced me to RPGs (and Indian food) in the first place.

The Prince RPG: What Would Machiavelli Do?

Purpose: to give the students an interactive experience of national relations using Machiavelli's principles, and to refine their understanding of such principles, resources, military, and how they relate to modern international politics. The students are to research and formulate a set of principles from *The Prince* as to how a Prince must/ought to govern, according to Machiavelli's advice. They use these principles to govern their "nation's" actions as they develop their own nation and interact with the other two team's nations.

Materials: Chalkboard & chalk, 10-sided die, and all students have their Machiavelli textbooks

Examples of Some Machiavellian Principles:

1. It is better to be feared than loved
2. Power is more important than virtue or justice – apparent cruelties and vice may be essential to maintaining stability and power
3. Have a willingness to imitate the behavior of great rulers
4. Have a dedication to the art of war
5. Be prudent with your resources
6. Have the wisdom to seek advice and counsel only when needed
7. He who causes another to become powerful ruins himself
8. Force is the most effective and efficient means to do something
9. Benefits must be given gradually so they are appreciated more, but harm should be inflicted all at once, so as to be quickly forgotten. Neither should be viewed as the answer in desperate times.
10. Mercenary forces are for hire – militia is made up of nationals. Mercenaries fight for money, and cannot be trusted. Militias fight for their own families and homes, and can be trusted.

Step 1: National Awareness

Divide the class into three “nations”, and choose who will be the “Prince” for that nation. Then choose, randomly, three or four “nobles” and dub the rest “citizens”. **The only modes of communication are citizens to nobles, and nobles to Prince, and back again. Citizens cannot speak directly to the Prince.**

YOUR NATION’S NAME:

PRINCE:

NOBLES:

CITIZENS:

Step 2: The Object of the Game

Students are to guide their nations through certain scenarios based on “What Machiavelli Would Do”. On their turn, a group’s actions can be challenged if another group suspects that it is **not** what Machiavelli would do. They **MUST** back it up by using text from their books. The group being questioned must defend their action **ALSO** using text from their book. The professor makes a judgment as to the best argument. If the group being challenged wins the dispute, they can continue on with their actions. If the group doing the questioning wins, the actions of the first group are less effective in attaining their object by half (for example, if using militia to attack an enemy, the militia unit would cause only half the damage to the enemy than they normally would), **OR** based on a roll of the dice, if the nation is willing to gamble.

Step 3: Game Play

Each nation starts out with the same demographics.

Gold	Military	Land	Populace	State Health
100 units	1 Militia	100 acres	Happy (100 units out of 100)	Total of all unit points added together

Each nation can buy or build the same things once per turn – but **ANY CHANGE COSTS** – in gold, happiness, land, etc.

Things you can buy:

Granary – costs 10 gold units, monthly brings in 20 gold units.

Temple – costs 20 gold units, monthly brings in 30 happiness units

Settler Unit – costs 5 gold units, monthly brings in 10 units (by moving them into conquered territory, or putting them to work in your own land)

Mercenary Unit – costs 5 gold units, and 5 attack points - can plunder other nations when at war, for a random (dice roll) amount of gold units. If not paid for two turns, they attack one of your own villages.

Militia Unit – costs 3 gold units, and 3 attack points - after winning 2 battles, becomes twice as effective

Spy Unit – costs 10 gold units, can bring in one piece of secret information. Must buy new spy for each piece of information.

Diplomat Unit – costs 8 gold units, can negotiate to calm hostile situations. Must buy new diplomat for each act of negotiation.

Trade Unit – costs 15 gold units, can negotiate trade routes for supplies. Can be attacked as a military target, or used to supply your own military. Brings in 30 gold units monthly.

Technological Advancement – costs 100 gold units, and is based on a choosing a card from the Tech Card stack. How this is used depends on what the card reads, and as the professor chooses.

A “month” is when each nation has had a turn. (At that point, each nation gets the income from any granaries or settlers they have, to increase their gold treasury.) In each turn, the nations can 1) buy and build things, and 2) perform an action, such as send a diplomat, invade a territory, etc.

A roll of the dice determines how many acres are lost to an invader, or how many military units are lost, assuming the invader wins the battle. Battles are won by pitting total attack points against each other. For example, one militia unit (3 attack points) against one mercenary (5 attack points) and one militia unit (3 attack points) is a battle of 3 against 8, which means that the force totaling 8 wins, and the winner rolls a die to determine how many attack points they have lost – which means if they roll a 3, they lost their whole militia unit.

Additional note: Machiavelli, despite his desire to overcome fortune’s effects, is aware of its impact on governing. Thus, an occasional roll of the dice or flip of a coin to randomize the students’ efforts is appropriate, to see how they roll with the punches, so to speak.

Before the game, you will want to prepare cards to give to each nation as appropriate to their gameplay choices. For example, certain information should be given to spies, diplomats, etc., that gives them special information or advantage. Each time a nation buys and sends one of these units, the professor should give them a card with a piece of information on it. Feel free to add or subtract as you feel necessary!

Sample Cards:

Spy Card	Diplomat Card	Trade Card	Technology Card
The Prince of this nation occasionally takes walks in the woods, lightly attended by only a few guards.	This Diplomat Unit allows you to negotiate hostilities if you are in the middle of a war.	Your nation has a surplus of grain.	Your nation has discovered a way of tempering iron to make it harder and stronger.
If the nation you are attacking has mercenaries, your spy learns that you can bribe them to fight for your nation instead, for a cost of 250 gold.	This Diplomat Unit arranges a marriage between your ruling family and the ruling family of the nation to which you send it.	Your nation needs fresh produce.	Your nation has discovered a new form of transportation, which allows your military units to travel twice as fast (two attacks in one turn).
The nation you are investigating is on the verge of a new technology, which the spy steals for your nation. It allows your military units to travel twice as fast (two attacks in one turn).	This Diplomat Unit accidentally insults the other nation by stepping on and killing one of its sacred animals, and the conflict escalates.	Your nation needs fabric and luxury goods.	Your nation has discovered a way to double your grain yield every month. For each settler unit your nation has, multiply its monthly yield by 2.
Your spy kidnaps a key religious	This Diplomat Unit discovers that	Your nation has a surplus of	Your nation has created a new

figure of the nation you are investigating. You are now in a position to demand ransom.	your nations share a religious faith.	spices and luxury items.	weaving method that doubles its ability to create fabric, causing a trade surplus.
Your spy is captured, and the opposing nation gains some of your nation's secrets. If you have a technological advancement, they now have it too, [OR] if you have mercenaries, they switch sides to fight for the other nation, [OR] if you have a trade route, the other nation now controls it.	This Diplomat Unit establishes a permanent embassy in the nation to which you are sending it.	Your nation has just discovered a large gold deposit. It is worth either 500 gold units as a one-time sum, or 200 gold a month if put into a trade relationship with another nation.	Your nation has discovered a new method of architecture that allows each of your granaries and settler units to yield 10 more gold per month.
Your spy has discovered that the nation you are investigating is building settler units.	This Diplomat Unit has negotiated a military alliance. When you are next engaged in a military action against another nation, half of your allied nation's military will fight on your side.	Another nation has asked for slaves, and has said they will pay you 20 gold each time you give them 50 slaves. Will you give them? And where will you get them from?	Your nation's technology has created a pollution problem that halves the effectiveness of your settler units.