

SIX HISTORICAL THINKING CONCEPTS

FROM: BENCHMARKS OF HISTORICAL THINKING FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT

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	<i>How do we decide what's important to learn about the past?</i> HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE	<i>How do we know what we know about the past?</i> EVIDENCE	<i>How do we understand the complexity of the past?</i> CONTINUITY & CHANGE
ASPECTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resulting in change The event, person or development had <i>deep</i> consequences, for <i>many</i> people, over a <i>long period</i> of time. • Revealing The event, person or development sheds light on enduring or emerging issues in history and contemporary life. • Event/development/person occupies a meaningful place in a narrative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good <i>questions</i> are necessary in order to turn a source into evidence, the first question being, “what is it?” • Authorship: The position of the author(s) is a key consideration. • Primary sources may reveal information about the (conscious) <i>purposes</i> of the author as well as the (unconscious) <i>values</i> and <i>worldview</i> of the author. • A source should be read in view of its <i>historical background</i>. • Analysis of the source should also provide new evidence about its <i>historical setting</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuity and change are <i>interrelated</i>: processes of change are usually continuous, not isolated into a series of discrete events. • Some aspects of life change more quickly in some periods than others. <i>Turning points</i> help to locate change. • Progress and decline are fundamental ways of evaluating change over time. • Chronology and periodization can help to organize our understanding of continuity and change.
AT THE MOST SOPHISTICATED LEVEL, STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate how an event, person or development is significant either by showing how it is embedded in a larger, meaningful narrative OR by showing how it sheds light on an enduring or emerging issue. • Explain how and why historical significance varies over time and from group to group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use several primary sources to construct an original account of a historical event. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how some things continue and others change, in any period of history. • Identify changes over time in aspects of life that we ordinarily assume to be continuous; and to identify continuities in aspects of life we ordinarily assume to have changed over time. • Understand that periodization and judgments of progress and decline can vary depending upon purpose and perspective.
SUGGESTED STUDENT TASKS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain what made [X] significant • Choose the “most significant events” [e.g., in Canadian history; in the 20th century; for new immigrants to Canada] and explain your choices. • Identify and explain differences in significance over time or from group to group (e.g., Why is women’s history more significant now than 50 years ago? Why do Canadians consider Louis Riel significant, while Americans generally don’t?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulate questions about a primary source, whose answers would help to shed light on the historical context. • Analyze a primary source for the purposes, values and worldview of the author. • Compare points of view and usefulness of several primary sources. • Assess what can and can’t be answered by particular primary sources. • Use primary sources to construct an argument or narrative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place a series of pictures in chronological order, explaining why they are placed in the order they are. • Compare two (or more) documents from different time periods and explain what changed and what remained the same over time. • Assess progress and decline from the standpoint of various groups since a certain point in time.

	<i>How do we explain the effects of decisions and actions taken in the past?</i>	<i>How can we better understand people in the past?</i>	<i>What can we learn from the past to help us better understand the present?</i>
	CAUSE & CONSEQUENCE	TAKING AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE	THE ETHICAL DIMENSION
ASPECTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical Actors or Agents are <i>people</i> (individuals, or groups) who <i>cause</i> historical change. • They do so <i>in</i> social, political, economical, historical <i>contexts</i> that <i>impose limits</i> on change. • Actions often have <i>unintended consequences</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking the perspective of historical actors <i>depends upon evidence</i> for inferences about how people felt and thought. • It is important to avoid <i>presentism</i>—the unwarranted imposition of present ideas on actors in the past. • Historical events or situations involve people who may have <i>diverse perspectives</i> on it. Exploring these is <i>a key</i> to understanding the event. • Taking the perspective of a historical actor <i>does not mean identifying</i> with that actor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All meaningful historical accounts involve <i>implicit or explicit ethical judgment</i>. • In making ethical judgments of past actions, we <i>always risk imposing our own standards</i> of “right” and “wrong” on the past.
AT THE MOST SOPHISTICATED LEVEL, STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the interplay of intentional human action, and limitations on human actions in causing change. • Identify various types of causes for a particular event, using one or more accounts of the event. • Be able to construct counterfactuals (e.g., if Britain had not declared war on Germany in 1914, then...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize presentism in historical accounts. • Use evidence and understanding of the historical context to answer questions of why people acted the way they did (or thought what they did) even when their actions seem at first irrational or inexplicable or different from <i>we</i> would have done or thought. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make judgments about actions of people in the past, recognizing the historical context in which they were operating. • Use historical narratives to inform judgments about ethical and policy questions in the present.
SUGGESTED STUDENT TASKS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine an everyday event (e.g. a car accident) for its potential causes • Analyze a historical passage, and identify “types of causes,” (e.g., economic, political, cultural; conditions, individual actions) that it offers as causes. • Examine the relationship between an individual actor’s motivations and intentions, and the consequences of their actions. • Chart of the causes of [X] and explain their arrangement. • How might people at the time have explained the causes of [X] and how does that differ from how we would explain it now? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a letter, diary entry, poster (etc.) from the perspective of [X], based either on some sources provided by the teacher, or sources the students find. • Compare primary sources written (or drawn, painted, etc.) from two opposing or differing perspectives about a given event. Explain their differences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine a historical issue involving conflict [e.g., the outlawing of the potlatch], identify the perspectives that were present at the time, and explain how these historical conflicts can educate us today. • Students identify an ethical issue today [e.g. Canadians’ role as peacekeepers, private vs. public health care, protection of the environment], research aspects of its historical background, explain the implications of the history for today.