

# Using *People Power* in the Classroom

## *A Tip Sheet for Instructors*

*(Prepared by the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict)*

The *People Power* roleplaying game has been used in university courses on world affairs, security studies, international relations, social movements, and civil resistance. Some high school teachers have assigned it in their social studies classes as well. We've already received a number of comments and suggestions by these instructors (and some students) and incorporated many of them into the latest, current game version. These field testers also made suggestions about how to best integrate this roleplaying game into formal education courses.

### **Basic background**

The *People Power* game casts the students as the lead strategist of a nonviolent movement facing an oppressive government. The regime is played by the computer, which uses advanced artificial intelligence to determine its actions. The gam includes four scenarios that students can choose—an anti-corruption struggle, a minority rights struggle, a movement confronting a dictatorship, and a movement against foreign occupation. In addition, advanced students can design their own scenarios using a “Scenario Designer” application that is free of charge and can be downloaded separately.

### **What the game teaches**

Through game play, students analyze an evolving, complex conflict situation; identify opportunities and risks; devise a nonviolent movement's strategy; choose and experiment with tactics; try to build support from diverse individuals, groups, or the general public in a given society; adjust strategy and tactics over time; and are able to try again if they fail. Players learn as much from mistakes as from successes. Students report that game play lets them put concepts they have learned from civil resistance literature into practice.

### **Best practices for incorporating the game into coursework**

Integration of the game into a course can take many forms. Most commonly, students are assigned to play the game a number of times, over a period of weeks, outside class meetings. This can begin at the start of a semester, even before students are familiar with literature on civil resistance.

The value of the game comes from experiential learning, which is deepened through sustained and repeated play. Familiarity with all game screens and features requires more than a single sitting; learning comes through trial and error.

If you are considering incorporating the game into a course, we suggest these guidelines:

**Introduction.** Although the game is designed to be self-teaching (with a built-in help text), a brief introduction at a class meeting, by someone who is thoroughly familiar with the game, will help. Presenting a ‘saved game’ can significantly enhance this introduction, allowing a richer demonstration of game flow, and examples of how to find and analyze useful information during game play.

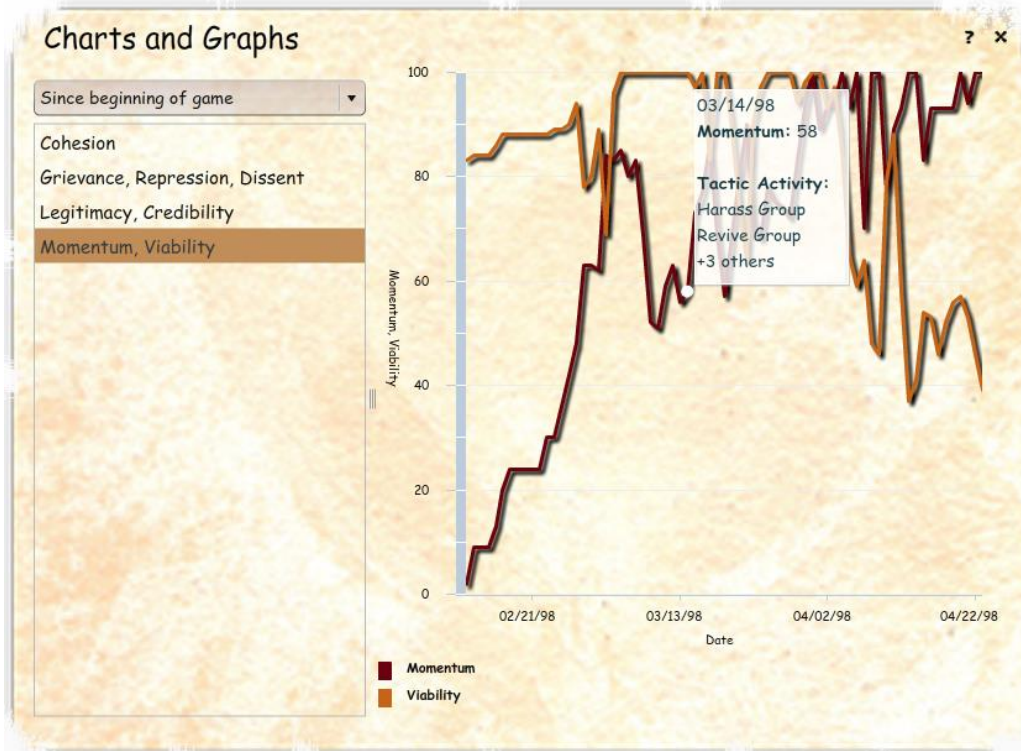
**The game is not meant to be a ‘classroom exercise’ for a group of students.** The game is designed for play in ‘solitaire’ style: one person at a computer, proceeding at her/his own pace. At most, two students may play together, comparing ideas, analyzing what they encounter, making decisions.

**Game play can be ‘take-away’ homework,** to be done throughout a semester. With experience, the pace will quicken, but beginning players will probably need several hours to finish a scenario. More than a hundred turns will be needed to complete a scenario. Even experienced players will find it difficult to win in fewer than 70 or 80 turns. Students can save an unfinished game and resume play in later sessions.

**Students should play at least two different scenarios during the semester if possible.** The game includes four scenarios, each of a different type of struggles: anti-corruption, civil rights, anti-dictatorship and anti-occupation campaigns. Playing against a corrupt regime is not the same as playing against a dictatorship. Different adversaries present different opportunities and risks, and require different strategies and tactics. A multitude of diverse actors and institutions are part of different scenarios. If possible, a student should play the same scenario twice or more (perhaps for extra credit), applying different strategies or varying tactics to determine what is most effective.

**Students should share game play experiences** either in class presentations and discussions or in a written reflection, at mid-semester or at the end of the course, or both. Making use of game logs and screenshots, these presentations should go beyond simple recitations of what happened—emphasis should be on comparing tactic success and failure, on evaluating which tactics and strategies were most effective, comparing progress (i.e. an increase in a movement’s “momentum”, and/or a drop in a regime’s “viability”) based on game conditions (e.g. levels of “enthusiasm” or “hostility” among various movement supporters and opponents), and other factors such as the number of agents and groups who have been recruited to be part of the movement. One among many game features that assists a player’s analysis is the ‘Charts and Graphs’ function, which tracks both Movement (the player) “momentum” and Regime “viability” over

time. Hovering the mouse reveals what tactics occurred on a particular date (March 14, in this example):



By comparing “momentum” (the primary indicator of player success) with the “viability” of the regime during the period selected (in the example shown, the entire game), the player can assess the impact of her/his strategy, seen in the ups and downs—as the movement alternately gains momentum or declines as the regime fights back.

Students’ feedback about the game play should include comments on how their experiences compare to events in the historic cases they have examined (e.g. Chile, Poland, South Africa); and how game play experience has added to their understanding of strategy, the nature of civil resistance and relevant concepts (such as backfire, or defections) discussed in the classroom.

If students are asked to submit a written reflection (for example, of at least 1,000 words), the assignment could ask them to describe their game experience, addressing the topics mentioned above. Screen shots or other data from the game should be included to illustrate and reinforce their comments.

For more information about the game, see: <http://peoplepowergame.com/>