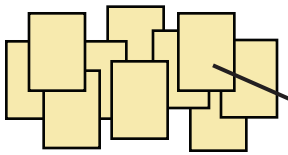
A Model of Historical Thinking

Historical Evidence



Historical Reading Skills:

* Sourcing
* Close Reading
* Contextualizing
* Corroborating

Historical Complexity:

We use historical reading skills to analyze evidence and then to create and evaluate interpretations. In creating and evaluating these intepretations, we come to understand that history is complex in a variety of ways, including:

* multiple perspectives (historical actors see things differently)
* multiple causation (many factors and circumstances contribute to the development of historical events)
* change and continuity over time (connections across eras and circumstances)

Historical Inquiry Questions should help us identify and investigate these types of complexity when we encounter evidence.

Historical Evidence:

Evidence includes primary sources such as documents, letters, diaries, newspapers, cartoons, paintings, photographs, maps, music, objects, and architecture.

As critical historical thinkers, we need to determine what counts as reliable evidence. This involves using the historical reading skills.

Interpretation and Historiography:

Evidence and analysis is assembled to tell a story. Historians and students both can work to create these stories (interpretations). Often interpretations conflict and the one that is judged to be dominant can change over time. The textbook is one example of an interpretation. As one account of the past, it requires interrogation and close reading. We can use primary sources to question the textbook's account of history.

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Historical Reading Skills

Reading historical documents requires students to use different skills than those they might use when simply reading a textbook for information. In reading primary sources, students need to interact with the text, ask questions, and consider the context in which the source was written. While these skills listed below are frequently used simultaneously during reading, encouraging students to focus on each skill individually facilitates learning.

Historical Reading Skill	Explanation	Examples of Questions that Facilitate this Skill
Sourcing	Think about who produced this document and use that to understand the viewpoint and reliability of the document. Direct students to think about the author, the author's intentions, and the genre/purpose of the text.	1. Who is the author? What judgments can we make about him/her? 2. What kind of source is it and where did it appear? 3. What can we learn about the author's point of view, motives or intentions? 4. Is the author in a position to be a good reporter about the event? Why or why not? 5. Is the account believable? Why or Why not?
Close Reading	Determine what the text says and how it says it. This reading requires students to slow down and pay attention to the details of what they are reading. Students should acquire a basic understanding of the text and what kind of language is being used.	1. What does the text say? What topics are included? 2. Who are the people in the document? 3. What words do you notice? 4. What is the overall tone or message of the document? 5. If an image: what symbols, colors, etc. are used?
Contextualizing	Focus on when and where the historical events took place. Readers use contextual information to understand the behavior or decisions of historical actors, the setting in which events took place, the reliability of a document, and the causes of historical events.	1. When was the document written? 2. When did the events discussed in the document take place? 3. What relevant or significant events came before or after? 4. Why did the author write this? For what occasion? 5. Who was the audience? How did the audience regard the author? 6. What was the climate of opinion at the time of this writing?
Corroborating	Ask questions about important details across multiple sources to determine points of agreement and disagreement. Prompt students to go back and forth between documents and read carefully. Direct students to look for consistency and discrepancy in documents to develop an understanding of the past.	1. Where do the texts agree with each other? Where do they disagree? 2. What viewpoints does each document reflect? 3. How are the texts similar and different in style (word choice, language, audience?) 4. What documents seem more reliable or trustworthy? Why? 5. What can you know about the topic, given these various accounts?

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