

Learn Academies Trust: Big Ideas in History

Our ambition is for children to learn to ask questions about the how and why in History, understanding that the things that have happened in the past shape the way that we are now. We are planning our curriculum to teach historical facts and skills, but our pupils also need to understand that their lessons are not a one off: that they are part of a big picture of learning about the world.

Our History Big Ideas are key historical concepts that the children will revisit again and again, providing a progression of understanding against each concept. When we plan our curriculum knowing how and where each unit of work contributes towards an understanding of each Big Idea will help to develop the children's understanding of the bigger picture of the world and the way they can be a part of its future.

To learn more about the idea of using key concepts in curriculum planning, see <https://cambridge-community.org.uk/professional-development/gswkey/index.html#back-to-top-ZDg4Z1eYTz>

In our Learn-AT History curriculum, we have six Big Ideas:

- Continuity and Change**
- Cause and Effect**
- Perspectives**
- Empathetic Understanding**
- Significance**
- Contestability**

This document goes through the thinking behind each of these Big Ideas and gives some examples taken from the national curriculum programmes of study.

It is recommended that each school uses the Learn-At Big Ideas History planning document to plot their curriculum against the big ideas, so that teachers can see how and where each idea is introduced or revisited as the children progress through school.

Continuity and Change

Historians recognise that over time some things change, and some things stay the same. Things that have stayed the same over time are referred to by historians as continuities, while things that do not stay the same are known as changes. Many things that happened in the past influence the way we live now. Examples of continuity and change can be seen across every civilisation and any given period of time. They can be seen in some aspects of everyday life that has continued across centuries or in changes in religious belief that has affected an entire society's culture.

Continuous events are significant to historians because they show the long term impact of an event or person, while changes are often significant because of the events which brought about the change. The time scale in which changes happen can also be of interest to historians.

Changes in the primary curriculum may be invasions, migration or inventions. Continuity is shown in the longevity of some legacies from ancient changes, or in patterns of behaviour e.g. religion or customs.

Continuity and Change question prompts

Invasions – what changes did this bring? (language, religions buildings/settlements, food/drink etc) Did these changes remain?

What different jobs did the people do? How are they different to the jobs that people do today?

How were the buildings/settlements different to today? What can the buildings/settlements tell us about how people lived?

What changes occurred during this time – what was the impact? Does it affect the way we live today?

Did these changes happen quite quickly or over a long period of time? Why was this and what does it tell us?

What changes do you notice between and ?

What aspects of our lives have remained the same?

Why did so many people want change?

Cause and Effect

The concept of cause and effect is the “why” and “what” of history. Historians are very interested in what happened in the past and in why it happened. These concepts of cause and effect are used by historians to identify the events or developments that have led to particular actions or results. Sometimes the links between cause and effect are clear. Often the link is less obvious or more complicated. Sometimes there are many causes and many effects. Sometimes the causes and effects can only be identified and understood some time after the event takes place.

Some causes are natural: famine and disease, for example. Others are the direct consequence of someone's action: this may be a leader, a rebellion against a leader, or a social event that effects a long term change.

Cause and Effect question prompts

Was the cause natural (e.g disease) or due to the actions of an individual, group or army?

How many causes were there / can you find the main causes of?

Without all of the causes do you think the event (effect) would have happened? Why?

What was the motivation behind ...?

What might have happened to the people who? Why?

Why did the invasion / rebellion / attack take place? And what was the result?

Why did the population get bigger/smaller?

Why were towns, buildings, roads, bridges etc built? What was the purpose and impact of this?

Why were buildings converted e.g churches to houses, pubs to houses – what does this tell us?

What was significant about the changes to e.g transport, laws, leadership etc. and what impact did this have?

Perspectives

The concept of perspectives is an important part of historical inquiry. A person's perspective is their point of view, the position from which they see and understand events. People will have different perspectives about an event depending on factors such as age, gender, social position, beliefs and values. Historians try to understand the perspectives of people from the past even though they may differ from their own. People from the past will have had different perspectives on the same event. Writers and historians also have perspectives that can influence their interpretations of the past: when thinking about perspective, it is important that historians do not impose their own values and beliefs on judgements that they make about what happened in the past.

Learning about perspectives means learning about the social norms of the time and being able to view the events that happened in the context of their own time rather than judging them through the context of our own time.

Perspectives question prompts

Why might this person have had this viewpoint? Did others share the same view?

Who might have a different viewpoint and why?

Why do you think views at the time might be very different from our views today?

What factors might have effected someone's perspective?

Why might different sources offer different accounts of what happened? (contestability)

Do you think this is an accurate account / picture of event/place etc? Can you explain why?

What does this tell us about life at that time?

What was a typical day like for....?

Empathetic Understanding

Empathetic understanding is the ability to understand and appreciate particular events or actions from someone else's point of view. In history, it is about trying to understand the thoughts and feelings of people who lived at different times and in very different cultures, connecting us as humans despite living in a different time. It helps us to understand the impact of past events on individuals or groups and to understand what has motivated them to act in particular ways. Being able to empathise with what happened in the past brings history to life and helps us to understand it better.

In a similar way to understanding perspective, empathy asks us to find out about what life was like in order for us to identify the emotions, tensions and constraints that would have been felt in times past, and for us to appreciate how others felt when faced with situations that are not familiar with us today.

Empathetic Understanding question prompts

Try to imagine you are how would you feel?

How would soldiers/warriors who had to fight in the Battle/War have felt?

How did people feel when e.g the railway was built/ the village was invaded/ The king was defeated?

What type of person was and why did they ...?

What was it like to have been a in?

How did the challenges/difficulties of..... impact on people's lives? How would they have felt?

Can you imagine happening today?

Significance

The concept of significance relates to the importance historians assign to aspects of the past. Often, significant historical events are ones that have the biggest impact on what happens after them. Historians make decisions about what is significant and worth studying, and to do this they ask questions about the impact of events, discoveries, movements, individuals and sites in the world, to decide whether they are historically significant.

In order to decide whether or not events and people are significant, historians also consider:

- Whether the event or person was important to people who lived at the same time
- How many people were affected by it/them
- Whether or not the event or person significantly affected other people's lives and how those lives were affected
- Whether or not the event or person brought about a change that is still impacting the way we live today

It must also be remembered that significance can differ from person to person, depending on their age, gender, nationality and personal beliefs.

Some events or places have particular significance to people who live near where they happened but they are not widely recognised as being significant. Sometimes, as we learn more about the past, we are able to re-categorise the significance of events, places or people.

Significance question prompts:

Why was the event so significant? Did it lead to something important?

Do we still feel the effects today?

Why do you think it important that we remember these people and others like them?

Was the event or person in question important to people who lived at the same time?

How many people were affected by? And why?

How did the event or person significantly affect other people's lives?

Did the event or person bring about a change that is still impacting the way we live today?

How did the introduction/building of affect life in the village/town/city?

What was the significance of (changes in law, invasion, war, monarchy etc) for the people at the time?

What impact did the discovery of.... have?

What does the (historical site/artefacts) tell us about the past? Why was it so significant? How can it help us to learn about life in the past?

What do you think might have happened if this event had NOT occurred?

Contestability

The concept of contestability is about interpretations of the past that are the subject of debate among historians. Historians have access to different sources of evidence and sometimes study the same sources yet reach different conclusions.

Sometimes the evidence that is used as sources for information can be interpreted in different ways, or has been destroyed so can't be used as a primary source any more; other sources may have been changed or damaged over time. Often there is no right answer, and historians find it exciting to explore and talk about others' ideas about how to interpret the past. Historians are always striving to have a more complete understanding about the past.

Sometimes the sources themselves are contestable because the original texts were written or have been re-written to support a point of view or interest. An example of this might be different accounts of what happened to the Princes in the tower when studying Richard III. Historians need to be aware of these biases and examine sources of evidence critically, asking questions of the sources and examining ways in which they can be contested.

Technology and science can help historians reach a more complete understanding of the past by enabling artefacts to be examined and analysed in different ways, or by supporting the discovery of completely new sources of evidence or ways in which the evidence has been changed over time.

Contestability question prompts:

What does source tell us about?

Why was the source created & what was its purpose? Is it useful/reliable and why?

When was the source created and by who? What can this tell us about....?

Why is there (or might there have been) different interpretations of?

How does source help us to understand what life was like?

Which source do you think is most useful/reliable and why?

Are there other sources that support / challenge this view of?

Is there anything that surprised you about...?

What type of source is?