**CHY4U Historical Thinking Concepts**

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**Historical** **Significance:**

You can learn a great deal about what historians think is important by what they write about. Traditionally, historians have focused on great figures or important events, arguing that these are the most *significant* shapers of our past. However, the *historical significance* of a person or event can also be determined by their connection to a much bigger issue or trend. For example, the life of a woman in 16th century Japan might hold great significance in a study of social history; on the other hand, the life of a famous military commander from the same era would be significant in a study of political and military history.

Significance means a lot more than just importance. We must decide what is historically important using criteria.

**Criteria for Significance**

* **Results in Change** - does this person, event, or development change things - how many people were affected? How long-lasting was the change? How profoundly were people affected?
* **Reveals the Past** - what does it tell us about how the past was different?
* **Relevant to Today** - how does it shed light on issues that affect us today? Do the issues of the past resonate with us today?
* **Relevant to a Question** - does it connect to our course question or unit question?



Figure https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/31/Napoleon\_I\_of\_France\_by\_Andrea\_Appiani.jpg

This is a painting of Napoleon. In the past, his military successes and failures were studied in detail. In a course about global history, his exploits are not as relevant. In fact, Ms. Gluskin proposed a workshop on this course entitled “Dropping Napoleon.”

**Continuity and Change:**

Some historical events are part of a continuum, reinforcing pre-existing ideals, systems, or relationships, such as the Renaissance (rebirth of classical ideals). The Renaissance took place in the 1400s but it looked back to ancient Greece and Rome as models of ideal behaviour. Other events, however, represent a break in a continuum. These changes take individuals or societies in new directions. Historians call these events **turning points**. Turning points mark the pace or direction of change. In reality, continuity and change can overlap – they do not have to be seen as opposites. As much as the Renaissance looked back to older values, it also brought new, more secular values to the table.



Using continuity and change, you can also examine whether events are leading to “**progress**” or “**decline**.” Events cannot always be clearly categorized as progress or decline because it depends who is being affected. Different groups of people have distinct experiences. Not everyone benefits equally from changes. Generally in our time people are in favour of human rights and peace. However, in ancient Greece, for example, peace was seen as ‘but an interruption of war.’

**Vocabulary**:

change, block, prevent, forbid, stand in the way of, discourage, deter, impede, hinder, transform, fuel, derive from, continue, carry over, change direction, swerve, overlap, interwoven

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Figure https://media1.britannica.com/eb-media/90/116490-004-36C7920D.jpg

Japan adopted the Meiji Constitution in 1890. It was Japan’s first constitution, and ended centuries of rule by the samurai and warlords; traditional laws, codes, and expectations were replaced by western traditions, such as a legislative body. Thus, the adoption of the Meiji Constitution was a turning point for Japan.

**Causes and Consequences:**

Causes and consequences have always been an important part of learning history.  However, students have not always been asked to **analyze** causes and consequences; instead, they have been asked to memorize and reproduce the analysis completed by historians.

When you do the work of the historian in analyzing causes and consequences, you should ask yourself:

* What are the multiple causes of historical events? These could include the actions of individuals and groups, social forces, such as economic and political conditions.
* Which causes were more important in leading to an event or development?
* Was there an immediate cause that acted as a catalyst to set events in motion?
* What were the intended and unintended consequences of an event?
* What were the short-term and long-term causes and consequences of this event?



Figure https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e2/Codex\_Mendoza\_folio\_2r.jpg

This is a page from the Mendoza Codex, which was commissioned not long after conquest of the Aztecs by the Spanish.  Knowing that the conquest took place in 1521 is not nearly important as understanding the causes of the conflict, and the impact of the conquest on both societies.

**Vocabulary:**

**Mid- to long-term:** encourage, motivate, develop, exacerbate, exaggerate, extend, underlie, lead to, contribute to, influence, support, drive, motivate, lay groundwork for, enable, inspire, conspire, culminate in

**Short-term**: trigger, spark, incite, catalyze, push, pull

**Historical Perspectives:**

In this course, we will examine a variety of cultures featuring different beliefs, values, and practices. At times, the differences between the past and your own present-day world will be striking. It is important to acknowledge these differences, especially since these differences are part of what makes the study of history so fascinating. At the same time, it is essential that we understand these beliefs, values, and practices in the context of the era we are studying. We should try not to judge the past by today’s valus. But let’s not assume that all people in a historical time and place felt or thought the same way. The values held by those with power—or even by the majority of the population—do not always represent the entire society.

**Key terms to understand historical perspectives:**

* Worldview
* Historical context
* **Anachronism (when things are out of place in time)**
* **Presentism (judging the past by today’s values)**
* Inference



Figure https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8d/Leutze%2C\_Emanuel\_%E2%80%94\_Storming\_of\_the\_Teocalli\_by\_Cortez\_and\_His\_Troops\_%E2%80%94\_1848.jpg

This painting depicts a key event in the conquest of the Aztecs. However, whose worldview does it represent? The Spanish? The Aztecs? The German-American artist who painted it 300 years after the event? Are there anachronisms? How is it different from the Mendoza Codex in portraying the same event?

Below you will see a so-called T-O map made in 1475 by the Bishop of Seville. It reflects a European view of the world. From culture to culture and across time periods, maps represent different views of the world.

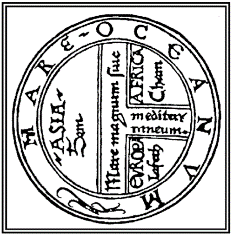


Figure http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:TO\_map.gif

**Primary Source Evidence:**

A historian’s work is really the decoding and analysis of **Primary Source Evidence**. A primary source is a piece of evidence from an era that can be used by historians to understand that specific era. Primary sources come in many forms, including government documents, personal belongings, and anything else *from the time* (such as the Codex Mendoza). In contrast, a secondary source is written after the fact, and is *about and after the time;* for example, the painting by Leutze we considered earlier is a secondary source.  Secondary sources, like textbooks and documentaries, feature analysis by historians who tell the reader/viewer what matters. While such sources can be invaluable, they also do some of the work for us; in this course, while we will examine some secondary sources, we will focus on doing the work of the historian, which means that we must use primary source documents to reach our own conclusions.

Classifying sources, however, isn’t always easy. For example, let’s imagine that we are examining a book written in 1936 about World War I. In one sense, it is definitely a secondary source; it was written over a decade after the war, and it is designed to examine the past. On the other hand, historians examining bias and values in the 1930s could argue that the text is a primary source, too; such a book might provide insights into how events of the 1930s—such as the Great Depression and the rise of Fascism—were impacting historians’ work.

Before we proceed, we need to practice identifying primary and secondary sources. Fill in the blanks in the following exercise.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Source** | **Primary or Secondary? + Explanation** |
| *The lazy history of civilization is this:*  *The Greeks begot the Romans.*  *The Romans begot Christians (Christian Europe, that is).*  *Christian Europe led to the Renaissance.*  *The Renaissance led to the Enlightenment.*  *The Enlightenment led to political democracy and the Industrial Revolution.*  *The Industrial Revolution and democracy produced the United States, the home of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And we’re done.*  *And we laugh. But, actually, read a history book about the world, and that’s the story that gets told.*  <http://cdn.immediatecontent.com/bbchistory/audio/HistoryExtra_2016_01_21.mp3> | This clip is from a podcast published by BBC History Magazine. This is a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ source. Historian Michael Scott is providing one interpretation of events long since passed. |
| **Source** | **Primary or Secondary Explanation** |
| “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” | This is from the *Communist Manifesto*, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, and was published in 1848.  In one sense, this a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *source* because Marx and Engels are analyzing events that occurred through history. However, if we are using this document to understand the 19th century class struggles that prompted Marx and Engels to write this work in the first place, then it is a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *source*. |
| “Nobody wants to read about a bunch of dead white men sitting around a table talking about peace treaties.”  <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jul/25/margaret-macmillan-just-dont-ask-me-who-started-war> | This is from a rejection letter historian Margaret MacMillan received in response to one of her manuscripts. The letter itself is a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *source*. It is of its time, and provides us with some insight into how the desire to generate sales can shape what is published; it also suggests that our understanding of history is evolving. |
| <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmYu-Wppp3c> | This is Wab Kinew, explaining 500 Years of Aboriginal History in Canada in Two Minutes. This is a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *source*. Kinew is analyzing the past, providing an interpretation of events that occurred centuries before our time. |
| Oral traditions form the foundation of Aboriginal societies, connecting speaker and listener in communal experience and uniting past and present in memory.  <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/culture/oral-traditions.html> | This is from the Indigenous Foundations website at UBC. This is a *\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ source*. It explains the process through which history and tradition are (and have been) shared in indigenous societies. If we were to read a written account of an oral history, it would be a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *source*. |
| “History is a people's memory, and without a memory man is demoted to the level of the lower animals.”  <http://www.blackpast.org/1964-malcolm-x-s-speech-founding-rally-organization-afro-american-unity> | This is a quotation from a speech made by Malcolm X, a militant civil rights activist in the US in the 1960s. It is a *­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ source* because speeches are *of* their time. Historians might use this speech to better understand the various forces shaping America in the 1960s. |