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A serious study of the past always forces an encounter with new dimensions of human experience. This leads to one of the most interesting and creative tasks of the history teacher – how to help pupils to notice in themselves those assumptions that are based on their own familiar world and which actually get in the way of making sense of past actions and beliefs. Sam Wineburg always has plenty to say about this: how do we bracket out what we know about people today in order to understand the thinking of the people in the past? He cites contemporary historians, such as Carlo Ginzburg, on the matter:

*'The historian's task is just the opposite of what most of us were taught to believe. He must destroy our false sense of proximity to people in the past because they come from societies very different from our own. The more we discover about these people's mental universes, the more we should be shocked by the cultural distance that separates us from them.'*

Likewise Robert Darnton:

*'Other people are other. They do not think the way we do. And if we want to understand their way of thinking we should set out with the idea of capturing otherness.... We constantly need to be shaken out of a false sense of familiarity with the past, to be administered doses of culture shock.'*

Some would question this, however. What about issues of continuity across time and space? Is there never anything transcendent about human experience that can connect us, even through a tiny chink, with those that are far off? This dilemma becomes central when we are trying to support the historical thinking of children. On the one hand, we have to gather all our intellectual and creative energy to help them shake off modern preconception and a 21<sup>st</sup> century lens; yet, on the other, cries of 'relevance!' 'motivation!' are invoked to help them see some line of continuity, similarity or connection. The latter hides real danger, whichever way we lean: if we are endlessly plundering the present to find some analogy with the past, if we are so busy trying to find the familiar in order to give access to the strange, do we, in effect, *stop* it being strange and therefore remove the puzzle and miss the point? For some, however, the chief 'plundering' danger occurs the other way. Whether or not teachers should plunder the past to teach lessons about the present – to generate moral reasoning for example, or to build the attitudes and understandings of a 'good citizen' – is a question that has been hotly debated in this journal in recent editions.

The trouble is that in the end, we cannot put a stop to plundering in either direction. We, the enquirers, are connected with the object of our enquiry by our humanness. Humanness is our object and humanness is all we have to reach across the distance. What principles, frameworks or cautions

might guide us, then, if we are to preserve the strangeness of the past, if we are to make sure that when we journey across the distance, pupils find the 'other' as well as themselves?

For me, Sam Wineburg puts it most neatly. He reminds us that we can never completely rid ourselves of our preconceptions, our modern lens, and it is, paradoxically, *that* knowledge that can keep us humble, and so keep us questing. He leaves us with a set a paradoxes which one of my trainee history teachers last week summed up as: 'you just have to keep questing after the strange, you have to keep up the fascination with the strange, even though you know you can never completely get there'.

In those suddenly inspirational history lessons, the ones where the pupils suddenly pour forth questions, isn't this what is happening? They are intoxicated by the puzzle itself. 'What is driving these people? Why would they do that?' And, 'How did it come about that I am so different from them?'. Wineburg pulls out the wider educational significance of holding onto the strange:

*'A scepticism toward the products of mind can sometimes slide into cynicism or solipsism. But this need not be the case. The awareness that the contradictions we see in others may tell us more about ourselves is the seed of intellectual charity. It is an understanding that counters narcissism. For the narcissist sees the world in his own image. Mature historical knowing teaches us to do the opposite: to go beyond our own image, to go beyond our brief life, and to go beyond the fleeting moment in human history into which we have been born. History educates ("leads outward" in the Latin) in the deepest sense. Of the subjects in the secular curriculum, it is the best at teaching those virtues once reserved for theology – humility in the face of our limited ability to know, and awe in the face of the expanse of human history.'*<sup>1</sup>

This edition deals with aspects and offshoots of these issues. Dealing with chronological and cultural distance is the distinctive property of our discipline, shaping our methods of enquiry and, with children, requiring new, demanding, and perhaps unnatural ways of thinking. How do history teachers address this? Well, differently. Don't expect consensus in this edition. We offer some radically different perspectives, positions, concerns. I leave it to the reader to work out how each piece relates to the above and, perhaps, to find convergence, after all.

#### REFERENCE

- <sup>1</sup> Wineburg, S.S. (2001) *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, Temple University Press, p24. The quotations from Ginzburg and Darnton are in Chapter 1, on page 10.

**Christine Counsell**  
Editor



# Martin Butler Booth

## 1936 – 2004

# OBITUARY Obituary

Martin Booth died in Cambridge on 1 August 2004

Martin was born in Liverpool and educated at Gordonstoun School, whose formidable head, Kurt Hahn, he would still recall with a shudder decades later. Like his father, grandfather and elder brother before him, he went up to King's College, Cambridge, where he graduated in History. He undertook National Service in the Royal Navy and was stationed in the Far East. On his return, he took a Certificate of Education at the University of London, taking up his first post in Bury Grammar School in 1961. In the early 1960s he gained an MEd at Southampton, converting this into a PhD from Reading. Between 1967 and 1972 he was an inspirational head of history at Burnt Mill School in Harlow, where his impact was such that a head of department in another school preferred to come to Harlow to work as Martin's deputy.

In 1969 he published the book for which he will principally be remembered: *History Betrayed*. In an economical style Martin set out just what had gone wrong with the subject, and indicated what could be done to put it right. He was typically modest about it. 'A dated little book,' he once wrote, but this was to understate its impact. He wrote convincingly of the need to encourage mental flexibility and daring in students. It is now hard to remember just how novel this seemed in 1969; and it should still be what we seek from every encounter in the classroom. Martin hoped to provide a way forward for thoughtful history, and to help create 'a situation in which challenge and response take over from one-sided instruction and rote learning'. Much of what he wrote is still relevant today, not least his insistence upon listening to what students had to say. The book had a massive impact both on the emergence of the Schools Council History Project, and on the subsequent development of the GCSE.

In 1972 Martin became senior lecturer in Education at Goldsmith's College, London, and moved to Cambridge in 1981, first as Lecturer in History Education, and then as Head of the Education Department until 1999. He was also an immensely energetic Fellow of Hughes Hall.

Martin gave generously of his expertise, travelling to many countries, including the United States, Japan and Australia, to share good practice in the history classroom. It was entirely typical that in South Africa he should go to Soweto to train history teachers. As a colleague said of him, 'he wanted no one to be powerless.'

In Cambridge, his daughters attended my school. At first, I was slightly alarmed. Might they not run home to tell him just what history had been betrayed that morning, and by whom? I need not have worried. He was a wonderful support for a young history teacher, as he was for a generation of trainees. He was always willing to help in the classroom, and I still possess a video of the diminutive Martin, clad in a gown and clutching a staff, interrogating my Year 8 villagers in the wake of the Peasants' Revolt. It was a fine example of what history teaching should be about: real learning, understanding and enjoyment. All, of course, was based on disciplined knowledge. Like everything he did, it was also based on the absolute conviction that anyone – everyone – had both the right and the capacity to become involved in history.

Martin remained interested in all aspects of history and its teaching. In 1989, it was his drive and vision that set up the GCSE magazine *Hindsight*, which he was to edit for the next fifteen years. He was also an influential member of the Teaching History Research Group. An active member of the Historical Association, he edited *Teaching History* for several years, as well as running the Association's Cambridge branch with great good humour and effectiveness. He continued to make important contributions to educational research, and was a key member of a large-scale project comparing history teaching in Japan and England. In *Teaching History* 114, published only months before his death, he co-authored an important paper which showed that these comparisons were both more complex, and more surprising, than might have been supposed.

In his last years Martin had to confront the long illness of his wife, Meg, and following her death in January 2001, his own increasing incapacity resulting from a series of strokes. He remained very active at Hughes Hall, organising and chairing cross-disciplinary seminars until shortly before his death, and always making time for students, colleagues and friends.

Martin's contribution to history education was enormous. His industry, erudition and, above all, his concern for students will continue to inspire history teachers in their work.

Nicolas Kinloch

## www.thinkinghistory.co.uk

thinkinghistory.co.uk provides free role plays and other active learning ideas for use from Key Stage 2 to university level. The site is being developed by Ian Dawson as part of a National Teaching Fellowship. The primary purpose is to introduce PGCE students to active learning techniques but its materials which can be used by teachers of all levels of experience. The site currently offers over 20 activities, together with an introduction to active learning but further activities will be added each month, including ideas submitted by teachers. If you have activities that you are happy to share with other teachers please contact Ian Dawson via the site.

## Commonwealth War Graves Commission launches education initiative

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) is delighted to announce the launch of an exciting new teaching resource:

### *Remember me - echoes from the lost generations*

available now at [www.cwgc.org/education](http://www.cwgc.org/education)

**Remember me** uses a lively, informative approach to interest students of all ages in the work of the CWGC and the contribution and sacrifices made by our Commonwealth veterans during two world wars.

**Remember me** consists of seven units of curriculum-linked learning resources and the **One Boy** multimedia presentation, intended for use in assembly time in the weeks preceding Remembrance Day. The resource is designed for use with students across the secondary and upper primary age range in History, Citizenship, Music, English, D&T and ICT. The resource looks at:

- The work of the CWGC and the principles of equality on which it is founded.
- Using the CWGC casualty database as a research tool
- The impact of war on local communities
- Issues surrounding vandalism
- How the media records and interprets a single event in different ways
- Music motivated by war.

The CWGC are also offering students the opportunity to display their creative talents with a competition to compose an Anthem for Remembrance. More details are available on the website.

## Spirit of Normandy Trust Young Historian Prizes

The Spirit of Normandy Trust has agreed to extend their funding of Young Historian Awards for a further year and this means that in 2005 three prizes for work focussed on the Normandy Campaign will again be available. The categories will again be Primary [group work] and Key Stage 3 and Upper Secondary [individual work].

The funding has been extended because the Trustees declared themselves to be delighted with the outcome of the 2004 competition: a massive increase in entries, the national spread of these entries and, most significantly, the outstanding quality of these entries.

They congratulated the winners – William Taylor of Bishop Heber High School, Malpas [Key Stage 3 winner]; Philippa Dobson of Newcastle-under-Lyme School [Senior winner]; and St Michael's CE Primary School, Lichfield and Boldmere Junior School, Sutton Coldfield [Joint Primary winners] – on the commitment and research behind their work. The Award Ceremony is to be held at the Imphal Barracks at York in November.

Enquiries about entries for 2005 can be made to Dr Trevor James, Director of the Young Historian Project, Birmingham and Midland Institute, 9 Margaret Street, Birmingham B3 3BS [sae please] or telephone 01543-301097.

## History In British Education Conference

14-15 February 2005

Institute of Historical Research

History is in the midst of a remarkable period of popularity. It is well taught in schools and universities and is popular with students. Along with success and with changes in the way the subject is perceived have nonetheless come a range of concerns for professionals at all levels. The most pressing of these are arguably the reduction of its place in the school curriculum, the relationship between what is taught in schools and universities, the subject's place in discussions about citizenship and education and the role of museums, archives and heritage. In addition, long-running debates about what should be taught and learnt, and how, are also still very much with us.

Organised by the Institute of Historical Research, the Historical Association, the Royal Historical Society and the History at the Universities Defence Group, the

conference sets out to address the above issues and also to tackle them from a wider perspective. This is being done by, for example, including sessions in which school and university students present observations on current debates and on the value of history, by including presentations on specific innovative projects and by including professionals from museums, archives and heritage. It is anticipated that the conference will be of interest to all interested in history as a school and university subject.

### Cost:

£80.00 for both days; £40.00 for one day.

To register, please contact Richard Butler, Conference Administrator, Institute of Historical Research, University of London, Senate House, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HU. [Richard.Butler@sas.ac.uk](mailto:Richard.Butler@sas.ac.uk)

## HTEN Conference 2005

In 2005, the History Teacher Education Network [HTEN] annual conference will be held at the University of Nottingham from 11 to 13 July. The theme of the conference will be *Teaching Sensitive and Controversial Issues in History*.

Further information is available in due course from the HTEN Secretary at: [richard.dargie@ed.ac.uk](mailto:richard.dargie@ed.ac.uk) or from the HTEN conference host at [gary.mills@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:gary.mills@nottingham.ac.uk) or on the HTEN website [www.hten.org.uk](http://www.hten.org.uk)

## HA CPD Weekends

The HA is offering three exciting, innovative CPD weekends for members. The residential weekends are all led by leading practitioners and are fully inclusive. They provide an excellent opportunity to develop new skills or take your existing expertise further. For further details and a booking form contact Alf Wilkinson, 33, Hall Road, Great Hale, Sleaford, Lincs, G34 9LJ or e-mail: sue.alf@btopenworld.com; or by phone: 01529 460553.

### Make Your Own Website Weekend Bradford, 4 - 6 February 2005

The weekend begins with a Friday evening session looking at best practice in the use of the Internet in history lessons. In subsequent sessions these principles are applied to the construction of interactive learning resources. You will develop the skills and confidence to develop resources that will enhance your teaching using the Internet. These workshops are suitable for beginners and intermediate users of web design tools and/or the Internet. Accommodation will be in single rooms at the Victoria Hotel, in the centre of Bradford. The whole weekend, led by Dan Moorhouse and Heather Scott, is designed to help you, under expert supervision, to develop your own or a departmental website. The cost is £199 per person, fully inclusive.

### ICT 'Hands On' Weekend Lincoln, 5 - 6 March 2005

This 'hands on' weekend course provides the opportunity to try out, evaluate and create a range of ICT resources which directly impact on the teaching and learning of history. Led by Ben Walsh, there will be a combination of demonstrations and hands-on activities but the emphasis will be on developing resources - from simple wordprocessor-based tasks through to the latest developments in digital video and film making. Accommodation will be in single rooms at the Courtyard Marriott Hotel, in the centre of Lincoln. The whole weekend is designed to allow you to see much that is new in the world of ICT, and to have the time, under specialist supervision, to design and develop your own materials for use with your own classes. The cost is £199 per person, fully inclusive.

### Interpretations of History Weekend Churchill College Cambridge, 9 -10 April 2005

This practical and reflective weekend will explore tradition, current practice and future possibilities in helping secondary school pupils of all abilities and ages to examine the ways in which the past has been interpreted and represented. Ofsted comments that 'interpretations of history' is one of the most challenging demands of the history curriculum. It is also one of the most exciting, full of potential for fascinating and enabling work with text and talk, images and ideas. This course is designed to address these issues, and to provide stimulating examples of how to tackle interpretations of history in the classroom. The weekend will start at 10am Saturday and finish after lunch on Sunday. All sessions will be led by Christine Counsell. The cost is £199.00, fully inclusive.



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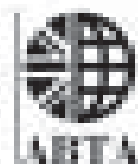
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# Seeing double: how one period visualises another

When pupils study interpretations or representations of the past which are neither from their own period nor from the period being interpreted/represented, they are having to employ sophisticated knowledge and skill. Jane Card describes this as 'double vision': the pupils must think about *the period depicted* (in this case the mid-Tudor period) and *the period of the interpreter* (in this case the early Victorian period and earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century influences upon it). When working on 'interpretations of history' in the National Curriculum sense, their aim is not primarily to critique an 1834 painting for being inaccurate; rather, they are trying to understand the intended message of that painting and to explore what it reflects of the values or preoccupations of the 1830s. To do this they have to distance themselves from their own 21<sup>st</sup> century setting and values in two ways: not only must they make sense of the relevant events, ideas and values of people in the mid-Tudor period, but also they must explore how and why an 1830s artist chose to see those events through a very different lens. They discover that the artist has overlaid a Tudor story with ideas and values that belonged to his own age.

Authors and publishers of textbooks try hard to produce picture sources which are contemporary with the period under study. Sometimes, however, no suitable image is available, and sometimes a desirable contemporary visual source will not reproduce to a sufficiently high quality. In such cases, what appears in the book is an artist's construction of what a person or event would have looked like. When the artist him/herself lived in a period prior to our own, what we get is 'double vision' – one historical period's visualisation of another. The artist – even one who has done a great deal of research – usually projects back onto his/her subject the values, ethics, manners and sometimes costume of his own period.

We have many such pictures, since history painting was a genre attracting a great deal of prestige in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. If these paintings are not dated, they can sometimes be mistaken by the unwary for a contemporary product. Furthermore, many nineteenth and early twentieth century paintings are so richly detailed, dramatic and 'realistic' that pupils are tempted to over-rate their value as evidence. These apparent drawbacks, however, can be turned to advantage by using these pictures as resources for how one period of history interprets another.

In the days when we were heady with the excitement of helping pupils to realise that not everything written or painted in the past was trustworthy, I produced a simple exercise on Lady Jane Grey's execution. It invited pupils to compare a written eye-witness account of the event with the dramatic, brightly coloured and evocative painting by Paul Delaroche

(1834). By comparing the accounts, Year 8 worked out that the painting was not a 'true' representation of events. In time, this developed into an exploration of why the artist had chosen to put his painting together in this way. Examining Boards were asking at GCSE, 'How useful is Source X?', and pupils came to see that, even if the painting was not an accurate depiction of the event, it still told us a great deal about the tastes and interests of the early nineteenth century. In its latest incarnation, the investigation is becoming, 'Why did the Victorians choose to show Lady Jane Grey like this?'; the activity has thus become one of analysing an *interpretation*. Colleagues and interns (student teachers) from Oxford University Department of Educational Studies have contributed to its evolution. The focus has evolved into an exploration of how subsequent representations or accounts of the past are constructed.

In many ways, this journey of shifting emphases reflects the coming of age of Key Element 3 in the National Curriculum, 'interpretations of history'.<sup>1</sup> Like many history teachers over the last decade or so, my focus has shifted away from 'Can we trust it?' (sometimes it is obvious that we cannot) to 'Why is this image the way it is?' or 'Why was it painted or written?' or 'What does it tell us about the period or values of the interpreter?'. This new curricular emphasis, made explicit in the first history national curriculum of 1991, was articulated thoughtfully by Tony McAleavy in some of the early theorising that tried to explore what 'interpretations of history' might mean for pupils' learning. McAleavy emphasised the value of looking at real interpretations, chronologically distant from the

Jane Card is Head of History at Didcot Girls' School (11-18 comprehensive), Didcot, Oxfordshire. She recently completed MSc research into how historical picture sources have been used in school history textbooks.

Jane Card



*The Execution of Lady Jane Grey*, 12th February 1554, c.1834 by Paul Hippolyte Delaroche  
Guildhall Art Gallery, Corporation of London, UK / Bridgeman Art Library

period under study, so that pupils could see how an event and its significance are refracted through the shifting values and priorities of time.<sup>2</sup>

The label 'Victorian' needs some justification. Paul Delaroche was French, exhibited in France, and produced his most influential history paintings in the 1820s and 1830s, just before Victoria became queen.<sup>3</sup> But his work was popular and well-known in England, and, according to Strong,

*'...it was these pictures which set the standard for scenes from history for the artists of mid-Victorian England...his impact on the Victorian vision of the British past was immense.'*<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the use of such a period label is a great help to pupils. To study how one period represents

another is a sophisticated undertaking; by calling the painting 'Victorian' and the events 'Tudor', pupils are constantly reminded that they are actually dealing with two periods of history.

The activity presented here may seem complex, but pupils have always responded enthusiastically. Material for the investigation consist of a series of 'building bricks' which can actually be put together in different ways according to the preferences of the teacher and the interests of the class. It would be possible to produce a simpler version of the exercise, or to tackle the activities in a different order.

Pupils do need to be familiar with the story of Lady Jane Grey. I then start by showing Delaroche's picture to the whole class – a coloured slide is available from

**Figure 1:** Lady Jane Grey and the Victorians

**Many Victorians liked women to be:**

obedient	quiet	innocent	beautiful	child-like
religious	Protestant	married	interested in the home	

**Extract from a Victorian history book for children:**

Some people would have liked Lady Jane as Queen, first because they believed that their dear young King Edward had wished her to be queen, and next because she was beautiful, virtuous and wise, and, above all, a Protestant.

**Extract adapted from a Victorian School textbook:<sup>8</sup>**

(She) went calmly to suffer death herself upon the scaffold on the green within the Tower...and with perfect calmness got ready for the fatal stroke. Fakenham, the Queen's confessor, had in vain been trying to shake her Protestant faith. Thus, at the age of seventeen, she passed away – a remarkable example of outstanding talent wedded to a most pure and high-minded character.

**Can you pick out the things which made the Victorians admire Lady Jane Grey?**

1. Jane Grey could read 5 languages. She also studied dancing, needlework, and religion. She preferred studying to hunting or dancing.
2. She was married in her mid-teens to Guildford Dudley, another teenager.
3. She did not want to be queen when Edward VI died. She accepted the crown because her parents wanted her to, and to stop Catholic Mary becoming queen.
4. When Mary did become queen, Lady Jane said that she herself had been wrong to accept the crown. She and her husband were lodged in the Tower of London.
5. Sir Thomas Wyatt tried to overthrow Mary. Jane Grey's father joined the revolt. Jane herself had nothing to do with it, but Mary's advisers decided she was too dangerous to be left alive.
6. Awaiting her own execution, she saw Guildford's headless corpse in its coffin.
7. On the scaffold and blindfolded, Lady Jane Grey could not find the block. She felt for it, saying, 'Where is it? What shall I do?' She was guided to it and then beheaded. She was seventeen.



the National Gallery. The first step is to focus on three key questions :

- Name something you can see.
- How does this picture make you feel?
- What tricks has the artist used to make you feel like that?

The last question often produces surprisingly sophisticated pupil responses. The teacher needs to draw out the gloomy darkness of the background; the attention draw to Jane Grey by her central position and by the bright light shining on her white dress; the fact that she is small, childlike and pretty; the anguish of her ladies-in-waiting; the concern of the Lieutenant of the Tower, and the threatening presence of the block. There is usually a heated discussion as to what emotion the expression on the face of the executioner actually conveys.

The essential point is that the picture is a piece of manipulation. It is now that I introduce the fact that we are dealing with a Victorian portrayal of an event from Tudor history, and explain that Victorians liked dramatic and sentimental pictures, especially if they showed vulnerable woman and children.

The next step is to focus on, ‘Why did the Victorians admire Lady Jane Grey?’ (see Figure 1). The first part of the worksheet conveys some basic information about Victorian attitudes to women in general and to Jane Grey in particular. Pupils go on to pick out parts of her story which would have had an appeal. They can also identify a key feature which was glossed over – her formidable academic intellect.

There is a rich assortment of resources to enable students to undertake the next step – to investigate Tudor accounts of Lady Jane Grey, with reference to her character, her appearance and the events of her execution. It would be easy to extend the range of material presented in Figure 2. There are various supposed portraits of her, easily accessible on the Internet, but nothing whose authenticity is certain. The National Portrait Gallery’s version has recently been re-identified as Catherine Parr! The events of the execution are the most important aspect of this investigation, since they are most easily contrasted with Delaroche’s picture, and are accessible to most pupils.

It should now be possible to embark on a comparison of the execution as shown by Tudor evidence, and the execution as shown by Delaroche. Points which can be highlighted in the feedback are:

- Jane Grey has been made blonde
- Her hair is loose (sexier). It would have been tied up in order not to impede the axe.
- Her dress is white, not black, and not Tudor in style.
- The costume of her ladies-in-waiting is from a

period 20 to 30 years earlier.

- The execution is taking place inside, not on Tower Green.
- Eye-witnesses do not mention a cushion.
- The artist has selected the one moment in the ceremony of her execution when Lady Jane displayed any vulnerability.

Pupils can be invited to speculate on the reasons for some of the differences. Thus they are reflecting on how and why Delaroche chose to construct the painting as he did. For example, did Delaroche show her kneeling on a cushion in order to emphasise her small stature? Is the execution inside because that allows for more dramatic lighting? In my experience pupils really do come up with sophisticated questions and theories, generating lively debate. Last year’s lessons culminated in every student trying to find a portrait of Lady Jane Grey on the Internet, to contribute to a package of images. The class then tried to work out whether each portrait was Tudor or Victorian. A great time was had by all!

By the end of the session, students were indeed ‘seeing double’ – gaining an ability to date images by their style. Teachers could extend this activity further by including work on the film *Lady Jane* starring Helena Bonham Carter<sup>5</sup> and examining what that reveals about the intentions, views and influences upon of the creators of the modern film. It is also possible to design this kind of investigation with other historical figures. A good starting point for the teacher is *And When Did You Last See Your Father? The Victorian Painter and British History* by Sir Roy Strong.<sup>6</sup> A specialised study of representations of Elizabeth I is *England’s Elizabeth* by Dobson and Watson.<sup>7</sup>

#### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> As a distinctive curriculum focus that separated itself from traditional source work, the idea of ‘interpretations of history’, was justified by the National Curriculum History Working Group, as a need to help pupils see how *history* is a construct through which many versions of the *past* get presented. See DES (1990) *National Curriculum History Working Group: Final Report*. London, HMSO.
- <sup>2</sup> McAleavy, T. (1993) ‘Using the Attainment Targets at Key Stage 3: Attainment Target 2: Interpretations of History’, *Teaching History*, 72. See also the practical planning guidance that emerged from the National Curriculum Council at about this time, and which McAleavy substantially wrote: NCC (1993) *Teaching History at Key Stage 3*. See Chapter 8. History teachers have developed the idea in a range of ways, for example, see Moore, R. (2000) ‘Using the Internet to teach about interpretations in Years 9 and 12’, *Teaching History*, 101, *History and ICT Edition*.
- <sup>3</sup> See Bann, S. (1997) *Paul Delaroche: History Painted*, London: Reaktion Books.
- <sup>4</sup> Strong, R. (1978) *And When Did You Last See Your Father? The Victorian Painter and British History*, London: Thames and Hudson.
- <sup>5</sup> *Lady Jane*, (1985) Columbia Tristar Pictures.
- <sup>6</sup> Strong, *op.cit.*
- <sup>7</sup> Dobson, M. and Watson, N. J. (2002) *England’s Elizabeth: An Afterlife in Fame and Fantasy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- <sup>8</sup> Bright, J.F. (1876) *English History for the Use of Public Schools: Personal Monarchy 1485 – 1688*, London: Rivingtons.
- <sup>9</sup> This can be found at <http://englishhistorynet/tudor/exjane.html> This is one of many very good Internet sites on Lady Jane Grey.
- <sup>10</sup> I am indebted to one of our interns from Oxford University Department of Education for this worksheet, which encapsulates what we wanted our pupils to learn. Unfortunately, I do not know which intern produced it, and cannot acknowledge her by name.

Figure 2: Lady Jane Grey and the Tudors

## How many differences can you find between the Tudor evidence and the Victorian picture?

### Sayings and doings of Lady Jane Grey

1. Here is how Jane Grey described her parents to Roger Ascham, a friend of her teacher.  
*'When I am in the presence of either father or mother, whether I speak, keep silence, sit, stand or go, eat, drink, be merry or sad, be sewing, playing, dancing or anything else, I must do it as perfectly as God made the world, or else I am so sharply taunted, so cruelly threatened, yea, presented sometimes with pinches, nips and bobs, that I think myself in Hell.'*
2. Jane Grey did not want to marry Guildford Dudley. She refused to eat or sleep with him. She accused his family of trying to poison her.
3. She firmly refused to make Guildford king. She said,  
*'The crown is not a plaything for boys and girls.'*
4. When she heard that people were supporting Mary, she resigned the crown. She wrote to her father,  
*'Out of obedience to you and my mother, I have grievously sinned. Now I willingly give up the crown and endeavour to solve those faults committed by others.'*
5. After Wyatt's revolt, some of the rebels turned Catholic. They hoped Mary would let them live if they did. Jane Grey wrote to one, calling him, *'a deformed imp of the devil'*.
6. On the scaffold, she made it very clear that she was Protestant. She said that she died, *'a good Christian woman'* and asked the bystanders, *'While I am alive, pray for me.'*

### What did Lady Jane Grey look like ?

Battista Spinola, an Italian merchant, saw Jane in a procession in London.

*This Jane Grey is very short and thin, but prettily shaped and graceful. She has small features and a well made nose, and red lips. The eyebrows are arched and darker than her hair, which is red. Her eyes are sparkling, her colour good but freckled. In all, a charming person, very small and short.*

### What happened at Lady Jane Grey's execution?

From the anonymous *Chronicle of Queen Jane and of Two Years of Queen Mary* (modernised and partly paraphrased)<sup>9</sup>

By this time was there a scaffold made upon the green near the White Tower, for Lady Jane to die on.... Lady Jane, with a book in her hand from which she prayed all the way, came to the scaffold.... First, when she climbed the scaffold she said to the people standing nearby: 'Good people, I am come here to die...I was wrong to agree to take the crown but this was not something I wanted to do for myself. I am innocent of any wish to do harm.' And then, kneeling down, she turned to Feckenham saying, 'Shall I say this psalm?' And he said, 'Yes.' Then she said the psalm *Have mercy upon me O God*, in English. Then she stood up and gave...Mistress Tilney her gloves and handkerchief, and her book to master Bruges, the lieutenant's brother. Then she untied her gown. The hangman went to her to help her; but she told him to let her alone.. Then the hangman kneeled down, and asked her forgiveness, which she gave most willingly. Then he asked her to stand upon the straw. In doing this, she saw the block. Then she said, 'I pray you dispatch me quickly'. Then she kneeled down, saying, 'Will you take it off before I lay me down?' and the hangman answered her, 'No, madame.' She tied a handkerchief about her eyes; then feeling for the block said, 'What shall I do? Where is it?'

One of the bystanders guided her to it. She laid her head down upon the block, and stretched forth her body and said: 'Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit!'. And so she ended.

Figure 3: Lady Jane Grey becomes the ideal Victorian woman.<sup>10</sup>

<b>Lady Jane Grey and the Victorians</b>	
<b>The ideal Victorian woman</b>	How did Delaroché achieve each of these in his painting of Lady Jane Grey? Write especially about the things he <i>changed</i> to achieve this.
<b>beautiful</b>	
<b>innocent</b>	
<b>child-like and obedient</b>	
<b>religious, especially Protestant</b>	
<b>popular Victorian paintings</b>	
<b>dramatic</b> Look especially at the use of colour and light in the painting. Which incident in the execution has he chosen to portray ?	
<b>sentimental</b> The Victorians were fond of pictures with a tragic story, especially involving women or children.	

# Helping Year 9 to think and feel their way through the origins of the Holocaust

Dave Woodcraft is passionate about engaging students and making them care about the past. He is unrepentant about wanting his lessons to have an emotional impact and a relevant, immediate appeal. To this end, he frequently uses modern parallels in his classroom to make the point that issues in the past often remain issues in the present. He also makes use of powerful images, music and drama in his teaching. Here, he shares an example of teaching Year 9 about the Holocaust.

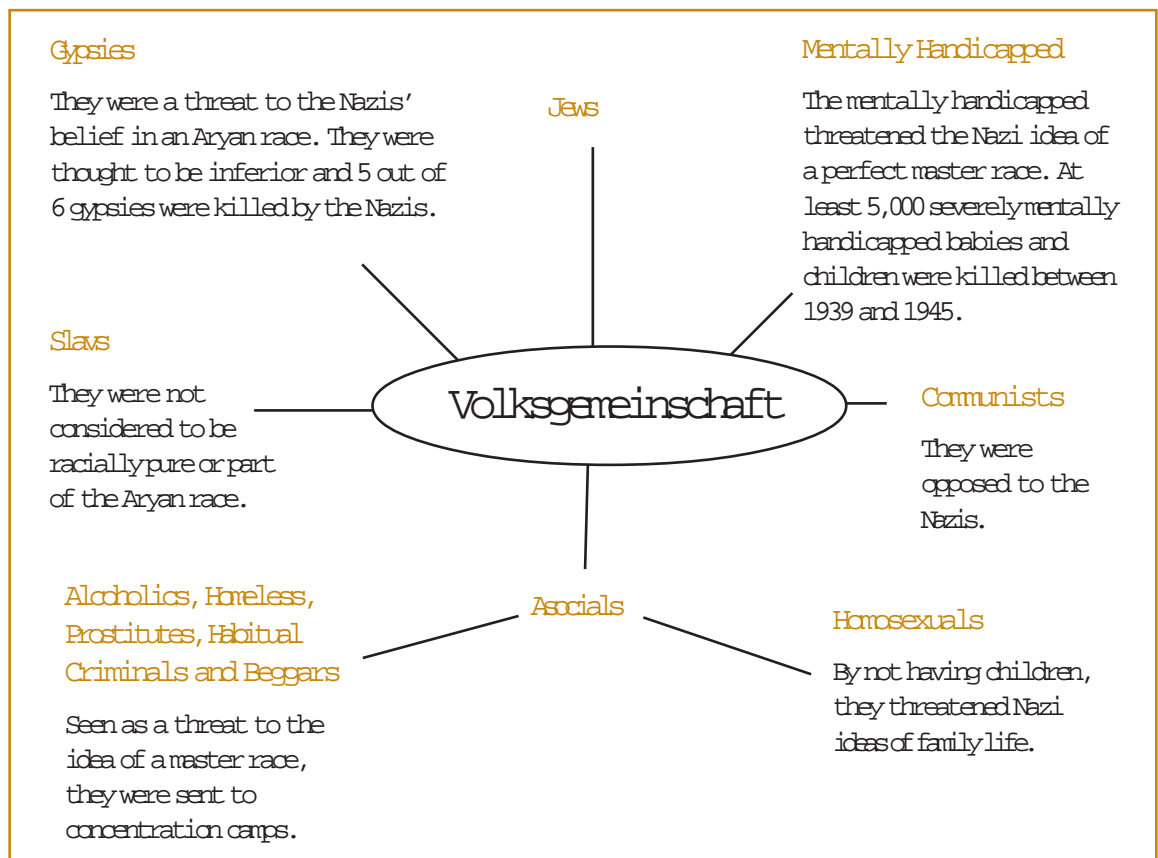
This is a brief account of a lesson with Year 9 last year in which I attempted to explore the concept of Volksgemeinschaft with my students and demonstrate how the propagation of this belief led to the persecution of minority groups in Germany and ultimately to the Holocaust.

Beyond an understanding of Nazi policy and persecution, however, I also wanted the lesson to have real meaning and relevance to a group of Year 9 students living in the city of Coventry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and maybe – just maybe – to inform the way they treat each other and those who live in their community.

Students were first introduced to the concept of Volksgemeinschaft or 'The National Community'. I explained how Germans were encouraged to put their own interests behind those of the state and how they were encouraged to see themselves as racially and culturally superior to those of other nationalities (Ben Walsh's *Modern World History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition p.175, is a great place to start.)

Next, the students were asked to research the groups which belonged to the Volksgemeinschaft and those which did not. Meanwhile, a circle was drawn on the whiteboard with the word 'Volksgemeinschaft' written in the middle. Students came to the board and placed those who belonged to the Volksgemeinschaft inside the circle and those who did not on the outside (see below). I then explained how, when people belonged to a group and thought themselves superior to others, they could push people who did not fit in 'outside' the circle. Those on the outside became the victims of prejudice and discrimination, including the Jews in Germany.

At that point, I asked students if they could think of instances when people belonged to a group, considered themselves superior to others and pushed those who did not 'belong' out. Among the examples given were football supporters (club and country), friendship groups or cliques, and the division that exists between goths and townies, so evident in many of our schools. We then discussed





the consequences of all this. These included violence and bullying, both inside and outside of school.

My next aim was to explore what can happen when prejudice and discrimination are taken to extremes. Here, I turned to a powerful visual source. Photographs, portraits and pictures are obviously great for more visual learners, but for any student, they can be used to develop inferential skills and to engender real empathy and historical understanding, creating a 'community of enquiry'.

The image I chose is included here (see above). Initially, the image – of a woman and child about to be shot by a member of the Einsatzgruppen – was laid face down on the students' tables. They were told that when instructed to do so, they had to turn the image to face them and write down their initial feelings on seeing it. Next, they were asked to think of at least seven questions they wanted to ask about the image (and that I would try to answer – though I could not guarantee it!). Whilst they were examining the source, I played the theme tune from *Schindler's List* to create an appropriately sombre atmosphere. The image elicited some powerful emotions and prompted the group to ask some thoughtful, sensitive and perceptive questions, engendering a heated historical debate.

Finally, the students were asked to think of as many human emotions as possible and use these to describe what was happening in the photograph.

Fear was an obvious emotion, but the students also began to talk about the detachment of the gunman – or was it hatred or duty? This exercise created a very powerful discussion.

### Outcome

On one level, students gained an understanding of the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* and how the dissemination of this belief led to prejudice and discrimination in Germany, ultimately ending with the Holocaust. On another level, students began to explore the dangers of creating their own *Volksgemeinschafts* and of pushing those who do not 'fit in' out of the circle and allowing them to become victims of prejudice and discrimination. Why not take it even further by drawing an analogy with the treatment of refugees fleeing genocide and seeking refuge in Britain, many of whom face such prejudice and discrimination. The use of modern parallels and a powerful image served several purposes. First, it engaged the students' interest and we offer nothing without that. Second, the causes of the Holocaust are made more relevant to the students' own lives. Finally, the image, coupled with music, helped students to engage on a more emotional level, feeling more intensely the terrible consequences of a policy based on exclusion and prejudice.

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# triumphs SHOW

# Time for chronology?

## Ideas for developing chronological understanding

The successful study of history requires many things, but few would contest that an understanding of time is one of them. Quite what we mean by 'an understanding of time' needs clarification, however. Chronological understanding is one feature. But it is not simply an ability to place events in order that drives our teaching (although that is a good place to start!). It is also a sense of scale (exactly how long ago was the prehistoric period in relation to the Tudors?), a sense of period (exactly what is conjured up by the expression 'Restoration England?') and a sense of what Ian Dawson calls 'the frameworks of the past'. As history teachers, we all have our own frameworks of the past. We can slot people and events from the past into a kind of mental map that enables us to make connections and draw comparisons across periods. The challenge is to equip our pupils to do the same. As with so much in teaching, the answer largely lies in good planning. In this article, Dawson helps us to tease out what teaching for an understanding of time might look like. In doing so, he offers invaluable advice to those forward-looking departments that want to think bigger in their Key Stage planning in order to maximise coherence between and across the different units. He argues that 'frameworks of the past' do not emerge by accident, but need to be planned for and nurtured.

**Ian Dawson**

In 2002, when the Historical Association held its *Past Forward* conference on ways forward in history teaching, there was no seminar on chronological understanding, nor was there a paper on the topic in the conference report.<sup>1</sup> Key Stage 3 textbooks, for all their strengths, provide few, if any, activities that explicitly develop chronological knowledge and understanding.<sup>2</sup> There has been important work at Key Stages 1 and 2 but, at secondary level, the assumption that pupils develop chronological knowledge and understanding by studying topics in chronological order still seems to hold sway.

Yet we do not expect pupils to understand how to evaluate and use sources just by reading them. We break down the process into its constituent objectives, analyse pupils' problems and misconceptions in relation to these objectives and create activities designed to overcome them. We plan for development across Key Stage 3. This does not seem to be happening in relation to chronology – but it has to if pupils are to develop their chronological knowledge and understanding effectively. This article therefore aims to identify the key issues that need resolving in order to develop chronological understanding at secondary level.

In doing so I am building particularly on the work of Terry Haydn, who has written several valuable pieces defining chronological understanding and has suggested possible teaching activities, and on the work of Denis Shemilt, whose challenging article 'The Caliph's Coin' should be read by anyone involved in

curriculum reform in history.<sup>3</sup> Despite their work, however, holes remain, most notably the vital practical area of moving from definitions to planning across Key Stage 3. Such planning should take account of chronological knowledge and understanding that is, perhaps, the key ingredient for success. Planning issues therefore lie at the heart of this article. I then move onto some practical activities and consider some implications of these ideas for GCSE and 14-19 developments. The article cannot offer certainties or promise complete success. Rather, it is a form of thinking aloud with the intent of encouraging debate about this extremely difficult area of history teaching.

### Why can we be optimistic about teaching for chronological understanding?

*'A common misconception ... is that primary-aged children cannot understand dates and so they should not be taught.'*

*'...the present research does not support the contention that 'less able' children cannot utilize dating conventions.'*

*'...primary-aged children are seemingly capable of assimilating the conventions of dating systems. This assimilation does, through, appear to be based upon specifically-designed activities and teaching methods ...'*

*'...teaching activates cognition, not maturation or the relative abstraction of the concept itself.'*

Ian Dawson is Assistant Director of the Schools History Project and a well-known author and editor of history textbooks. He is also currently working on a National Teaching Fellowship project, which includes his new website – [www.thinkinghistory.co.uk](http://www.thinkinghistory.co.uk)



These quotations come from Alan Hodkinson's research into primary pupils' chronological understanding.<sup>4</sup> His work is supported by that of other primary educators. For example, William Stow suggests that, after appropriate teaching:

- some 6 and 7 year-olds can identify and categorise pictures e.g. as Roman, Victorian;
- many 8 and 9 year-olds can confidently group and sequence pictures from five different periods (Romans, Tudors, Victorians, 1940s and 1990s);
- many 9 year-olds are able to place periods in the correct century and most 11 year-olds can recall and accurately use dates associated with a period.<sup>5</sup>

The development of chronological understanding happens neither quickly nor easily and is closely linked to both linguistic and mathematical development, but the important, broad conclusion from work at Key Stage 2 is that pupils' chronological understanding can be accelerated through clearly-targeted teaching and learning strategies. Teaching is a more significant influence on the development of chronological understanding than simple maturation or the level of abstraction of an idea. Teaching matters! But that, of course, sets us a challenge: what should we be teaching about chronological understanding and how should it be taught?

### What is chronological understanding?

The analysis in Figure 1 is developed from the work of Terry Haydn who has suggested a four-part classification for teaching and learning about time (labelled T1-T4), summarised as follows:

- T1 – Time-dating systems and conventions and vocabulary.
- T2 – A framework or map of the past over the time-span laid down in the National Curriculum.
- T3 – Knowledge of a number of short-term frameworks e.g. key events and chronology of the Norman Conquest or World War Two.
- T4 – Deep Time: an understanding of the true scale of the past from the formation of the earth onwards.<sup>6</sup>

In Figure 1 I suggest an alternative definition, retaining T1 and T4 as objectives 1 and 4 but bringing T2 and T3 under one heading (objective 3) because they seem to be essentially the same concept but for a difference in scale. I have added objective 2, the development of a sense of period which, logic and experience suggest, plays a crucial part in the development of chronological understanding. Identifying a working set of definitions and objectives is a crucial prelude to thinking about pupils' learning, planning schemes of work and creating activities. Departments wishing to develop chronological understanding more explicitly may wish to discuss

whether they agree with Figure 1 and whether any features should be omitted or added.

### Planning for enduring chronological knowledge and understanding – an agenda for discussion.

Little has been written about detailed planning across Key Stage 3 for the enhancement of chronological knowledge and understanding. This omission creates the danger that work on chronology is, at best, episodic, yet the development of pupils' chronological understanding depends upon teaching focused on clear objectives and regular reinforcement of understandings so that, over time, they become more sophisticated and take root in pupils' minds. Figure 2 therefore suggests an agenda for planning for chronological understanding and Figure 3 summarises some of the key issues arising from research and practice that can inform this discussion.

### Why plan Key Stage 3 history around thematic stories?

One of the key threads of this article is that pupils are most likely to develop enduring chronological knowledge and understanding if they regularly revisit material studied earlier, in the same way that they revisit evidence, interpretations and other concepts. At first glance, this idea seems to conflict with the notion of moving through time across Key Stage 3. However, it fits perfectly well, provided we package the content into a series of coherent stories rather than treating it as a series of episodic highlights to be plundered solely for their ability to enthuse pupils and to develop other conceptual understandings. The challenge is to continue to enthuse while adding chronology to the list of conceptual understandings being developed consistently across Key Stage 3.

This approach to organisation through thematic stories is illustrated in Figure 4, an outline scheme of work that assumes that Key Stage 3 history is seen as a single course, explicitly introduced at the beginning of Year 7 and concluded at the end of Year 9 with overview activities.<sup>7</sup> Within each year, content is organised so that pupils can identify a number of thematic stories in Year 7 and recognise them again (perhaps with a little help!) when they return to them in Years 8 and 9. This approach ensures that stories do not lurk, unseen, beneath the surfaces of individual enquiries. For example, the story of the struggle for power between monarchs, nobles and parliaments puts in a brief appearance through Magna Carta and the first parliaments and then rises majestically into full view when pupils investigate the Civil War – but how many hear the end of the story when parliament and

The development of chronological understanding happens neither quickly nor easily.

Figure 1: Suggested objectives for the teaching and learning of chronological knowledge and understanding

## Objective 1

### Understanding of the vocabulary of chronological understanding

Hodkinson demonstrates that children taught 'time skills' explicitly at Key Stage 2 were able to handle them and develop a more secure historical knowledge of the periods studied.<sup>8</sup> Long but precise lists are important for discussion between secondary schools and their feeder primaries because they reduce the chances of inadvertent omissions.<sup>9</sup>

This objective incorporates:

- i) Descriptive vocabulary – e.g. before, after, decade, century, millennium.
- ii) Technical vocabulary – e.g. AD, BC, the use of fifteenth century for 1485.

iii) Conceptual vocabulary – e.g. change, continuity, sequence, duration, anachronism, period, chronology.

By the age of 14, pupils should be able to:

- understand and use accurately terms such as BC and AD and be aware that other chronological conventions exist and the reasons for them;
- relate centuries to dates i.e. 1349 was in the fourteenth century;
- use accurately and with understanding vocabulary related to the concept of chronology, such as change and continuity, progress, sequence and duration, anachronism.

## Objective 2

### The development of a sense of period

Pupils have a greater chance of developing an enduring map of the past if it builds on a deeper sense of period. 'If children cannot envisage an Iceni, a Roman, a Saxon, a Dane or a Norman in any way 'from the inside' there could be no purpose in their being able to place them in correct order in a time chart, let alone to space them accurately. That is what inert learning means *par excellence*.'<sup>10</sup>

It seems likely that a pupil's sense of period begins with visual images of individuals, clothing, homes or events – an introductory mental package to which a label such as 'Tudor' can be attached. Once that package is mentally established, other details are added. Sense of period needs to be taught explicitly through specific activities and by using explicit language about 'sense of period'.<sup>11</sup> Early periods should not be left behind as pupils move through Years 8 and 9 but kept in the memory bank through activities that revisit and reinforce the learning.

This objective enables students to relate, for example, the term 'Tudor' to people, events and developments and to undertake the reverse activity, recalling key events, people and developments

when working on a named period. These periods include:

Prehistory, ancient, middle ages, modern, Romans, Saxons, Vikings, Normans, Medieval, Tudors, Stuarts, Victorians, twentieth century.

By the age of 14, pupils should be able to:

- use terms such as prehistory, medieval and modern accurately, being aware of approximate dates for these periods;
- explain some of the key features, individuals and events of the major periods of British history;
- sequence major periods of British history and be aware of approximate dates for these periods;
- explain some of the key features, individuals and events of the major periods of European and world history, such as the Renaissance.

This suggests the different elements of knowledge that make up a 'sense of period'. The level of knowledge and understanding shown by pupils will clearly vary at Key Stage 3 and as they continue to study history beyond 14.

## Objective 3

### Knowledge and understanding of a 'framework' of past events related to the Key Stage 3 programme of study

There is more to this objective than knowing dates and putting items in sequence. An understanding of the frameworks of history provides the ability to trace patterns of change and continuity across long periods of time, to make comparisons and to challenge comparisons made between events in the past and in the present day. Shemilt argues powerfully that, 'unless and until people are able to locate present knowledge, questions and concerns within narrative frameworks that link past with past and past with present in ways that are vivid and meaningful, coherent and flexible, the uses that are made of history will range from the impoverished to the pernicious ... history cannot be disaggregated and plundered for bits and pieces that can validly inform the present. Its value is as a big picture ... that ... gives perspective to the present.'<sup>12</sup>

This objective can be divided into:

- i) A basic knowledge of sequences of events and their dates.
- ii) An understanding of how the relationships between these events contribute to both thematic overviews

and an over-arching overview, sometimes called 'the big picture'.  
iii) Knowledge and understanding of the detailed chronology of some major events within the Key Stage 3 Programme of Study.

By the age of 14, pupils should be able to:

- recount in outline the major stages in key themes identified in the Key Stage 3 Programme of Study e.g. monarchy and parliament, social changes and empires;
- identify key people and events in each of these stories, place them accurately on a timeline and record their dates;
- describe the characteristic features of past societies and periods;
- identify changes within and across different periods, making links between them;
- recount the detailed chronologies of a number of key events within the Key Stage 3 Programme of Study;
- explain why identifying the precise chronology of events is important in explaining the outcomes of events.

## Objective 4

### The ability to set objective 3 within a knowledge and understanding of a wider overview of history, both chronologically and culturally

While not a statutory requirement, pupils benefit in a more broadly educational way if they can relate the periods and cultures studied at Key Stage 3 to the broader span of human history. This could include a sense of the approximate duration of prehistory, the development of farming and the first towns, links to Key Stage 2 topics such as the Ancient Greeks and to key developments in other cultures. This need not be time-consuming and could involve one or two brief activities each year that build upon each other.<sup>13</sup>

By the age of 14, pupils should be able to:

- place topics studied at Key Stage 3 within a wider historical outline, including such major features of world history as prehistory, the development of farming and the first towns and the foundation of major religions;
- relate topics studied at Key Stage 3 to topics studied at Key Stage 2 such as the Ancient Greeks, the Romans, Saxons and Vikings and their world history option.

Figure 2: An agenda for departmental discussion

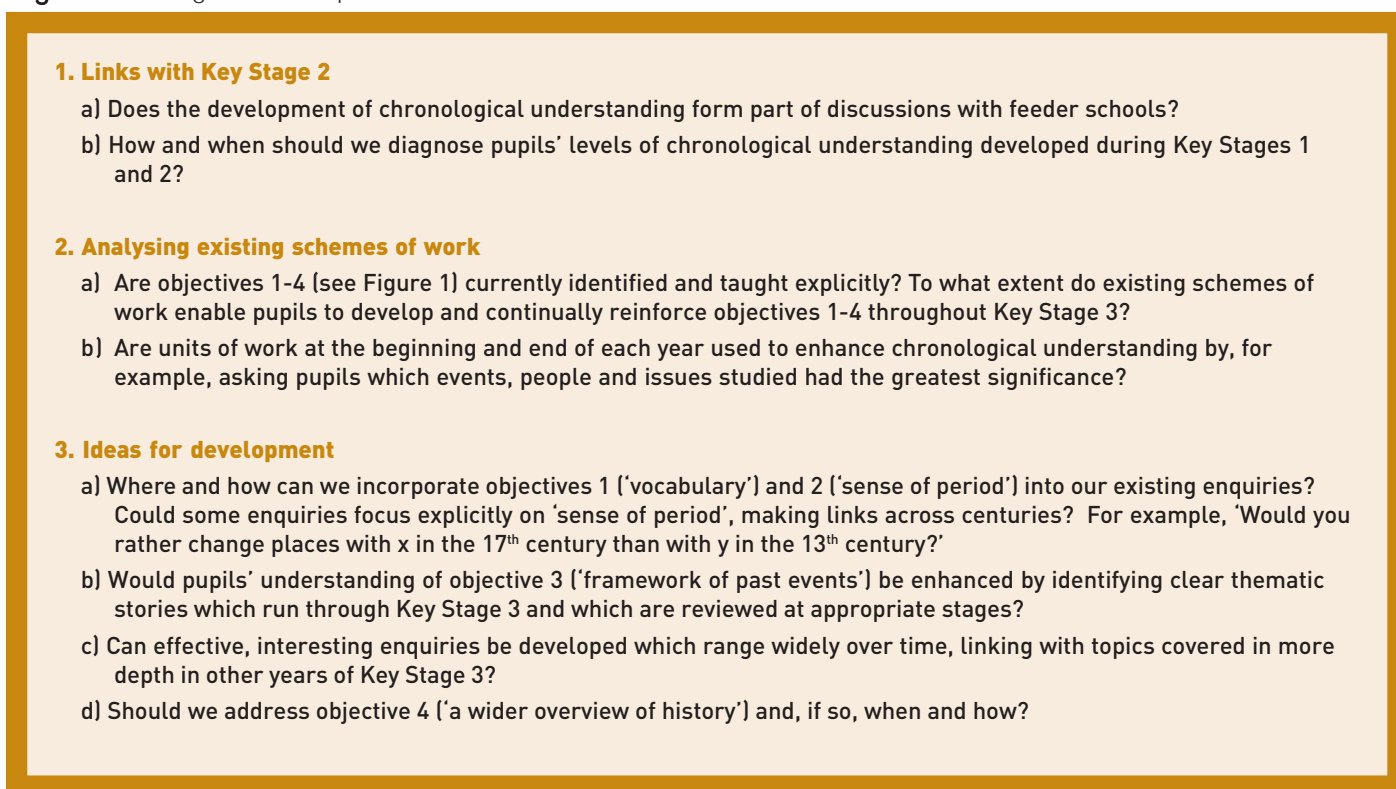
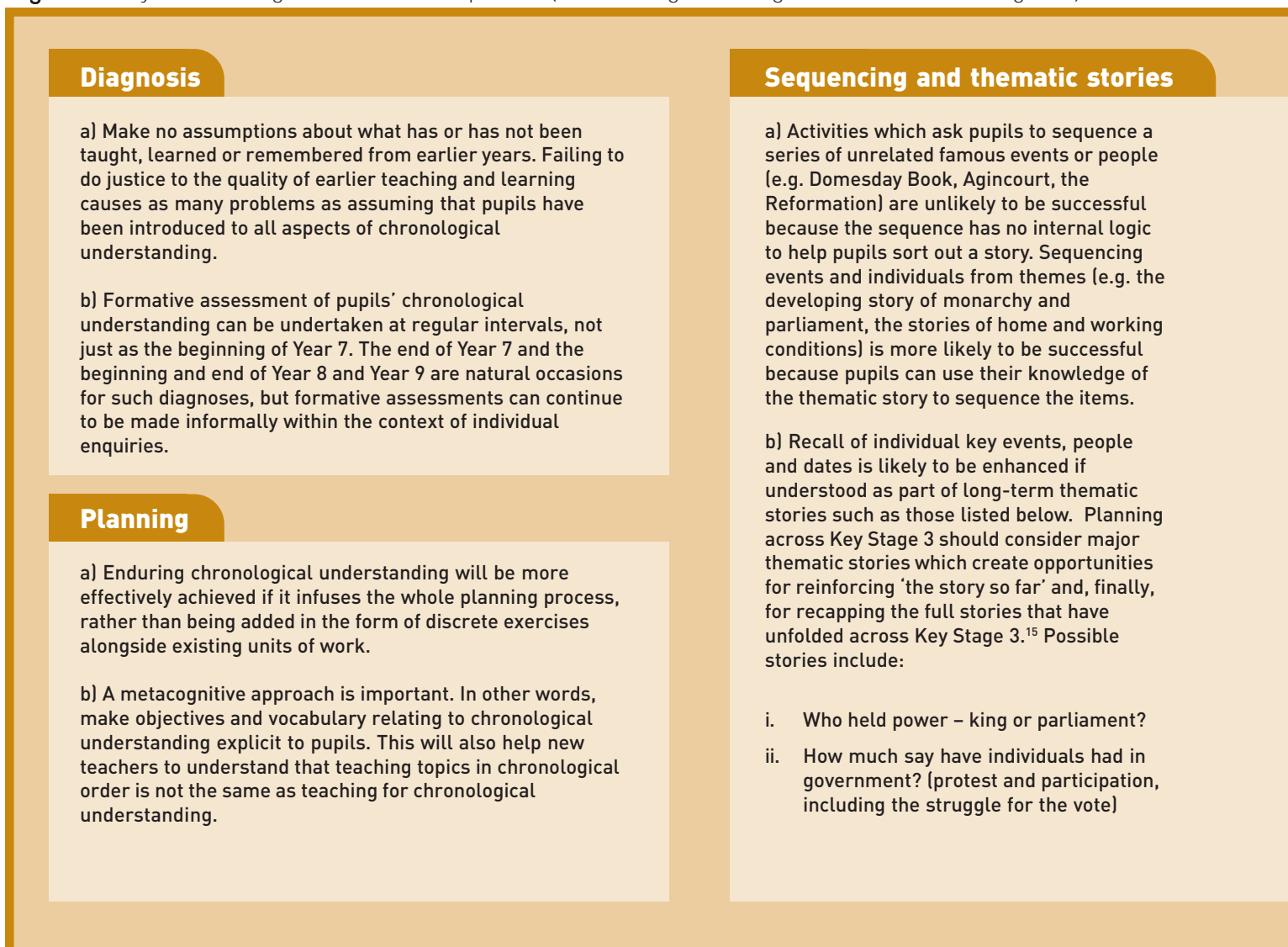


Figure 3: Key issues arising from research and practice (for use alongside the agenda for discussion in Figure 2).



politicians finally took power from the crown in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries?<sup>14</sup>

Using stories in this way solves the problem of revisiting and reinforcement. Teachers and pupils can move backwards and forwards through time, making links within themes and reinforcing chronological knowledge by summarising the stories to date at regular intervals. For example, when moving onto work on Charles I's struggle with parliament, the story so far (i.e. the balance of power among monarchs, nobles and parliament) needs to be actively recapped and then, at the end of that unit, the whole story reinforced (see Figure 4). Thus pupils revisit the key points from earlier years and, by the end of Key Stage 3, will have had the chance to develop an understanding of several such stories. This also requires pupils and teachers to differentiate between what must be remembered, what could be remembered and what need not be remembered at all. Recall of individual events, people and dates is likely to be enhanced by being understood as part of a story.

This approach to planning raises, in turn, one of the recurrent questions in history teaching – what do we want pupils to take away with them when they leave history classrooms at the end of Key Stage 3? One

'history takeaway' we all crave is for pupils to find history enjoyable and intriguing, putting an end to those parents' evening comments such as 'I hated history at school but now I find it really interesting.' A second 'history takeaway', at a more intellectual level, is for pupils to understand the methodology of history and how the skills and concepts developed in history can enhance their understanding of the world around them. A third 'takeaway' is knowledge – but exactly what form should this knowledge take? Recall of individual facts and dates equips us to shine in quizzes but has little other value in its own right. A more constructive approach to a 'knowledge takeaway' is to suggest that by the end of Key Stage 3, pupils should be able to tell, in outline, a number of key thematic stories from British and world history as well as demonstrating an understanding of individual events. The depth in which these stories are told will clearly vary from pupil to pupil, incorporating more or less detail, but it is a task that is worthwhile at a variety of levels. This approach, based upon regular reinforcement of key stories, could be the best way to create enduring chronological knowledge and understanding. It also links across effectively to other concepts, creating natural contexts for enquiries investigating significance and interpretations, recurrent patterns of causation as well as change and continuity.

### Links across the Key Stage

- iii. How has daily life changed? (e.g. housing, diet, health, leisure, transport, communications)
- iv. How have working lives changed? (farming, manufacturing, the impact of technology)
- v. Have empires done more good than harm? (e.g. Roman, Norman, Spanish, British)
- vi. How and why has Britain become a more diverse society?
- vii. How united is Britain?
- viii. What part has Britain played in Europe? (e.g. warfare, trade, culture or religion)

(Note – these are not enquiry questions (which need to be more pupil-friendly and sharply focused) but indicate the broad themes that can be developed across Key Stage 3.)

a) Local studies can follow the long-term development of a community or place. This enables links to be made across periods and with major national events. One question is 'why was community x not affected by event y?'

The history department at Holbrook High School, Suffolk, has developed the following enquiry for the end of Year 7: 'How and why has Dunwich changed since Roman times?' This enables them to trace the development of Dunwich from Roman and early Saxon prosperity, through mid-Saxon decline to Viking growth (cementing links to Key Stage 2) and real prosperity in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries to decline in the age of the Black Death, the impact of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, on into the settlement's status as a rotten borough and then into the death-toll amongst local men in the world wars. A living graph records the rise and fall of the settlement's prosperity across time. Looking forward from Year 7 to events not yet covered in detail has not proved to be a problem and helpful reinforcement in Years 8 and 9 stems from questions such as 'Do you remember what happened to Dunwich at the time of ...?'<sup>16</sup>

b) Links across Key Stage 3 can be planned into some enquiry questions in Year 8 and Year 9 which refer back and make comparisons and contrasts with topics from previous years rather than being solely concerned with content covered in that year. This creates opportunities to relate new material to pupils' existing mental chronological framework.

c) Particular opportunities arise at the ends of years and the end of the Key Stage, particularly through enquiries concerned with developing understanding of interpretations and significance as well as the more obvious contexts of causation and change and continuity.



Figure 4: An outline scheme of work built around 'thematic stories'

Stories/ Themes	Year 7 To c.1540	Year 8 c.1500-c.1900	Year 9 Since c.1900
	Introduction to Key Stage 3 course. Vocabulary and sense of period activities	Introduction to Year 8 history. Vocabulary and sense of period activities	Introduction to Year 9 history. Vocabulary and sense of period activities
<b>Empires</b>	Did the Romans do more harm than good?	Why were so many American cultures destroyed?	Why do people still argue about the impact of the British Empire?
<b>Warfare and unity</b>	a) Why did the English rebel against the Normans? b) Why couldn't English kings conquer Britain?	a) How have wars changed since 1500? b) Why weren't the British Isles ever unified?	Why was the 20 <sup>th</sup> century so full of wars?
<b>Power and citizenship</b>	a) Was Magna Carta really so significant? b) Why was London in flames in 1381?	a) Why did Charles I quarrel with parliament? b) When did the monarchy lose its power?	Did violence do more to win the vote than peaceful campaigns?
<b>Religion and human rights</b>	a) Why did so many people visit Canterbury in the Middle Ages? b) Why did Henry VIII close the monasteries?	Why did religion cause so many wars?	Has the struggle for human rights been successful?
<b>Social life</b>	a) Would you rather have lived in the 15 <sup>th</sup> century than the 12 <sup>th</sup> century? b) Did anyone benefit from the Black Death?	When was the best time to be alive, 1500-1900?	a) Why have living standards risen so quickly since 1900? b) ... but have they risen for everyone?
<b>Conclusions</b>	What were the most significant people and events you studied this year? How do this year's topics fit into the wider patterns of history?	What were the most significant people and events you studied this year? How do this year's topics fit into the wider patterns of history?	What were the most significant people and events you studied this year and in Key Stage 3? How do this year's topics fit into the wider patterns of history?

Figure 4 provides an example of an outline scheme of work pursuing thematic stories across Key Stage 3 and so enabling what I term 'framework' activities to arise naturally.

### Activities for developing chronological knowledge and understanding

This section can only introduce the range of activities that are possible.<sup>17</sup> In general, activities must be as challenging and involving as those developed for depth studies. Most are likely to be short and active, making explicit use of technical vocabulary. It is of paramount importance to vary the style of activities to meet the differing needs of pupils. Some will respond positively

to tasks involving creating, drawing and illustrating timelines, others will prefer to take part in physical timelines or family trees across the classroom while others will prefer pen and paper exercises. The key is to vary activities to meet individuals' needs and this may include, for some, learning lists.

Negative images of classes bored to tears because history consisted of nothing more than dictated notes and learning dates by heart should not deter us from finding out which pupils enjoy compiling and learning lists and are good at it. Many 11 and 12 year olds have no problems remembering amazingly detailed lists of who plays for which team – a skill that can be taken advantage of, even if the motivation is not quite the same. This is not a return to the mythical 'good old days' beloved of certain



newspapers. As a product of the good old days myself (a 1960s grammar school education), I did not learn the names and dates of the monarchs of England until in my 20s and teaching. Hopefully, what follows is an improvement, providing a variety of activities for a variety of pupils and focusing activities so that each one targets one of the chronology objectives 1-4 explicitly.

### Picture sorting and a sense of period

Picture sorting activities are a valuable way of developing pupils' sense of period. They need to be used at regular intervals throughout Key Stage 3. Try using sets of pictures that represent several periods that are chronological neighbours so that pupils have to identify which pictures are, for example, medieval and which are Tudor and to explain their choice. Examples of possible sets of pictures are:

- Set A Roman, Saxon and Viking, middle ages
- Set B Norman, early Middle Ages, later middle ages
- Set C medieval, Tudor or Stuart
- Set D 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> centuries
- Set E Victorian, inter-war, 1940s and 1950s, 1960s onwards

A possible series of tasks would be to:

- a) Identify which pictures are from which periods.
- b) Give the groups of pictures the correct period labels and locate them on a timeline.
- c) Identify the clues in the picture that tells us which period it is from. The sense of period diagram in Figure 1 can be used here as an aide-memoire to provide an agenda for thinking.
- d) Suggest one anachronistic picture to add to each group.
- d) Research a set number of other pictures to add to each group, perhaps to illustrate a particular theme, e.g. warfare.

It is important, in order to develop an enduring sense of period, that the earlier periods are not ignored once pupils move into Years 8 and 9. Cross-period sorting activities in Years 8 and 9 should include, for example, Roman and medieval pictures to maintain pupils' knowledge of those periods and to help distinguish and define later periods.

### Using timelines

Timelines play an important part in understanding chronology and helpful work has been undertaken by primary colleagues that can be transferred to Key Stage 3.<sup>18</sup> Key points about timelines include:

- Pupils need to construct timelines for themselves and not just look at completed ones.
- Pupils' sense of duration will be helped if each century on a timeline is a different colour, thus

emphasising the number of units. Pupils find it harder to get a sense of the passage of time from colourless timelines, even when they show dates and events.

- Many pupils benefit from physical activities which require them to stand on a timeline and 'move about in history', gaining a sense of how far it was from one date to another by simply walking across the timeline.
- We often use timelines as introductions, to place in time an event about to be studied, but pupils may gain more from re-visiting the timeline after the topic has been studied and they have some understanding of it. This is also the occasion to make effective connections across time to other events.
- Timelines are more likely to be successful in reinforcing chronological knowledge and understanding if they contain visual images rather than simply words and dates.
- Pupils can find timelines more interesting and memorable if they focus on real individuals they have studied rather than just 'big events' such as the Industrial Revolution.<sup>19</sup>

Many pupils will benefit from telling the story aloud because it forces them to organise the information in their minds and make sense of it in order to pass it on orally to others. This is another opportunity to make the activity more physical by giving each pupil a card and getting them to organise themselves into a sequence, stand on a timeline and tell the story aloud, passing the story on through time from one person to another. It is this conversion of the story from one format to another that is productive in reinforcing knowledge. Another option is to retell the story in just 4 or 5 cards, which requires the pupils to choose the most significant developments.

You will find two specific activities at the very end of this article, complete with instructions and resources.

### Implications for history at 14-19

#### GCSE

One obvious area where we might expect students' chronological understanding to be enhanced is in Schools History Project Development Studies (i.e. Medicine Through Time and Crime and Punishment Through Time). Theoretically, this is the ideal structure for developing chronological understanding because students tackle a broad sweep of time in little more than half a year and so there is less chance of forgetting what order periods and events came in. And yet examiners' reports regularly point out an inability to sequence periods correctly, a lack of sense of duration, people and events turning up in entirely unexpected

**Many 11 and 12 year olds have no problems remembering amazingly detailed lists of who plays for which team.**

**Examiners' reports regularly point out an inability to sequence periods correctly.**

periods as if propelled by an erratic Tardis and an inability to correctly identify, for example, the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all with dire effects on students' ability to analyse change, continuity and causation.

The villain here appears to be the not unreasonable assumption that teaching a topic in chronological order is sufficient in itself to develop students' chronological knowledge and understanding. However, as argued above, such knowledge and understanding is far more likely to develop when specific objectives have been identified and activities have been constructed to meet students' learning problems. One key point is the junction between Years 9 and 10. Assessing students' sense of chronology as they begin a Development Study should reveal what students have retained from Key Stage 3 and what misconceptions they have. Can they, for example:

- Identify 1850 as in the 19th century?
- Tell a thematic story of major developments in social history?
- Place Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution on a timeline accurately?

Furthermore, have they developed a sense of period sufficient to fill in most of the features of the sense of period diagram in Figure 1 for the Middle Ages or the nineteenth century? Can they use this to predict what each society might know and understand about public health, anaesthetics and surgery?

The results of such diagnosis may suggest that more time may need to be given during the course to developing a stronger sense of period for each of the major eras, to sequencing periods and to building up a sense of duration. This all takes time, but it is likely that more time spent on tackling chronology specifically and less time on the details of medicine or crime may help students avoid some of the major pitfalls in examinations.

### 14-19

Put simply, the big lesson about chronological knowledge and understanding is – use it or lose it! Even higher attaining pupils who develop a sound basis in chronological knowledge by the age of 14 risk losing much of that knowledge if it is not reinforced through further historical studies after 14. We cannot do anything about those misguided souls who choose to drop history but, if we only offer a single, narrow period of history for study after 14, how much of that sense of a framework or sense of periods can be maintained? If we are to take the development of an enduring sense of chronology seriously, then every student who opts for history at 14-16 and then 16-19 should have, as part of their historical studies, an overview course that, amongst other things, reinforces the hard-won understandings developed by the age of

14. Such courses can be interesting, challenging and need not fragment into a series of depth studies masquerading as an overview. Indeed, they should provide that long-term perspective on the present that is one of history's unique contributions to education.

## Conclusion

Writing this article has been a form of thinking aloud, trying to find ways of turning analyses of objectives into practical planning and teaching activities. For some time we have been addressing concepts such as evidence explicitly, identifying learning problems and constructing activities to overcome them. Is it now time for chronology?<sup>20</sup>

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- 18 See, for example, Hodkinson (2001) *op. cit.* and his TES article (2004), *op. cit.*
- 19 An unanticipated spin-off discovered by teachers using Dawson I. (2001), *Lost in Time*, John Murray. This is one of the very few development studies published for Key Stage 3 and focuses on similarities and differences between the lives of Sir Geoffrey Luttrell, Samuel Pepys and Flora Thompson.
- 20 I would like to thank Chris Culpin, Dale Banham and Angela Leonard for their discussion of the issues in this article. For an expanded discussion, together with a wider range of activities, see OCA's *Innovating with History* website at [www.qca.org.uk/history/innovating](http://www.qca.org.uk/history/innovating)

# Activity 1

## BC, AD and the use of physical timelines

This activity is designed to make the abstract ideas of BC and AD and centuries more comprehensible. It involves using your pupils to build up a physical timeline with each pupil representing a century. The diagram below shows the starting point, with just a few pupils in the timeline, standing in front of large notices saying BC and AD and each holding a sheet of paper on the top half of which is written the years of a century e.g. 100-199, 200-299. From here the stages of the activity can be developed along these lines:

1. There's a gap in the middle of the timeline, dividing BC and AD – who goes into that gap? The answer you're looking for is Jesus – here you deploy your baby Jesus from a crib or your daughter's favourite doll. Beware religious sensibilities but ham this up as much as possible – bring in toy shepherds and lowing cattle if possible – it has to be memorable! Leave the baby Jesus there in the middle throughout the activity.
2. Ask what BC and AD mean – work with the baby Jesus to underline the answers.
3. Now turn to the pupils in the timeline – explain that each person is a century (how long is that?). Now turn to the first pupil/century AD – and ask 'which century are you Anno Domini?' The answer should be clear – he or she is first in the row and you can add a large 1 to the sheet of paper below the dates.
4. Repeat with pupil/century 2 – which century are you? The second – here you can act confused to mimic the confusion that is often in pupils' minds – are you sure? How can you be the second century when the dates on your sheet are 100-199? Go back and count from the baby Jesus – first century, second century. Write a large 2 on the sheet below 100-199.

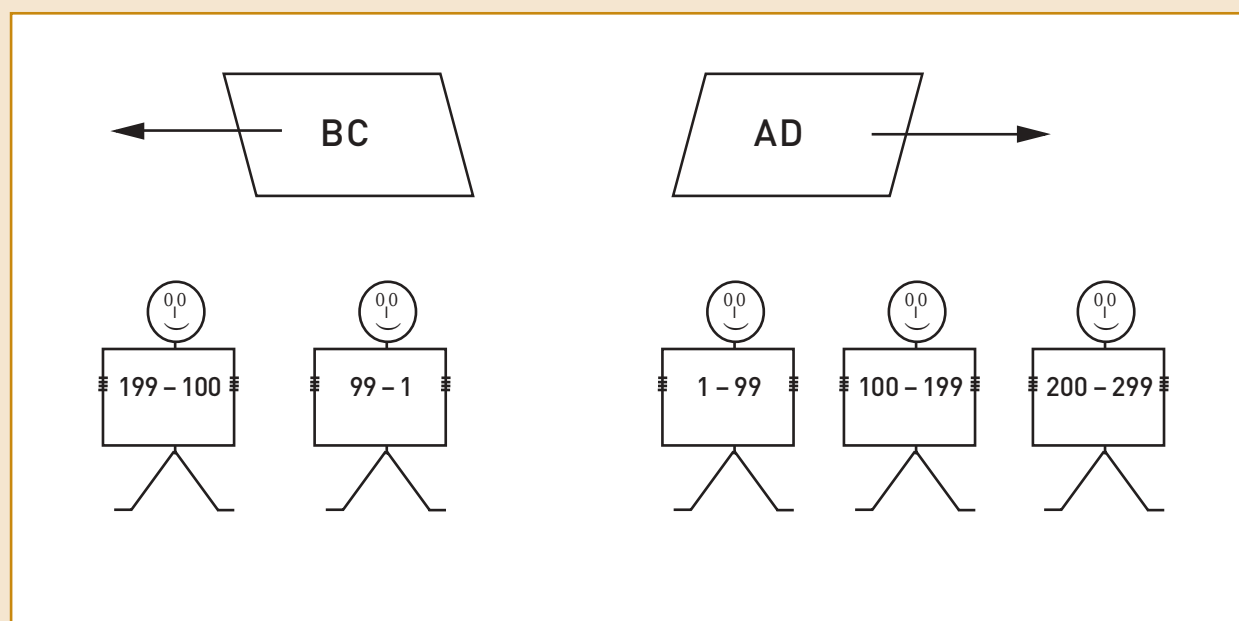
5. Repeat as often as you wish to get across the apparent discrepancy – the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD being 300-399 etc. After you've done enough, bring out some more pupils and make a longer line, maybe enough to get up to date. Standing in their line they need to say their century number, counting on from the original group. Once each knows that he/she is the 9<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century, get them to write that number on their own sheet – then ask them to add their dates. If stages 1-4 have worked, then they will get this right – if not, you've diagnosed who has the problems and you can return to this later.

6. That may be enough for one session but next time repeat quickly and then start work on the BC section in the same way. This will need more time and care.

7. A range of other ideas can be built onto this core activity, such as:

- a) Build in alternative dating systems – start another parallel line for the Islamic calendar.
- b) Relate centuries to peoples and periods – which of you centuries were Roman, which Tudor – this begins to bring out the difference in duration between Roman Britain and Tudor England.
- c) How many centuries were there between e.g. the Romans and the Tudors, the Tudors and the Victorians?
- d) Use the timeline to help you sequence four mixed up BC and AD dates.

Physical activities such as this have much to offer throughout Key Stage 3. They are memorable, ideal for making abstract ideas comprehensible and they can be adapted to tell our thematic stories as Activity 2 shows.



# Activity 2

## Summarising thematic stories

This is a card sort activity that demonstrates the teaching and learning of the kind of thematic stories outlined in Figure 4. It enables pupils to see the big picture of developments in working lives from 1066 to the present and also exemplifies how chronological knowledge is essential for an understanding of important concepts such as cause, change and significance.

The cards can be used at several stages of Key Stage 3. Some cards can be used at the end of Year 7 to tell the story to date, then used again as an introduction to the theme in Year 8 and in Year 9. The whole story can be recapped at the end of Key Stage 3, when a possible sequence of concluding tasks is as follows:

- Sequence the cards to tell the story of working lives and conditions.
- Place them on a blank timeline and add dates from knowledge or research.
- Bring the story up to date for the twentieth century (give out blank cards to complete).

d) Ask questions about the patterns of change and continuity, significance of individual events, turning points or.....

e) ....interpretations: which events might be emphasised or left out by someone telling this story from a particular standpoint?

f) Ask questions about what else was happening at the same time. Ask, for example, who was alive at this time? Who was the ruler?

The major problem with this kind of activity is interest. Taken at a very general level, this does not have the potential fascination of investigating the working life of a real individual in the 14<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century. One possibility would therefore be to build into the information references to individuals studied during coverage of this theme during Key Stage 3. The challenge is certainly to make pupils care about the activity as much as they might about a depth study enquiry. Making the activity physical helps but is only part of the solution.

G. 90% of people worked as farm labourers. Many were villeins who had to work on their lords' land every week	J. Government began to pass laws to reduce working hours and to improve working conditions.	H. People began to move to the rapidly growing towns to find work in textile factories and metalworking industries	K. The monasteries employed many workers but after the Dissolution of the Monasteries these workers had to find new lords.
B. The Black Death and Peasants' Revolt changed working lives. Villeins were given their freedom and many received higher wages.	E. The Norman Conquest did not affect people's working lives	D. Less than half the population now worked in the countryside as farmers.	A. Men, women and children worked long hours in dangerous conditions in many factories and mines.
C. In the 16 <sup>th</sup> and 17 <sup>th</sup> centuries, many people combined farming with working in small-scale industries, such as coal-mining and the cloth trade.	F. After the Black Death, women had more opportunities to find work in towns or to run their own businesses.	I. 10% of people worked in towns as traders, making goods such as pottery and clothes or working in shops and inns.	L. Many people in the 16 <sup>th</sup> century became vagrants when they found it hard to get work.

# 'I just wish we could go back in the past and find out what really happened': progression in understanding about historical accounts

This is the second in a series of articles for *Teaching History* in which Peter Lee and Denis Shemilt share the findings of Project Chata (Concepts of History and Teaching Approaches). In their first article (see Edition 113), they questioned the wisdom of using the National Curriculum attainment target as a model of progression and argued the case for more nuanced, complex models based on empirical research. Such models, they argued, can never provide a blueprint for what progression in history looks like, but they can be genuinely useful in revealing the kinds of preconceptions pupils at different ages might have and the ways that these can be successfully modified over time. In this article, they explore one aspect of their research, pupils' understanding of historical accounts, focusing in particular on pupil preconceptions and progression. Drawing on a wealth of empirical data, gathered over several years in many classrooms, the authors are able to propose a way of *characterising* what progression in pupils' understanding about historical accounts might look like. They are not advocating rigid, all-embracing models of progression; they are providing us with a much more finely tuned and sophisticated way of talking about and analysing pupil progression. Above all, Lee and Shemilt urge us to attend to the preconceptions that pupils bring into the classroom. Without this, they argue, teaching becomes little more than 'firing blindly into the dark: we may get lucky and hit one of our targets, but we are much more likely to damage our own side.'

## Preconceptions and progression

Astonishingly, it is still sometimes said that there is little research on students' prior conceptions about history. It is hard to see how anyone can think like this, because understanding progression and knowing about students' prior conceptions are two sides of the same coin. Given that progression models map the ideas that students bring to school history, students' preconceptions are absolutely central.

Over the past three decades teachers, examiners and researchers have acquired considerable knowledge of the ideas they are likely to encounter. Like any other knowledge it is subject to revision in the light of further work, but it is not mere guesswork and is based on more than individual experience. Moreover research in countries beyond the UK is now adding to our understanding, and it is possible that in Europe and the USA, and perhaps further afield, students may share some preconceptions with UK students.<sup>1</sup>

There is powerful evidence – in addition to experience and common sense – for thinking that if students are to learn effectively, we must address their preconceptions. The US National Research Council's *How People Learn* Project looked at research on learning over the past 30 years, and picked out three key findings emerging from vast amounts of research evidence.<sup>2</sup> Their first finding is:

Students come to the classroom with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught, or they may learn them for purposes of a test but revert to their preconceptions outside the classroom.<sup>3</sup>

If we do not address student's ideas, our teaching may go for nothing: what we teach may simply be assimilated to existing ideas, even if our students can reproduce the kind of responses we want in the particular context in which they learned them as 'correct'.

After three decades of work in the UK, much of it in extensive day-to-day classroom based research as well as in large projects, it is possible to make research-based claims about student preconceptions within particular strands of ideas, like *evidence*, *empathy* or *accounts*.<sup>4</sup> In this paper we will consider ideas that seem to be important for students' understanding of historical accounts.

## Historical accounts

We assume in what follows that historical accounts are not copies of the past, but are in some ways more like theories, and in others like extended metaphors.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that we think any account is as good as any other, or that accounts do not in any way refer to the past. We subscribe to a view of history in which we may test accounts against other, rival accounts, using

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Peter Lee and Denis Shemilt



Figure 1: One past, one story?

**Andy, Year 9**

Once history is made, it cannot be changed in any way possible, so one thing is correct, and the rest are incorrect, even if we don't know which is which.

**Geoff, Year 7**

I agree because I think that if a story was told and it was all correct, and copied what actually happened, it could be the only true story. If stories had been wrong in places then it could not be right.

**Danielle, Year 9**

Yes, history really did happen. Yes, there was an outcome. But lots of different factors and things may have affected it. A history story may emphasise one particular point, but it doesn't mean that that is the only correct history story. They can say different things to answer certain questions. They can go into more detail on a certain point. They may leave out certain points but it doesn't mean it is right or wrong. There can be many different history stories about one thing.

criteria of congruence with facts, comprehensiveness and consistency. This is not the place to develop this position, but anyone wanting to pursue these questions should go to the work of Noël Carroll, Chris Lorenz and Mark Bevir.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of a historical account is related to that of evidence, but whereas with evidence the focus is on the establishment of particular facts, with accounts it shifts to historical 'representations' of whole passages of the past.<sup>7</sup> We emphasized in the first paper that students' ideas are likely to develop in decoupled ways: ideas about *cause* and *empathy*, for instance, do not necessarily change in step with each other.<sup>8</sup> However, research suggests that at the root of students' ideas about *evidence* and *accounts* are some everyday preconceptions applicable (albeit in different ways) to both concepts.

## Students' ideas about historical accounts

### Everyday intuitions

How do students explain differences in accounts of the past? What relationship do they think exists between an account and the evidence historians use to produce it? What kind of relationship is there between an account and the past that it is 'about'? As part of a range of tasks in *Project Chata*, students looked at two different accounts of Saxon settlement in England, and were asked (among other questions) if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

*History really happened, and it only happened one way, so there can only be one proper story about the Saxons in Britain.<sup>9</sup>*

Compare the three responses to this statement given in Figure 1.

Andy knows that the past cannot be changed, so he thinks only one story can be correct. Geoff provides the missing logical step in Andy's argument. He believes that whether we know them or not, past events happened, and they happened in the way they did. What historians say must somehow mirror the way things happened and therefore *copy* the past. It follows that there can only be one 'true story'.

In contrast Danielle explicitly separates the fact that 'history [understood as the past] really did happen' in the way it did  $\frac{3}{4}$  'there was an outcome'  $\frac{3}{4}$  from what we can choose to say about it. She recognises that accounts may answer different questions, and so there may be 'many different history stories about one thing'. She is not thinking of historical accounts as copies of the past.

Research points to several recurrent ideas in students' understanding of historical accounts. Some ideas might be characterised as 'historically defeatist', because they stop the historical enterprise in its tracks. For example, Tricia, Year 9, wrote 'There could be more than one story because no-one lived in those time[s] so how does anyone know this is right and the other one's wrong?' The idea that we cannot know anything because 'no one was there' makes history impossible. Underlying this position is the assumption that only direct acquaintance with events can provide us with knowledge, which is an illegitimate extension of the commonsense belief that direct perception is generally our best check on claims about the world. Nobody from our time can actually see what happened in the past, so we cannot rely on any account.

Another idea is apparent in Geoff's response in Figure 1. Because stories copy the past it is only possible to have one true story. Geraldine, Year 7, took a similar position: 'I agree because it did really happen and it did only happen in one way, so yes there can only be one story. I just wish we could go back in the past and find out what really happened!' It is as if Geraldine thinks that by being there we could see the story in the same way as we can witness (some kinds of) events.

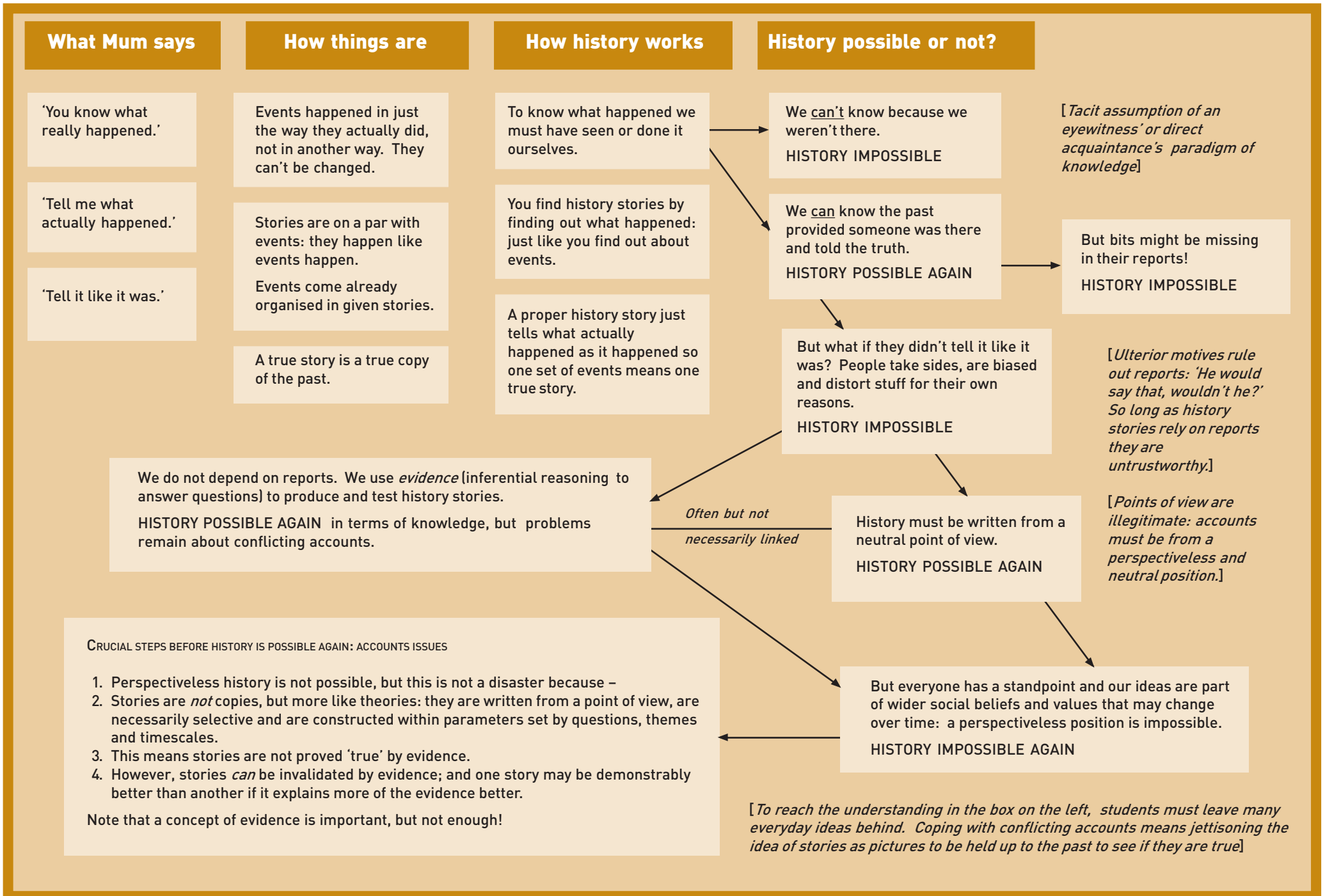
Lucy, Year 7, on the other hand, knows that we can say something about the past even if we weren't there, but she agrees with Geoff in thinking there can be only one true story:

*I agree because you can only get one proper history story and to really get the truth you'd have to find a scroll written by someone who was there at that point in time. To see if he is telling the exact truth you'd have to find two scrolls but if not he should be telling near enough what is happening.*

Of course, when students make the move to recognising that witnesses can leave testimony, history becomes possible again ('historical defeatism' is replaced by 'historical optimism'). But this is an inherently unstable solution. Susan, Year 7, shows why. 'I disagree because



Figure 2: 'Everyday' preconceptions connecting ideas about historical accounts and historical evidence.



the story can get changed as it gets passed down by word of mouth. Two people might make up little bits – that they do not know about – differently. Also different people might have been told different things so their stories could be different. Often people argue because of their different opinions.’

Figure 2 sketches some possible relationships between the key preconceptions we have so far considered. The boxes in the left hand column speculate about the everyday circumstances in which children learn about telling the truth in the context of something they did in the immediate past.<sup>10</sup> The next two columns of boxes relate students’ ideas about what sort of things events and stories are, and their ideas about how history can make claims to know and give accounts of the past. The right hand half of the diagram deals with preconceptions that allow or prevent history. Black boxes indicate dead ends that make history impossible. Grey boxes indicate ideas that may be stable for a time but are eventually likely to run into difficulty, whether ‘defeatist’ or ‘optimistic’ about the possibility of history. Comments are bracketed in italics on the right. The final box with shadow borders indicates ideas that help students move forward.

### The development of ideas about historical accounts

If even eyewitnesses can give conflicting accounts, testimony is in the end useless for exactly the reason that makes students defeatist in the first place: our only recourse is ‘being there’ and seeing for ourselves. Worse still, people have reasons for distorting the truth, as Thomas, Year 7, points out. ‘I disagree because if there was a king and he was bad to one monk the monk would write a bad story. If he was nice to another monk that monk would write a good story about the king. One historian picks up the good bit one picks up the bad and write two different stories.’ Moreover people take sides. Jimmy, Year 7, wrote, ‘Because only one piece of history really happens but the reason why we get many different stories is because the writer of sources can be biased.’

Students thinking like Jimmy still see the problem as a knowledge issue – we rely on corrupt sources and ‘biased’ sources mean conflicting ‘biased’ stories. But by Year 9 many students see the difficulty as more to do with the active authorial role of historians in putting together accounts, distorting them so that they are not proper copies of the past. This is an advance because it recognises that historians have a job to do beyond giving ‘the facts’. But in holding on to the idea that accounts copy the past, students can only view differences between accounts as a disaster, generally fudged by the uneasy suggestion that ‘it all comes down to opinion’. ‘Opinion’ comes in here in several different guises, as a substitute for unknown facts, as a source of illegitimate positioning leading to distortion and, rather differently, as an unconstrained ‘right’ to offer

an opinion. ‘Bias’, ‘distortion’, ‘dogmatism’ and ‘lies’ carry with them the idea that historical disagreement is impossible to settle and, for some students, the idea that anything goes. History becomes a place where opinions are freely exercised, as Oakeshott put it, like whippets in a meadow.<sup>11</sup>

A corollary of this is that any sign of a position in an account (since it is necessarily a distortion) must be illegitimate, and only an author with no position can produce an undistorted copy of past reality. The everyday sense of bias as ‘taking sides’ leads students to think that conflicts can be solved by looking for accounts written by someone ‘neutral’. This makes sense for everyday clashes between two people with practical interests at stake (who started the quarrel?), but does not work for history, where alternative accounts may have nothing to do with taking sides over a practical issue. The ideal of neutrality fits comfortably with the view that authors must write from a ‘perspective-free’ stance.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes, as with Sasha, Year 7, neutrality involves conflating two ‘sides’: ‘I can disagree with this statement because there can be three stories. One telling one side of the story the other telling the other side of the story, or there can be one that tells them both together.’

However, Year 9 also sees a different kind of shift of emphasis. Roughly a quarter of the Year 9 *Chata* sample recognised that points of view were legitimate, not necessarily distorting, and that selection was part of the historian’s task in producing accounts. In the case of two stories each giving different end dates for the Roman Empire, this crucial change offers a more powerful way of looking at competing accounts. Compare the ideas at work in Figure 3.

For Louise and Richard, the end of the Roman Empire, and the issues between the two accounts, are *factual* matters: the problem is we don’t know the facts. Lara, on the other hand, has made a major leap. She recognises that the differences between accounts, and in particular the end of the Empire, are *critical* matters. Historians must ‘set some fixed thing’, which means they must make *decisions*, and it follows that stories cannot be *copies* of the past, but are more like theories.

Stories order and make sense of the past; they do not reproduce it. There can be no ‘complete’ story of the past, only accounts within the parameters authors unavoidably set when they decide which questions to ask. Hence accounts necessitate selection, and therefore a position from which selection is made; perspective-free accounts are not an option. Research suggests that some students already understand this by the end of Year 9.<sup>13</sup> They know that we can assess the relative merits of alternative stories by asking the right questions. What are the accounts claiming to tell us? What questions are they asking? Are they dealing with the same themes? Are they covering the same time-span? How do they relate to other accounts we accept,

There can be no ‘complete’ story of the past, only accounts within the parameters authors unavoidably set.

and to other things we know? Ideas of this kind allow students to go beyond searching for ulterior motives to account for differences between accounts. Natasha, Year 9, explained that there could be different times given for the end of the Roman Empire

*Because it all depends on your opinion and whether you are thinking about the Empire physically ending or mentally ending...*

*The Empire ended physically when it was all no longer governed by the same person, mentally, when it was no longer thought about and spiritually when there was no longer a shadow of it in people's lives, we still use Latin derivatives now so the Empire's influences still haven't ended now.*

With ideas like this, history becomes more than an arbitrary set of 'interpretations' construed as broad gauge opinions, explanations for which can be couched only in terms of a claim that 'he would say that, wouldn't he'. Students have the beginnings of an understanding that competing accounts may be better or worse attempts to answer a question, and that merely to show that someone has an interest in arguing one rather than another does not settle the question whether one is better than the other. Moreover, students who recognise that accounts are not copies of the past are more likely to understand that historical significance is not fixed – not a property of special events or even processes – but will vary in relation to particular accounts and the parameters they bring with them. The Great Fire of London cannot simply be characterised as 'significant', but is more significant in (say) a theme of town development, and less in a theme of political organisation. And within a theme, its significance will change according to the timescale in which it set.<sup>14</sup>

Attempts to teach those students already thinking like this about 'interpretation' by simply giving them lists of types of interpretation plainly aim far too low. We want students to produce reasons for differences in accounts, but if we do this by asking them to look for ulterior motives, we underestimate some students, and allow others to assimilate this approach to their existing ideas about the importance of perspectiveless neutrality. Any move to persuade students to give external explanations as to why the accounts may have been produced can meet the same fate, if the students have not *already* understood that there are internal and valid reasons why accounts may differ.

### **A model of progression for ideas about historical accounts**

On the basis of the research evidence it is possible to give an initial model of the broad changes we might expect to find between ages 7 and 14 in ideas about historical accounts. 'Initial', because we have less work on students' understanding of accounts than some other concepts, but as usual with research this means we need to know more, not that we can ignore what research

**Figure 3:** Differences in accounts: factual or criterial?

#### **Louise, Year 9**

'It happened so long ago no-one really knows when [the Roman Empire] ended.' We could decide when it ended by 'looking it up in a few books and take the time that most of the books say.' There are other possible times when it ended 'because no-one really knows when it ended it could be any time.'

#### **Richard, Year 9**

'One story says it ended in AD476 - that was his opinion. One story says it ended in AD 1453 - that was his opinion. It is just a matter of opinion.' 'You couldn't [decide when the Empire ended because] the answer you come up with is just your own opinion.' It does not matter if there are two different stories, 'because they are both opinions and no-one really knows what happened even if they do have what they think is proof.'

#### **Lara, Year 9**

We could decide when the Empire ended 'by setting a fixed thing what happened for example when its capitals were taken, or when it was totally annihilated or something and then finding the date.' There are other possible times when it ended 'because it depends on what you think ended it, whether it was the taking of Rome or Constantinople or when it was first invaded or some other time.'

suggests so far. All the caveats we set out in our general discussion of progression apply here too.<sup>15</sup> Models of this kind do not cover all or even most of what is valuable in learning history. They work well for groups of pupils, but do not describe individual learning paths, and are not ladders to be taught mechanically and climbed step by step. What they can do is to pick out the main features of progression over the long term, helping to prevent us from being ambushed by students' ideas in our teaching, and enabling us to address students' preconceptions in our planning.

A valuable feature of this model for planning and teaching is that it points to possible 'break points' in the development of students' ideas. It also warns us of some dangers, particularly those in which moves we might otherwise make may simply encourage students to assimilate new, more powerful, ideas to unhelpful prior conceptions.

The first major break point is when students begin to recognise that the idea of 'being there' (the idea that if we weren't there to see we can't know) is problematic. This may require teaching moves that make it hard to fall back on assumptions that we only know what we can eyewitness. Practical examples that deal with daily life but also overlap directly with historical issues, like changes in the acceptability of dress-codes and fashions, can be very useful. Getting students to consider whether anyone can actually *see* the point at which a hair-style goes out of fashion can lead on to issues like the increasing or decreasing popularity of a government, or the rise and decline of the power of nation states. No-one can witness these things, although they can see evidence for them. Once students recognise that much of what

Figure 4: Progression in ideas about historical accounts

1

### **Accounts are just (given) stories**

Students treat accounts as stories that are just 'there'. Competing stories are just different ways of saying the same thing. If two stories are 'about' the Romans, then they are both about 'the same thing'. We can say 'the same thing' in different ways, just as at school we sometimes have to tell the same story 'in our own words'.

2

### **Accounts fail to be copies of a past we cannot witness**

Accounts cannot be 'accurate' because we were not there to see the past and therefore cannot know it. If accounts differ, this is because they are just a matter of opinion, where 'opinion' is a substitute for knowledge we can never have.

3

### **Accounts are accurate copies of the past, except for mistakes or gaps**

The past determines accounts: the latter are fixed by the information available so that there is a one-to-one correspondence. (This is the positive correlate of the previous position.) If we know the facts, there is just one proper account. Opinion is a result of gaps in information and mistakes.

4

### **Accounts may be distorted for ulterior motives**

Accounts are copies of the past that can be more or less distorted. The past is reported in a more or less biased way. Where accounts differ, this is not just a problem about our knowledge of the past, but about the role of the author as an active contributor and therefore also and necessarily as a distorter of the past. Opinion takes the form of bias, exaggeration and dogmatism (and also lies that stem from partisan positions). These all 'twist' stories. Ideally a story should be written from a position of perspectiveless neutrality (or no position at all).

5

### **Accounts organised from a personal viewpoint**

Students who think like this have made a major break with previous ideas by abandoning the idea that accounts should have a one-to-one relationship with the past. Accounts are not just copies of the past, but arrangements of significant parts of it. A viewpoint and selection are legitimate features of accounts. Opinion re-appears here as something controlling the selection that historians make; it is a matter of personal choice, but this does not mean that it is partisan. A historian may, for example, answer a question about housing or about work and education, because he or she is interested in that question.

6

### **Accounts must answer questions and fit criteria**

Differences in accounts are not just a matter of authors deciding to make choices; accounts are necessarily selective, and are necessarily constructed for particular themes and timescales. The past is (re-) constructed in answer to questions in accordance with criteria. There can be no complete account. It is in the nature of accounts to differ  $\frac{3}{4}$  legitimately  $\frac{3}{4}$  from one another. Accounts are assessed against criteria in order to determine their admissibility and relative worth. The aim of this process, however, is not to select a single best or most valid account of a given topic or period of history. Contrary accounts of the same topics and periods may be accepted because they address and answer different but equally worthwhile questions about that topic or period. The criteria of the discipline, the 'rules of the game' for doing History, knock out many possible accounts of the past but do not prescribe a fixed number of admissible accounts. The latter depends upon the sorts of questions that we deem to be worth asking and to which valid answers can be given.

historians are interested in cannot have been witnessed by anyone, they can begin to see that we are not dependent on people telling us truthful tales from the past, and that different kinds of historical claims require different kinds of support.

The second (and crucial) break point is when students begin to see that historical accounts cannot be copies of the past. The idea rests in part on the commonsense belief that the past is fixed, and that in turn seems to students a natural consequence of the (reasonable) claim that 'what happened really happened, and not something else'. But we can loosen the connection between some sense of a 'raw unconceptualised past' and the organisation we can validly give it by helping students to understand that for any passage of the past (including short contemporary spans like 'this lesson', 'last week' or 'my journey to school') there is an indefinite number of possible – and valid – descriptions of it. They will then be in a position to explore the different ways in which historical accounts of events or processes must necessarily be selective. It may also be valuable for students to consider how similar classroom examples bear on the notion of 'the whole truth', which may have a chance of working in murder trials, where the criteria of relevance are largely agreed, but cannot be transposed into 'the whole past'. The 'complete story' is not just an impracticable aim, it is an incoherent one.

Once students see that historical accounts are not copies of the past, they no longer think of testing them by somehow holding them up against the real past to see if they match. And if they understand that accounts (even the ones that simply come with a 'title' rather than an explicit question) are selective not on someone's whim, but in virtue of some question or questions, then we can begin to talk with them about the parameters set by questions, and the criteria that these allow us to employ in arguing about which account is preferable. Ideas like the scope and explanatory power of accounts are useful here.

Of course historians may differ over their quasi-theoretical assumptions, their explanatory ideals and so on, and students will eventually need to grapple with these matters too. But the research-based progression model in Figure 4 suggests that if students are taught these things before they recognise and understand the theory-like nature of historical accounts, they will simply assimilate what we teach them to ideas in which bias and ulterior motives distort the 'real past'. Grappling with ways in which accounts may differ legitimately without being merely matters of 'opinion', helps students to recognise that although the past is not fixed, this does not mean that 'any story is as good as any other'. Tackling historians' reasons for writing one story rather than another before students grasp that accounts cannot be copies of the past is a recipe for leaving them helplessly shrugging their shoulders in the face of competing stories.

Even simple distinctions like 'fact' and 'opinion' are likely to be fatal unless we know exactly what notion of 'opinion' students are working with.

Here as elsewhere, a progression model gives us some grounded insight into clusters of preconceptions that students bring to history. To teach without addressing those ideas is like firing blindly into the dark: we may get lucky and hit one of our targets, but we are much more likely to damage our own side.

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2. The principles are listed in Donovan, M., Bransford, J. and Pellegrino, J. (eds) (1999) *How People Learn: Bridging Research and Practice*, National Academy Press, which summarizes HPL findings and sets out a research agenda. A fuller treatment, with a chapter on American work in history by Sam Wineburg, is in Bransford, J. Brown, A. and Cocking, R. (eds) (1999) *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and School*, National Academy Press.
3. Donovan et al. *op.cit.* p.10.
4. Assertions that the big projects commenting on progression were conducted outside the context of day-to-day history lessons are somewhat misleading. Chata had its origins in some of the longest running classroom based research undertaken in history in the UK. Two teacher-researchers taught two classes for more than three years, videoing lessons and small group discussions almost weekly. More importantly, the SHP research was informed by a long process of working with teachers and students in an everyday teaching context: it should be remembered that it was evaluating a course.
5. 'Accounts' rather than narratives because we do not want to pre-empt the ways historians make sense of the past. Developmental accounts of change, for example, may be rather different from narratives, but there is no space to debate this here.
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14. For research on students' ideas about significance, see Cercadillo *op. cit.*
15. Lee and Shemilt, *op. cit.*

**The crucial break point is when students begin to see that historical accounts cannot be copies of the past.**



## Douglas Haig: donkey or scapegoat?

As every student knows, Douglas Haig was the Butcher of the Somme. Yet it has not always been so. Haig's reputation has changed over time in response less to new evidence than to new attitudes. At first a beneficiary of the British desire not to challenge the war and thereby dishonour its dead, Haig would become a scapegoat for an anti-war public in the 1930s. Although his reputation among academics would be turned around, the public perception of him would not. There are few historical figures for whom the gap between academic and popular interpretations has been so wide.

During the First World War there had been fierce opposition to Haig. Edmonds (the official historian), Swinton (the tank commander) and Henry Wilson (who became Chief of Imperial General Staff in 1918) all labelled him 'stupid.' Churchill tried to get him sacked. Lloyd George hated his guts. After the War, however, Haig benefited from an attitude – mirrored in hymns such as *I Vow to Thee My Country* (1918) – which saw the loss of lives not as a tragedy, but as a Christ-like act of redeeming sacrifice. At the same time, Haig was a consummate self-publicist – he re-issued his despatches from the field, published (edited) passages from his diary, and sent a 75-page Memorandum on the Operations on the Western Front to everybody he knew to be writing a history of the War. He also interfered with the official history of the War. Thus, for a decade, most publications about Haig were eulogistic.<sup>1</sup>

The years 1927–1933, however, saw a revisionism – including Sassoon's and Owen's poems, and books such as *Goodbye to All That*, which emphasised the horror and futility of the War and presented the ordinary soldier as the victim of callous generals.<sup>2</sup> This changing attitude both fuelled and fed on public support for the policy of appeasement. Books appeared which criticised Haig. Liddell Hart's *The Real War* savaged Haig for ignorance of conditions on the battlefield, for an inadequate grasp of reality, and for the hell through which he put the soldiers.<sup>3</sup> Then, in 1933–6, Lloyd George's (well-researched and convincing) *War Memoirs* pilloried Haig as 'a second-rate Commander' and a 'planomaniac', who could only repeat endlessly the strategy that had failed innumerable times before – and who thus sent thousands of young men unnecessarily to their deaths.<sup>4</sup>

Haig's reputation did not recover after the Second World War. The hippy generation was never going to appreciate his Presbyterian pruderies or his desire

to staff GHQ with 'gentlemen'. Instead, the BBC Series *The Great War* laid the soldiers' sufferings before a television audience.<sup>5</sup> In 1963, a communist actress named Joan Littlewood – having read Alan Clark's *The Donkeys* – threw out the First World War play she was working on, and wrote instead the musical, *Oh What A Lovely War!*<sup>6</sup> It underlined an interpretation of the War as the expression of class-ridden Army stupidity, and a wicked waste of men's lives. Haig became an object of ridicule and class-anger: it was the nadir of his reputation.

### scholarship has proved less convincing than television

Ironically, 1963 saw also the publication of John Terraine's *Douglas Haig, the Educated Soldier*.<sup>7</sup> Terraine objected to an interpretation of Haig 'deafened by sixty years of lamentation.' He demolished the 'myths' of the War, concluding: 'The charge that Haig was careless about the lives of his soldiers, or that he was out of touch with the realities of war, cannot survive inspection of [the] documents that bear his signature...' Terraine failed to convince the academic establishment, but in 1987 Tim Travers published his seminal book, *The Killing Ground*.<sup>8</sup> Travers placed Haig in the proper historical context of an Army which still saw morale as the critical factor in victory. Travers argued that Haig, 'failed to come to grips with the twentieth-century paradigm ... of war,' and that he hindered the learning curve which eventually integrated the new technology and led to the victorious campaign of 1918. Nevertheless, Travers conceded, Haig's policy of attrition did 'lead eventually to victory, although at heavy cost.' Subsequently, although criticism of Haig has continued, revisionist historians have found positive aspects to Haig's command, and the trend of modern scholarship is towards a synthesis, which acknowledges Haig's mistakes and failings, but sees significant strengths and successes.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, excepting Gordon Corrigan's *Mud, Blood and Poppycock*, modern academic rehabilitation has not budged the popular demonisation of Haig.<sup>10</sup> In this respect, scholarship has proved less convincing than television: the series *Blackadder Goes Forth* has driven the 'butchers and bunglers' myth deep into the popular subconscious.<sup>11</sup> The subtle synthesis of modern academia can hardly compete with the popular caricature of the donkey leading lions to their death.

## Designing enquiries to make students think about interpretations of Haig

### Key Stages 3 and 4

A recent thread on the TES staffroom forum shows that teachers are at least becoming aware of the issues, and the 'Great Haig debate' has made it onto the Internet and even into a GCSE coursework assignment, but school treatments (especially amongst English teachers) still tend to emphasise the 'lions led by donkeys' approach.<sup>12</sup> Why are there such different views of Haig's achievement? One teacher bases his lessons around a poster which states: 'Mud blood and appalling waste – this Historian thinks that this view of WW1 is rubbish. Your English teacher is to blame!' As a way in to that you could ask your students *Why are some historians' view of Haig so different to the popular view in Britain?* You could address the historiographical labels more directly – *Why has Haig been called both a 'butcher and bungler' and one of the 'Great Captains of History'?* Look at the media – show them *Blackadder* and ask, *What influenced Curtis and Elton's interpretation of Haig?* If you do, consider the inconsistencies in the source material and of the historiographical record from which Curtis and Elton draw. Make sure that you spend just as much time on the origins of the particular *Blackadder* interpretation itself. What is it about comedy (particularly British comedy) that demands the presence of an incompetent aristocratic villain? You could perhaps compare the dramatic structure of *Blackadder the Third* with its foolishly aristocratic Prince Regent. Alternatively you could ignore the later twentieth century and focus on the historiographical



From the AQA Coursework Exemplar paper.<sup>13</sup>  
How does this poster demonise Haig?

interpretations which were produced at the time. Address the issue of politicians passing the blame: *Why did Lloyd George promote the view of Haig as incompetent?* Finally, you could turn the tables by asking, *Why was Haig's reputation so good immediately after the War?*

### Further Reading

- The article and reviews/summaries of a number of interpretations of Haig can be accessed from: [www.johndclare.net/wwi3.htm](http://www.johndclare.net/wwi3.htm). The article condenses a longer historiography at: [www.johndclare.net/wwi3\\_HaigHistoriography.htm](http://www.johndclare.net/wwi3_HaigHistoriography.htm).
- The Great Haig Debate can also be found on the Internet at [www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/comment/haig-debate.html](http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/comment/haig-debate.html)
- Sheffield, G. (2001) *Forgotten Victory: The First World War – Myths and Realities*, Headline, is another good recent synthesis.

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- <sup>13</sup> From the book *General Haig's Private War*, according to the assignment, and probably from the 1960s. We would be most grateful if the copyright holder, whom we cannot trace, would contact us.

This edition's Polychronicon was compiled by John D Clare. He is Deputy Headteacher at Greenfield School (11-16 comprehensive), in County Durham. He is author of a number of History textbooks at KS3 and KS4.

Polychronicon was a fourteenth-century chronicle that brought together much of the knowledge of its own age. Our Polychronicon in *Teaching History* is a regular feature helping school history teachers to update their subject knowledge, with special emphasis on recent historiography and changing interpretation.

# Seeing, hearing and doing the Renaissance (Part 1): Let's have a Renaissance party!

In two, linked articles, appearing in this and the next edition, Maria Osowiecki shares an account of a five-lesson enquiry, based on the concept of historical significance (National Curriculum Key Element 2e) for mixed ability Year 8. She wanted to experiment with an array of creative teaching techniques that would appeal to a wide range of learning styles and to examine how this could improve learning. The result was a feast of aural, oral, visual and kinaesthetic activity on the theme of the European Renaissance, all built around the enquiry question: 'What was so remarkable about the Renaissance?'. This first article focuses upon just one of the five lessons: lesson 4. Osowiecki describes the two major activities of the lesson – the Renaissance party and its follow-up, a balloon debate. A huge success, this pair of activities was pivotal in motivating pupils and proved efficient as a way of building both knowledge and conceptual reflection. Here Osowiecki illustrates the resources and some of the context for the lesson. In Part 2, in the next edition, she will present a rationale for the whole sequence of five lessons, a full description of all five lessons, a discussion of the 'learning styles' question and an in-depth evaluation of the quality of pupils' learning about historical significance.

My PGCE dissertation was based on a scheme of work for a five-lesson enquiry on the European Renaissance. The purpose of this new enquiry was threefold: first to provide Year 8 pupils with a European study; second, to introduce pupils to Key Element 2e of the National Curriculum – historical significance; and third to incorporate a range of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities in order to cater for the diverse range of preferred learning styles within the class. This introductory article will focus on Lesson 4 in the 5-lesson sequence – sharing some resources and results of two particularly successful activities, the Renaissance Party and the balloon debate. In Part II, I will give a full account of all five lessons, evaluating these with reference to the concept of historical significance and offering some reflections on the 'learning styles' debate.

One main enquiry question - What was so remarkable about the Renaissance? - drove the learning in all five lessons and culminated in an explicit attempt to answer that question through extended writing in Lesson 5. In that final lesson and the ensuing homework, pupils produced a script for a TV documentary on the Renaissance. As they had been working with the idea of historical significance right across the lesson sequence, they were able to use the documentary script to draw together all that conceptual learning and to answer the enquiry question.

The journey towards that final activity was lively and varied, with pupils encountering a range of visual material from the Renaissance and carrying out activities that involved a great deal of movement, structured talk and discussion. They constantly had to reach judgements, draw comparisons and link issues. Across the lessons,

some key themes structured their learning. For example, to enable pupils to sort and organise their ideas more easily, emphasis was laid on three strands of the Renaissance: art, science and exploration. These three themes became ready-made sorting mechanisms within which pupils could analyse the historical significance of individuals or events. The themes were to be particularly prominent in an enormous timeline spanning the back of the classroom, and incorporating more and more of the pupils' work as the lessons' proceeded.

After building a substantial body of knowledge and after beginning to climb into the conceptual basis of the enquiry (historical significance) during the first three lessons, the fourth lesson was designed to reinforce this learning through two predominantly kinaesthetic activities: a Renaissance party followed up with a balloon debate. I wanted each of these activities to develop the historical thinking of all abilities through movement, speaking and listening. In the Renaissance party, pupils had to employ their knowledge of Renaissance figures, trends and occupations to 'unmask' their fellow pupils. Having been told that they had been invited to the Italian ambassador's party, each pupil was given a mask (see Figure 1) and a secret-identity card which contained the identity of and basic information about a Renaissance figure (see Figure 2). Pupils had to remain in role as their character and attempt to establish the identity of their classmates by asking a series of closed questions. They were not to reveal their own identity unless another pupil worked it out, at which point they would remove their mask to demonstrate that their identity had been 'unmasked'. This meant that pupils were forced to use their knowledge of Renaissance figures. To support them in recalling relevant knowledge, they

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Maria Osowiecki

were encouraged to refer to the huge class timeline on the wall, full of their own detailed work and an array of visual references. This helped them to devise questions that would uncover the identity of other pupils (they were prohibited from simply listing names). A competitive element was introduced by explaining that the last five pupils to be unmasked would receive merits. Finally, crisps, lemonade and Renaissance music were provided to create a party atmosphere.

The latter half of the lesson continued the focus on Renaissance individuals, but narrowed the focus down to five figures: Michelangelo, Christopher Columbus, Andreas Vesalius, Leonardo da Vinci and Nicholas Copernicus. The class was divided into six groups for a balloon-debate; five of the groups were assigned one of the five Renaissance figures, whilst pupils in the sixth group were to act as judges. Each group was given an information booklet containing fictional speeches from each of the five figures (three of these are reproduced by way of example in Figure 3) and a set of instructions for the judges. The aim of this exercise was for the five character groups to prove that their Renaissance figure was the 'ultimate Renaissance man'. In other words, they were to convince the judges that their individual was the most historically significant by composing a speech outlining what was significant about their figure and, conversely, why the other figures were not as significant. Representatives from each group were then to stand on chairs placed in a circle in the middle of the room (to simulate a hot-air balloon) and deliver their group's speech to the judges (and the rest of the class). The judges had to decide which of the groups had delivered the most convincing speeches and so had earned the right to stay in the balloon. The judges

were then to explain their decision to the class, focusing on presentation, content and quality of reflection concerning historical significance.

Considering the potential for disaster offered by these two activities, they were remarkably successful in securing the learning objectives of the lesson. I had worried that pupils would take advantage of the noise, music and general chaos generated by the party but it was clear that all pupils, particularly the boys, were motivated by the competitive element of the activity. The standard of questioning during the Renaissance party was impressive. Pupils both drew upon prior learning and had recourse to the class timeline. The masks were also an effective way of signalling which pupils had yet to be identified.

Having had their general knowledge of Renaissance figures warmed up by means of the Renaissance party, pupils were ready to focus their attention upon the historical significance of five individuals using the balloon debate. Motivated by the competitive element, pupils produced final speeches of a good standard. An integrated consideration of historical significance was demonstrated by at least four of the groups. The group representing Nicholas Copernicus, for example, argued that Copernicus was remarkable because his ideas were so radical at the time *and* because he risked so much by expressing them, as well as the fact that the ideas had an impact on future knowledge and events.

The two activities complemented each other well. By strengthening broader knowledge very efficiently, the first activity gave pupils plenty of context for a rich and conceptually-rooted debate in the second. The pupils' enthusiasm surprised even me.

**Pupils had to employ their knowledge to 'unmask' their fellow pupils.**

**Figure 1:** Make a mask for each pupil at the party.  
(Enlarge this mask slightly, copy it onto thin card, cut it out and attach elastic.)

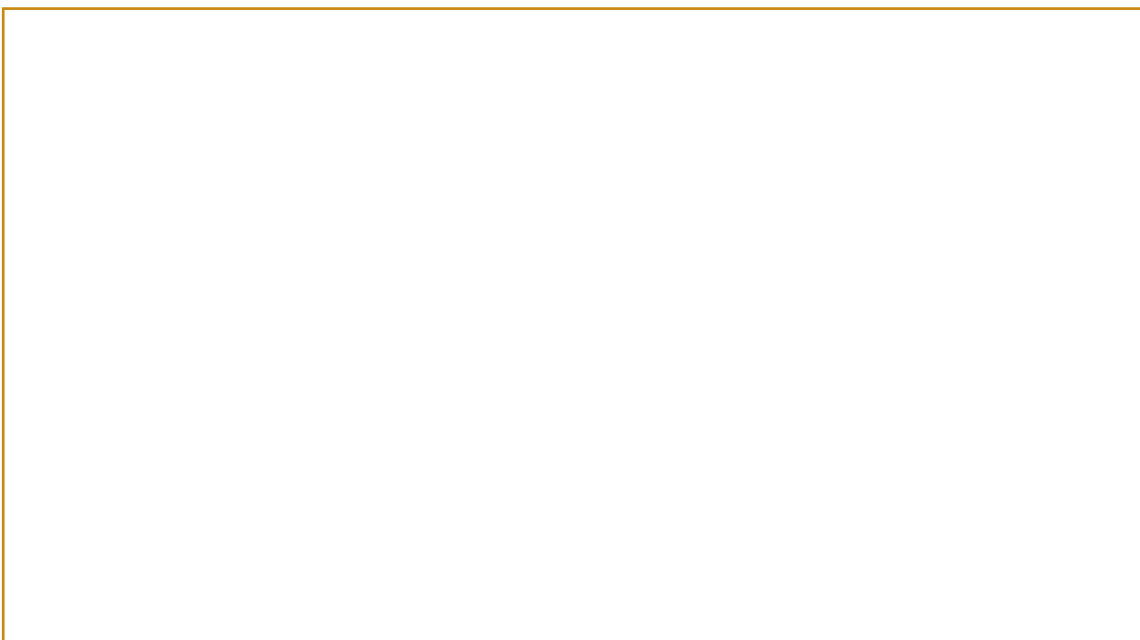


Figure 2: Character cards. Give each pupil a character card before the Renaissance party begins.

**You are  
Pope Nicholas V (1397-1455)**

You are in charge of the Roman Catholic Church and you live at the Vatican in Rome. You have enormous wealth and power. You tried to restore the glory of Rome by collecting books and manuscripts for the Vatican library and by employing lots of architects to build new churches, palaces and monasteries in the Roman style.

**You are  
Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446)**

You are a great architect and you live in Florence in Italy. You design Roman-style buildings. You create huge domes and ceilings. Your most famous building is the dome of Florence Cathedral. Large domes are difficult to build because they usually collapse, but your new scaffolding allowed you to make the dome of Florence Cathedral very large indeed.

**You are  
Galileo (1564-1642)**

You are a famous astronomer (you work out how the universe works). You have proven beyond doubt that Copernicus was right to say that the Earth revolves around the sun. This was not the accepted version of the way the universe worked. It was against the teachings of the Church, which said that the Earth was the centre of the universe.

**You are  
Bartholomew Diaz (c. 1450-1500)**

You are a famous explorer who was given instructions to find a sea route to the Far East round Africa. You sailed from Spain in 1486 and managed to get just past the Cape of Good Hope (the tip of South Africa).

**You are  
Johannes Kepler (1571-1630)**

You are a German astronomer (someone who tries to work out how the universe works) and you have used mathematical calculations to work out how the planets move. You have proven that Copernicus was right to say that the planets revolve around the sun. But you have shown more accurately exactly how the planets move. Your ideas were challenged by the Church and you have been expelled (kicked out) of your university.

**You are  
John Cabot (c. 1450-1498)**

You are an English explorer who was given permission by King Henry VII to go exploring in 1497. You sailed from England, hoping to reach the Far East. Instead, you found Canada.

**You are  
Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543)**

You are a Polish scientist who moved to Italy to study Greek, mathematics, astronomy and medicine. You have observed the movement of the planets and stars and you have decided that the Earth and the other planets revolve around the Sun. You published your ideas in a book called 'Revolution of the Celestial Spheres'. Your views are not popular with the Church. Most people in Europe still believe that the sun and the planets revolve around the Earth.

**You are  
Christopher Columbus (c. 1446-1506)**

You are a famous Italian explorer. You believe that the Earth is round and that if you sail westward you will reach China. Between 1492 and 1503, the king and queen of Spain gave you money and permission to go exploring. You made four voyages and thought that you had reached China. In actual fact, you reached the Bahamas.

**You are  
Pope Julius II (1443-1513)**

You are in charge of the Roman Catholic Church. You live at the Vatican in Rome. You have enormous wealth and power and you are a great patron of the arts. You employ famous painters and architects, such as Raphael and Michelangelo. You commissioned Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome – a great and astonishing work of art.

**You are  
Boticelli (1445-1510)**

You are a famous Italian painter, whose most famous paintings were *The Birth of Venus* and *La Primavera*. You also painted some of the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel (the Pope's chapel in Rome).



**You are  
Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527)**

You are a politician and a writer. You live in Florence. You are famous for writing a book called *The Prince* in which you describe a new way of thinking about power. You argued that princes must make unpleasant decisions and that it is better for a prince to be feared than loved by his people. There are times when a prince has to be cruel. These ideas shock many people. Some think that you work with the devil.

**You are  
Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536)**

You are a famous Dutch writer who has been influenced by the new Renaissance ideas. You are interested in the ideas of the ancient Greeks and Romans. You are also in favour of reforming the Church and have criticised its faults and abuses.

**You are  
Lorenzo de Medici (1439-1492)**

You are a member of a powerful family of bankers in Florence. You also help to rule Florence. You are a great patron of the arts and you have tried hard to make Florence the cultural capital of Italy. You employ many artists, sculptors and architects to make beautiful buildings, paintings and other works of art. You are often known as 'Lorenzo the Magnificent'.

**You are  
Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564)**

You are one of the great medical men of the Renaissance. You dissect (cut open and examine) bodies in order to work out exactly how the human body works and what different body parts look like. You wrote a book called *The Fabric of the Human Body*, which contained the first accurate drawings of the entire human body.

**You are  
Ferdinand Magellan (c. 1480-1521)**

You are a famous explorer. You believed that you could reach the East Indies by sailing west. You set sail from Spain and your expedition managed to sail all the way around the world between 1519 and 1522.

**You are  
Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)**

You are one of the most famous painters of all time. You trained as an artist in Florence, and you later worked in Milan, Venice, Rome and France. You painted the Mona Lisa, but you also advanced our knowledge of anatomy (human body) by cutting up and making accurate drawings of bodies. You also invent things which are way ahead of your time, such as a paddle boat and a helicopter.

**You are  
Amerigo Vespucci**

You are a famous explorer who made several voyages from Spain between 1499 and 1501. You landed in South America and you gave your name to America.

**You are  
Raphael (1483-1520)**

You are one of the most famous painters of the Renaissance. You have worked in many places, including Florence and Rome. You also took over as the architect of St Peter's in Rome in 1514 (the Pope's own Cathedral).

**You are  
Donatello (1386-1466)**

You are a famous sculptor. You make statues in the style of the Romans and Greeks. You trained in Florence and are friends with Cosimo de Medici, one of the most powerful men in Florence. Your marble and bronze statues are so important that people consider you to be the founder of modern sculpture.

**You are  
Cosimo de Medici (1389-1464)**

You are probably the most important person in Florence. Your family are rich bankers and you virtually rule the city. You are also a great patron of the arts. You commissioned Donatello to sculpt the famous bronze statue of David.

**Figure 3:** Three examples of “back from the dead” accounts by key Renaissance figures. These were part of the information booklets supplied to each group in preparation for their balloon debate.

## Nicolas Copernicus



Coming to Italy from Poland was a wonderful experience for me. The Renaissance was a good time for science and astronomy: people were prepared to think carefully about how the universe works. I was interested in the way that the stars and the planets move. The Church had always said that earth is at the centre of the universe, but I spent many nights observing the heavens and working out complicated mathematical calculations. Eventually, I was convinced that the earth and other planets really revolve around the sun. Of course, I couldn't really prove that I was right, so most people continued to



think that the Sun turned around the earth. And no wonder, when the Church thought that my ideas were blasphemous and evil! I did get a few things wrong: I knew that the earth revolved around the sun, but I was wrong in the way it did. It was actually Galileo who **proved** that the Sun was at the centre of the universe. He also showed, more accurately than me, how the planets move.

But I was **definitely** the **first** to have the idea that the Earth moves around the sun!

**No-one** else thought so at the time!



## Christopher Columbus



I was a very famous explorer. Travel was dangerous yet I was prepared to risk rough seas and journey to unknown lands. You see, I believed that the world was round. When I was alive, there were still people who believed that the earth was flat, and that you could fall off the edge if you sailed too far. But I knew that if I sailed far enough West, I would reach China. (This would have been a very good thing for the king and queen of Spain, who paid for my voyages. Trade in the East would make them a lot of money.) As it turned out, I didn't reach China; I found America instead. Only it wasn't quite America, it was the Bahamas. Well, it's close enough. The point is that no-one in our part of the world knew that the continent of America existed at the time – and **I found it!!** Some now say that my voyages marked the beginning of European settlement in North and South America. What enormous changes that was to bring...



## Leonardo da Vinci



From a very young age it was clear that I was a skilful artist. People now think that my most famous paintings, *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*, are **masterpieces**. They say that they are incredibly life-like. I used perspective, as I wanted my paintings to be as realistic as possible. In my notebook, I made sketches of the people and animals that I saw, the way they moved and their expressions. I was also interested in the human body so I cut up and drew numerous body parts: I wanted my drawings to be accurate. I believed that people could only understand how the body worked by cutting bodies open and looking very carefully at all their parts

(observing and experimenting were very unusual things to do when I was alive). I also drew a number of fantastic and remarkable inventions, such as flying machines and submarines. Of course, I never built such things, so I don't know if my inventions would ever have worked, but I was the first to think that such things were possible. I was not very good at finishing things – only about fifteen of my paintings survive. I was much more interested in getting things right.

## JUDGES

You need to listen carefully to what each group says and decide which two groups present the best argument. The groups are trying to convince you that their character is the most historically significant. At the end of the presentations you will have to explain your decision to the class.

### How to prepare

Decide what you are looking for:

What do you think 'significant' means?

What do you expect each group to do?

How are you going to mark each group?

Work out and write down what your criteria (expectations) are.

# ME MOVE ON

## THE PROBLEM PAGE FOR HISTORY MENTORS

This feature of *Teaching History* is designed to build critical, informed debate about the character of teacher-training, teacher education and professional development. It is also designed to offer practical help to all involved in training new history teachers. Each issue presents a situation in initial teacher education/training with an emphasis upon a particular, history-specific issue.

Mentors or others involved in the training of student history teachers are invited to be the agony aunts.

### **THIS ISSUE'S PROBLEM:**

**Mary is having problems  
putting her  
IDEAS into PRACTICE**

Mary is some weeks into her main school placement and both she and those working with her are feeling increasingly frustrated that she is struggling to put her ideas into practice. She came to the PGCE course deeply committed to education and passionate about the value of learning history. She is a mature student - in her late 30s and with two young children - and in part it has been her experience as a parent that has led her into teaching. Both she and her family have committed a lot to this enterprise: she left full time employment as a nurse to take a degree in history (and she achieved a first) and now the PGCE. In her initial school placement, everyone was deeply impressed by many aspects of her thinking and practice. She was really using her intellect to devise challenging activities that had the potential to enable students to make sense of complex historical issues, and in the classroom her enthusiasm for history and care for her students were great strengths of her teaching. These same characteristics are evident in her work in her second school placement but increasingly, there are occasions when her lessons start well but then begin to unravel. It seems as if she is almost too committed: she wants every pupil to understand every possible idea about every aspect of history and feels personally responsible for ensuring that this happens. Mary responds very positively to constructive feedback but is finding it hard to juggle everything at once: when she focuses on one aspect of her development then everything else - even if it was in place the previous week - seems to go out of the window. There are days when she looks exhausted as she arrives at school but her sense of professionalism means that she never complains. Her mentor is becoming worried that her desire to do the best by the pupils (and her own family) means that she is completely neglecting her own needs and that she will become disheartened and disillusioned.

## Note from Mary to her mentor

As you had to rush off at the end of school I thought I'd drop you this note as it would be really good if we could talk about this on Monday before my lesson with 9RB on Tuesday. I've found some really excellent material on the persecution of Jewish people that seems to me brilliant to get us all to think about significance and to challenge some of their likely preconceptions about the Holocaust. But I'm worried that because I care so much about this topic I'll lose the plot when it actually comes to teaching it. It's a bit ironic really – I blew the local history lesson when I couldn't care less about the subject matter! Either way it seems to end up in a muddle every time at the moment.

## Extract from lesson observation carried out by Reggie, Mary's mentor

<b>Date 25 March</b>	<b>Class 10C3</b>	<b>Time: 8.50-9.50</b>		
<b>Subject:</b> Preparing for local history coursework				
<p><b>Agreed focus:</b> Standard 3.3.3: teach clearly structured lessons or sequences of work which interest and motivate pupils and which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make learning objectives clear to pupils</li> <li>• employ interactive teaching methods and collaborative group work</li> <li>• promote active and independent learning that enables pupils to think for themselves, and to plan and manage their own learning.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Achievements in relation to focus</b> Very successful in many ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central task – two strong claims for each group to <i>prove</i> true or false - offered an imaginative variation on standard question and answer approaches to recording information and certainly placed responsibility for learning clearly on them.</li> <li>• It was well supported by the initial brainstorm, and by the final question you posed.</li> <li>• The detailed response from the first group showed how effectively the task could stimulate well-supported argument. They spelt out brilliantly both the ways in which this city was unlike industrial cities, and the reasons for these differences.</li> <li>• You were obviously communicating effectively - as you circulated round groups - about the central purpose of the task.</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Aspects for further development</b> Sadly, after coming up with that brilliant idea for the main activity, you almost seemed to give up on the challenge of engaging students in their own learning. Two key issues here:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>1. Introducing the task/motivating students</p> <p>I know you don't find the local history module particularly interesting, but don't <i>sound</i> so despairing! If you really feel you can't find any stimulus in the subject matter, go for the value of the 'skills' – selecting relevant evidence/examples to prove a claim; structuring coherent explanations.</p> <p>Just once (talking about the railway workers) you actually spelt out the characteristics of a high level response to the sorts of questions they will tackle in the coursework. Otherwise you tended to talk (in slightly panic-inducing terms) about them needing to get the stuff written down. What 'stuff'? What criteria should they be using to determine what was relevant/convincing?</p> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>2. Feedback/learning from each other</p> <p>You were right to abandon the idea of them copying key points from each group's presentation (far too much!) – but had you really thought things through in advance? What were you expecting them to produce? A more worthwhile use of the presentations, again providing some kind of stimulus, would have been to establish with the class the criteria for a good response e.g. specific factual detail to prove their claims about similarity and difference; or perhaps use of the PEGEX formula (point, example, explanation) and then score each other's presentation as they watched, perhaps offering further/better examples to improve them.</p> <p>You need to play the <i>whole</i> lesson through in your head. What are you going to say to get them into it? What <i>exactly</i> will they be doing/producing? How will you draw that learning together at the end: what is it you really want them to take away?</p> </td> </tr> </table>			<p>1. Introducing the task/motivating students</p> <p>I know you don't find the local history module particularly interesting, but don't <i>sound</i> so despairing! If you really feel you can't find any stimulus in the subject matter, go for the value of the 'skills' – selecting relevant evidence/examples to prove a claim; structuring coherent explanations.</p> <p>Just once (talking about the railway workers) you actually spelt out the characteristics of a high level response to the sorts of questions they will tackle in the coursework. Otherwise you tended to talk (in slightly panic-inducing terms) about them needing to get the stuff written down. What 'stuff'? What criteria should they be using to determine what was relevant/convincing?</p>	<p>2. Feedback/learning from each other</p> <p>You were right to abandon the idea of them copying key points from each group's presentation (far too much!) – but had you really thought things through in advance? What were you expecting them to produce? A more worthwhile use of the presentations, again providing some kind of stimulus, would have been to establish with the class the criteria for a good response e.g. specific factual detail to prove their claims about similarity and difference; or perhaps use of the PEGEX formula (point, example, explanation) and then score each other's presentation as they watched, perhaps offering further/better examples to improve them.</p> <p>You need to play the <i>whole</i> lesson through in your head. What are you going to say to get them into it? What <i>exactly</i> will they be doing/producing? How will you draw that learning together at the end: what is it you really want them to take away?</p>
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## Extract from the progress report compiled by the curriculum tutor, following a school visit some weeks into Mary's main (2<sup>nd</sup>) school placement.

Our conclusion was that while you have been able to demonstrate achievement in relation to most of the Standards *in one context or another*, we have not yet seen you *sustain* this. Strengths in relation to one aspect often tend to mean that other aspects get overlooked and things start to unravel. We listed lots of separate instances of excellent practice: brilliant enquiry questions and good resources for the Year 9 scheme on the Cold War; positive, assertive behaviour management with that tricky Year 8, very sound subject knowledge underpinning most of your teaching. Our concern, however, is that you must be able to hold them all together – sustaining a good idea at the planning stage through the final practical details of how it will play out, and actively supporting it through the way in which you present it to the pupils. You have strong views about what matters in history and why young people need to be able to think in certain ways: the challenge is to hang onto those views and make them count in lessons.



## Russell Manning and Darius Jackson

Russell Manning is Lecturer in History in Education and Darius Jackson is Lecturer in History and Citizenship in Education. They both work at the University of Birmingham.

Mary has the potential to become an outstanding teacher. Her life experience, skills, commitment and intellect could make her a valuable member of any school community. However, her confidence has clearly been knocked and she is putting herself under too much pressure. As a result, her teaching has suffered.

WE WOULD OFFER THE FOLLOWING ADVICE TO MARY'S MENTOR:

1. Why is Mary finding it difficult to put her ideas into practice? To begin with, we would spend time reinforcing the positive aspects of her teaching practice as well as her intellectual and moral qualities:

- Spend time talking to her about why she chose to become a teacher. She started the PGCE 'deeply committed to education' and 'passionate about the value of learning history'. Make sure she refocuses on her obvious moral commitment to education and her undoubted intellectual qualities.
- Tell her that you believe in her and that she will become a great teacher - but that it also takes time.
- Point out the mistakes you make and what you do about it.
- Celebrate her successes and remember how quickly triumphs can be forgotten when one aspect of a lesson goes wrong.
- Mary will find it difficult to make progress unless she begins to believe in herself. As her mentor you have a key role, but remember you may also be able to involve other members of your department, the senior mentor in the school and university tutors. You are not alone!

2. What has changed between Mary's first successful teaching practice and her second less successful one? Discuss why her first teaching practice was such a success and then compare it to her current one. Consider the following:

- Are there significant differences between how her first mentor was supporting her and what you are doing? Do not be afraid to ask 'what can I do for you?' As a reflective teacher yourself, you should be willing to listen to Mary's suggestions and learn how other successful mentors handle their students.
- Are there significant differences between the schools in which Mary has been placed? If there are, can you suggest ways in which she can cope with the different challenges?
- Could you cut back on her teaching load? We would suggest that it would be better for Mary to have the time to plan fewer but more successful lessons. She would then avoid teaching a large number of lessons that are less than successful and reinforce her belief that she has entered a downward spiral.
- Plan key lessons together with Mary. Encourage her to develop the three-part lesson and see her lessons as containing a number of beginnings, middles and ends. Help her to identify different ways of communicating the objectives of the lesson early on. If her lesson beginnings are successful then her plenary sessions could be just as good.
- Encourage her to observe other lessons. This will help her to understand why successful teachers are able to structure their lessons well. When she observes your lessons, encourage her to be critical so that she can see that there is no such thing as a perfect lesson.

3. How can you save a potentially excellent teacher from becoming a failure?

- Reinforcing her belief in herself, through collaborative planning, lesson observation and discussion will certainly help Mary. However, you may also wish to discuss issues of time management with her. We are not suggesting you adopt her children for the remainder of her teaching practice! However, if you feel it is appropriate, some discussion around this issue might be helpful, especially in terms of discussing the balance of work and home commitments. Mary needs to be encouraged to find a lifestyle that suits her, or else she may damage her health and leave the profession prematurely.

This response was written jointly by the PGCE (secondary) history team of mentors at the Institute of Education, University of Warwick.

It is a shame that Mary is feeling so frustrated and lacking in confidence after such a promising start. It is not uncommon, however, for trainee teachers to experience 'dips' during the year, particularly when they find themselves in a different school or become more ambitious in what they set out to achieve. We feel that Mary needs some very sensitive but pro-active mentoring and we are not entirely convinced that she is receiving enough of either.

WE WOULD OFFER THE FOLLOWING ADVICE TO MARY'S MENTOR:

1. Mary needs to simplify her lesson objectives and become more aware of the bigger picture. Encourage her to identify some clear, focused questions and some realistic and tangible outcomes. Make this a focus for the next two weeks' mentor meetings, lesson planning and observations (of her and by her). Use your mentor meeting time to engage in some collaborative planning. By planning with Mary, you will learn a great deal about the source of her problems and be able to model a different approach.
2. Encourage Mary to think in terms of the bigger picture by helping her to identify medium and even longer-term goals. Urge her to revisit the departmental schemes of work and share some medium-term planning strategies. She may find some more recent textbooks helpful (for example, the Longman 'Think Through History' series) in the way they model several of the features you wish to nurture: a focused enquiry question and tangible outcomes which span a number of lessons. She might also profit from revisiting some of the *Teaching History* articles she read last term. For example, suggest she rereads Banham & Hall's article in Issue 113 ('JFK: the medium, the message and the myth'). This article is perfect for exploring how complex and ambitious objectives can be broken down into manageable chunks by planning across a number of lessons and by identifying a good question and a valid, tangible end-product.
3. As well as planning collaboratively, try teaching collaboratively too. This should bolster Mary's confidence and also reduce her stress levels. In fact, we would seriously consider reducing her teaching load until she feels she is making progress again – this is not a mere endurance test! As an alternative – or addition – to collaborative teaching, why not ask Mary to teach one of your plans and vice versa?
4. In order to refine Mary's reflective skills – including an appreciation of her strengths as well as her areas for development – why not video one of her lessons? Reassure her that only you and she will be the audience. This will enable you both to reflect on a lesson in considerable detail. In our experience, this can be invaluable. You might consider asking Mary to video you initially so that you can reflect on your own practice with her at greater leisure. This will also make the experience less stress-inducing!
5. We would urge you to be careful in your feedback. Your completed observation sheet was very negative in tone, even though you began with positives. Mary is feeling overwhelmed and your feedback might serve to exacerbate this. Think of how you can reduce Mary's current stress levels and build on her strengths. Try to be more self-disciplined in the number of areas you identify for development and limit yourself to only the very central issue each week. Mary will be unable to cope with more than this at once and will only become more demoralised if she is constantly presented with a new list of problems to overcome.

### NEXT ISSUE'S PROBLEM:

Eddie thinks that lessons are either about serious learning OR something fun for a bit of light relief. For full details of Eddie's Mentor's Problem, contact Christine Counsell, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, 17 Trumpington St, Cambridge CB2 1QA. E-mail: cc247@cam.ac.uk Responses are invited from mentors and trainers of trainee teachers. Responses for the March edition must be received by 31 January 2005.

Mary and Eddie are fictional characters. Thanks to Anna Pendry and Katharine Burn, Oxford University Department of Educational Studies, for devising the Move Me On problem.



# 'Learning about an 800-year-old fight can't be *all that bad*, can it? It's like what Simon and Kane did yesterday': modern-day parallels in history

Deborah Robbins is a Newly Qualified Teacher at Banbury School (11-19 comprehensive), Oxfordshire.

Deborah Robbins

Deborah Robbins charts a story of her own learning during the PGCE year. She explains how she identified a point of interest in her own practice – the use of modern-day examples. Turning this into a focus for testing her own hypotheses, she theorised from her own lessons to produce guiding principles to improve her teaching. For example, she suggests that pupils need to distance themselves *from the modern analogy itself* before they can apply it to the past situation. Her conclusion is that engagement is all and that temporary detours from historical precision are justified by the need to help pupils use 'what they already know about the human and emotional world they bring with them'.

My interest in modern-day parallels started one uninspiring Wednesday afternoon in February. The pupils entered the class restless. Many were late. Something about wet and windy weather. It was not the greatest of starts. The lesson activity? A decision-making exercise on the motivation of Truman for dropping the atomic bomb. The pupils, against all the odds, displayed remarkable understanding and maturity. But the lesson stumbled on one idea. The pupils just could not 'get' why Japanese Kamikaze pilots (or, indeed, anyone at all), would actively *choose* to die for their country. Why on earth would somebody choose to die for their Emperor? After all, wasn't it human instinct to survive? Who would *choose* to die for the Queen today? Exactly. This was ridiculous! The lesson had reached a sticking point.

Searching around for an answer, and trying to think quickly on my feet, I attempted another example. I decided to use the example of the 9/11 Islamic fundamentalists:

'...Let's think about the problem as it presents itself today. Think of the determination of the Japanese Kamikaze pilots as similar to that of the 9/11 pilots. Think of their dedication, regardless of the personal cost to their lives. Although we may struggle to understand the strength of motive, think of the difficulty the Americans would have had defeating such a determined people. Now think of the situation in Japan in 1942-5. Three years of difficult war against an impossible enemy. Now, think of your limited options to achieve victory....'

The analogy had some success. The pupils now had some sense of how terrifying the enemy was. They still could not understand the passionate convictions but they began to acknowledge the strength of feeling. As far as it was possible to understand the motives of a suicide bomber, the analogy had worked.

Jolted by the success of the Year 9 lesson, I began to notice how often I used modern-day analogies. It turned out that I made frequent use of them. I began

to generate questions around my own practice. Did other teachers use links to the present as frequently as I did? Did these modern-day parallels motivate pupils by showing them the purpose of studying the past to illuminate the present? Or was it simply my personal stamp on teaching, finding the similarities between past societies and our own so fascinating?

The modern parallel has resonances in recurring debates among history teachers. It crops up in debates about citizenship, empathy, pupil motivation, pupils' moral development and the place of moral judgement in historical study. From the work of Low-Beer in the 1960s on the place of moral judgement in historical analysis to the empathy debates of the 1980s, to recent calls (such as Illingworth's) for history to play a part in developing pupils' values, the relationship between past and present in pupils' learning has been explored in multiple ways.<sup>1</sup> There are debates about whether and how examples from the past can help pupils to learn about and live within the present. Equally, there are debates about how and whether modern-day examples can improve understanding of the past. Many history teachers worry about this, fearing the distortion of period understanding that can come from overplaying analogy with the present. This article will focus on just one aspect of these debates – the motivational and engagement power of pulling pupils into a period issue by means of modern parallels.

## Reasons for modern parallels

Modern-day parallels are invaluable for helping pupils to become sufficiently comfortable with the past; they offer a present-day window to a conceptually remote time. Pupils' affective learning, in order to be effective, has to be structured around the relationships and attitudes of the world they know. By means of implicit analogy, modern examples provide the hook that aids pupil understanding of a difficult concept

Such parallels can also make pupils see the relevance or point of learning about history. Letters written from the trenches in 1916 may make sombre and poignant reading but why should pupils care 100 years on? Add in a parallel with the letters home from soldiers in Iraq today, and pupils see the point.

Some history teachers use modern-day parallels in order to satisfy the requirements of the National Curriculum for Citizenship.<sup>2</sup> Yet even without the Citizenship justification, many history teachers feel that modern analogies enable pupils to reflect on moral questions, to carry out moral reasoning, to consider the ethics of complex interpersonal or international situations. They are very happy to use history as a setting for such wider educational purposes. This is much more problematic (when does it stop being history and become citizenship?) but there is no doubt that for those teachers who are prepared to navigate those complex waters, there are lots of opportunities.<sup>3</sup> This also links with debates concerning the uniqueness of historical situations. For example, by helping pupils to think about how far the Holocaust or the more recent example of the Rwandan genocide are fundamentally similar or different, could we help pupils not only to see the point of continuing to reflect on the Holocaust but also to speculate as to conditions that might make such genocide likely?<sup>4</sup>

## Problems and pitfalls

Many reservations have been expressed about using modern-day parallels. Even those who argue that history can be used as a vehicle for the teaching of Citizenship will often emphasise that analogies should not be seen as neat and unproblematic moral exemplars. They should serve rather as a starting point for discussing the historical context of such issues, examining ways in which the issue can provide an insight into modern-day concerns. Others hold more fundamental concerns about merging history and citizenship. The job of history is surely to illuminate the past through reference to the present – not to illuminate the present through history's tale of the past. For some history teachers, combining the two into one joint course threatens the very purpose of history. And whilst the practical work of teachers and researchers such as McCully or of recent American theorists such as Barton and Levstik might suggest that there are ways of making the aims of citizenship coincide with the aims of history, nonetheless, clear dangers remain.<sup>5</sup> We need to remain alert to ways in which the very nature of history can be threatened by altering the purposes of pupils' activity to the point where we are no longer encouraging pupils to understand people who lived in the past, but rather distorting the past for presentist purposes. On the one hand encouraged for motivational reasons, whilst on the other discouraged by the danger of abandoning rigorous historical authenticity, the modern-day parallel is a contentious issue. Should the history teacher just try harder at or spend more time accurately recreating the past, rather

than taking short cuts and teaching the past through a modern-day window?

But pupils need to be able to structure a settlement with what they already know about the human and emotional world they bring with them. Whilst these sacred places in the past should certainly not be turned into jokey, self-conscious replicas of ourselves, nonetheless, the skilful history teacher can use present-day moral issues as a brilliant way into intrinsically historical thinking. Indeed, Hammond argues that the two are compatible only when you are clear about the distinction: after the motivational pull of emotional and moral interest, the teacher can deftly move onto historical questions.<sup>6</sup> She uses the concept of historical significance to show where the connection between past and present can be made explicit to pupils and how it can foster distinctively historical learning. Wrenn likewise seeks to achieve a connection between past and present that does not compromise the historical focus of learning, but he uses 'interpretations of history' rather than 'historical significance'.<sup>7</sup>

But do any broader, practical principles exist for making modern-day analogies work in the history classroom? Crucially, when do modern parallels serve to confuse the pupil who can access personal experiences in the present but who cannot stand back and create sufficient distance to recreate the past? Does the history teacher lead such a pupil down a misleading path? To put it simply – what are the principles for making modern-day analogies work? What types or kinds cannot work? What rules or principles might guide us? Do we want pupils rigorously to recreate the past through historical authenticity, or does it not matter, just so long as they are motivated?

My answer to this question is influenced by the realisation that the aim of getting pupils really to think and feel like a Tudor statesman cannot be achieved. In that sense, the historical 'truth' is unattainable.<sup>8</sup> So, why all the debates about the degree to which history can be kept accurate, and rigorously historical? The past indeed can never be recreated, because knowing occurs only in the epistemological present.<sup>9</sup> To my mind, the aims of the history teacher are not for pupils to feel the motives and experiences of the past precisely (indeed, this is impossible) but to be motivated and interested by history lessons. We need them to become engaged and determined pupils who grow to love history for its interest and educational value.

## My early efforts

After the initial success of my first modern-day parallel, I began to examine in what circumstances I used modern-day parallels most frequently, and why. One of my main priorities was to use such parallels as a motivational hook for Year 7 into the difficult, unfamiliar world of medieval England. A modern example might bridge the gap into a conceptually almost impossible world for an 11-year-

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old. The topic of the medieval Church held an irresistible temptation to refer to the present-day Church. The easiest way of doing this was to get them to write about a time they had been to a church service. The exercise backfired terribly, and I was quickly to realise that all modern-day analogies do not work. Many pupils had never set foot in a church. Upon reflection, it was terribly naïve not to have accounted for this. Some pupils simply printed off several pages from the Internet. Even the more thoughtful accounts were merely personalised versions of family gatherings and celebrations, detailing at length the clothes, the family members and the highlights of the disco afterwards. How would this aid an understanding of a church service in 1100?

*'The marrege was in a church. I was a bridsmaid. I had a prety dress and nice shoes. The meal thing after was also nice. In the evning we had a disco. All my famly were their'.*

I tried again. My Year 7 group struggled to understand the regulated way of life of monasticism. *Why did people get up at 2.00 am for vespers? Why didn't they just stay in bed?* How on earth do you answer that with 11-year-olds who understand neither the piety nor the voluntary sacrifices of monastic life? In an attempt to recreate the pattern of life, I used the 'Monk Arthur' letter in the *Horrible Histories* series. This likens the life of a religious monastery, regulated by church bells and strict order, to the regulation of school life guided by a bell. I decided to use this analogy.

Perhaps, in hindsight, this school was not the best example to use. The school bell is a weedy affair, struggling to be heard over the chaos of break-times. Although the pupils did seem to understand the ordered and regulated life better, I was not happy with the analogy. I felt it cheapened the hardship of the monks. The pupils probably felt that life for a monk was a bit like going to school. How misleading. For the pupils, the analogy contained more that was distracting than historically illuminating. After all, a 12<sup>th</sup> century abbot would not have started his prayers late if the monks had been playing football on the field at lunchtime.

### Modern distancing and the distant past

The lesson from this? It was clear that the choice of modern-day parallels involved both historical understanding and instinct, and a certain kind of sensitivity to pupils' preconceptions and misconceptions. The crux of the matter was: how could

I expect 11-year-olds to place themselves in the present, and then step coldly back? How on earth could I be critical about their superficial responses if it was me, as the teacher, who had led the pupils down a misleading path in the first place? My comparison invited a half-baked smudging of the present with the past – a confusing, dangerous affair.<sup>10</sup> The analogy seemed to be more damaging than not using one at all. Should I have tried to teach my lesson with real historical examples rather than inadequate analogy? But then again, if pupils are motivated, interested and engaged by a modern-day analogy, did I care if they fail to understand the true extent of medieval piety? Would I have got them to understand this using any other means? I doubt it.

Where the pupils stumbled, I felt it was because the analogies I had introduced drew far too closely on their own experiences – such as their own experiences of attending church or school. There was therefore no distance placed between them and their own experiences. Where the analogies were more successful, pupils had a greater ability to stand back. In Years 8 and 12, the motivation to study 17<sup>th</sup> century England was gained through a comparison of the indiscretions and scandals of court life with modern-day tabloid press. It was something they were aware of – but of which they had no actual living experience. It was from the present, but it was not so familiar that they could not stand back from it. Greater distancing seemed to prepare pupils better for the distant past.

### Getting the modern 'hook' right

Growing experience as a student teacher soon enabled me to enjoy more successful lessons using modern-day analogies. A key learning experience occurred with a challenging Year 7 class. They were about to embark on Thomas Becket. I had the task of motivating pupils to learn about an argument between two people that lived 800 years ago and who were not important to them. Why should they bother learning about this? Why should they care?

The first lesson struggled along. We were doing 'thinking skills', using thinking boards. Perhaps over-ambitious for a Friday afternoon. It was one of those lessons where you catch the teaching assistants gazing outside the window. It was not the greatest lesson I had ever taught. Dreading our next encounter, and after a day of lesson-planning frenzy, I had figured out the solution, the hook, which I gambled would turn disaster to success.

The next lesson, I asked pupils to imagine a scene: a teacher walks into a classroom, and sees two people fighting. An investigation must be launched into finding out why it had happened. How would the teacher go about this? What sort of questions would they need to ask? This is what I wanted them to tell me. I wanted them to develop the difficult skill of generating their own, 'what do we

Figure 1: Reasons why modern parallels are used in history teaching

#### Some reasons why modern parallels are used in history teaching:

making the unfamiliar more familiar by giving pupils a connection with the past based on their own, similar circumstances;

stimulating interest by applying modern sensationalist techniques of (e.g.) modern gutter press and celebrity scandal to colourful historical figures;

making history feel more relevant to pupils by comparing historical circumstances to issues in today's world;

justifying history's place in a competitive curriculum environment by showing its links with citizenship.



need to know' type of enquiry question. I thought it would be an easy way for them to do this.

The pupils were able to relate their own understanding and experiences to the problem; yet they were also able to stand back and think of the investigation a teacher would have to perform. Good questions flew out, most without prompting. Why were the pupils fighting? Was anyone else involved? Was there another problem behind it? Have they fought before over something else? Were they normally good friends, or enemies? Almost every pupil raised these. The analogy gave the pupils a hook. Indifference turned to interest. *Learning about a fight, albeit one that happened 800 years ago, couldn't be that bad, could it?* It was a terribly gruesome fight after all. I was informed it was 'like what Simon and Kane did in our French class yesterday'. The two named at this point looked sheepish at the back of the class. The timing of the lesson was pertinent for them, then.

Without the analogy, I doubt the level of participation in the class would have been achieved. It had clearly motivated them, and enabled them to understand. Did I care that we had abandoned strict historical accuracy if I ended up motivating a difficult class with a modern-day parallel? Did I care that they were interested because they were able to talk about a fight, and not about a medieval theological dispute? Not one bit. As a history teacher, I was pleased they had generated a difficult set of potential enquiry questions, and that were they genuinely interested in the lesson.

Crucially, this hook had not then obscured the subsequent lesson. The hook was not to get them to imagine they were there, to get them to empathise, but simply as a tool to generate some questions. As the class was dismissed, one of the 'characters' turned to me and said it was possibly the best history lesson he has ever been to. It was a pivotal moment for me in my development as a teacher.

Engaging pupils with modern-day hooks *does* create a motivated, interested class. Extensive efforts to find newspaper extracts or film clips to compare the tactics of Hannibal's surprise attack on the Romans with Norman Schwarzkopf's command in the Gulf War and his misleading of the Iraqi army made all the difference. I quickly learned why some teachers dig out that old video tape or cut out news stories from the press. It is the most wonderful reason: not because the senior management has forced them to incorporate citizenship teaching, not an attempt heroically to save history from the jaws of oblivion by linking it to citizenship. It simply stems from a genuine, caring belief that pupils should be exposed to a topical education. It goes down to the reasons why many history teachers want to teach in the first place. Quite simply, the endeavour of history teaching is to make sense of humankind, and one of the most powerful resources we have as history teachers is pupil's own experiences and understandings, these modern-day

experiences. We should work with these to enrich our lessons, and not shy away from them because of impossible convictions about historical authenticity.

## Conclusions

Modern-day parallels are important in creating motivated learners who can think critically about humankind. They aid understanding, enabling pupils to become more culturally aware. If pupils see the point of history, the relevance, they will become much more engaged and motivated to learn. It does not overly matter if historical rigour is temporarily abandoned so long as they are led back to history enthused, and fascinated. If we motivate pupils, their love of history is assured. Modern-day analogy can also help pupils care about the past. The liveliness and enthusiasm of the teacher, seeking to illuminate the issue in the past, is critical.

There are reservations, of course. Not all of my parallels worked. The danger seems to be when the modern-day example *leaves* the pupils in the present, instead of taking them away from it. There are other drawbacks – such as when the priorities turn around and history is used to explain the present in a crude moral exemplar. Like any aspect of the history teacher's tool kit, amongst all the strategies to motivate and engage, modern-day analogies must be used appropriately and with care.

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The  
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Mummy, Mummy, why does history need defending?

*Not now dear, Mummy's got to explain to the Deputy Head why it wouldn't be appropriate to give Levels to Year 7 once a term, not even if he helpfully breaks them down into sublevels for us, and especially not just because that's what they're doing in Science.*

But why? What has it done wrong?

*I think you must have been reading Richard Evans's book *In Defence of History* (1997). In the Sixties, the main historiographical arguments had been between E.H. Carr and G.R. Elton. Carr and Elton both believed that there is something which 'actually' happened in the past. The difference between them was that Elton was rather more confident than Carr that historians were generally able to access that 'historical truth.' The advent of post-modernism in the 1980s had rendered both these positions irrelevant. At the same time it threatened to make history itself impossible. This is why Evans thought history needed defending.*

So what did post-modernism do that was so serious?

*Post-modernists such as Derrida expressed the belief that language could only be interpreted as telling us about language; art could only be interpreted as telling us about art; etc. Any source could *only* be used to reveal something about the form of the source itself and the way in which it was constructed. Anything more would be subject to the interpretation of the reader, and would *only* exist for the reader. For historians who wanted to use sources to tell us in any kind of scientific and verifiable way about the past this presented a problem. If post-modernism were true, it would be absolutely impossible to find a source that could actually tell us anything valid about past historical events. 'Historical truth' would be absolutely unattainable. No historical 'fact' could ever be stated with certainty. It would instead have to be stated as a 'discourse' that might or might not be true.*

Is that why Daddy doesn't know anything about the past?

*No dear, there are plenty of other reasons for that. Evans realised that post-modernism presented a serious challenge to History - after all, it's very hard to interpret or explain the past when you don't have *any* facts to work with. He attacked the post-modernists in three ways. He said that the author's interpretation of a source, rather than the reader's, should be followed. He clearly defined what history is and what it is good for. He also compared post-modernism to German Fascism, which didn't go down very well with the post-modernists. The fundamental problem with his work is that Evans is unable to take on his opponents directly. How can you argue with a school of thought which dismisses your arguments as discourses the 'truth' of which is irrelevant? There now, you've got me going and it's time for bed. Run along now...*

Mummy, is it true that Daddy might just be a construct of someone's imagination?