

Cause and consequence

Historical events occur because of a series of events which happened beforehand. Causes which happen immediately before the event are short-term causes (for example, poverty or starvation), while those which occurred for longer periods are called long-term causes (for example, religious beliefs, and long-term ideologies or institutions). Depending on how you ask children to think about a consequence, they may identify long-term or short-term causes.

When we ask children to think about cause and consequence, we try to use questions which start with 'How?' and 'Why?'. For example:

Why did the event occur?

How did earlier events lead to the consequence?

Consequences themselves can be short-term (for a few hours, days or weeks), or long-term (for weeks, decades or years). In fact, consequences can act as causes for other events. For example, publication of the Fundamental Pact was a consequence, but also one of the causes of the new constitution in 1859 and the continued modernisation process. This eventually led to bankruptcy and eventually the Treaty of Ksar Said. To help children to think about this chain of cause and consequence, you can ask:

What later events happened because of this event?

What changed in society because of this event?

Hence, when thinking about cause and consequence, we want children to think about the actions, beliefs, events or other circumstances in history which led to a set of consequences which we may still be experiencing today. For example, the Arabs were forced out of Andalusia by conflict, but this Arab migration then had consequences for Tunisian architecture, language, and food.

Causes can often be very tightly related to the influence of individuals, groups, or other social forces or conditions. Asking children to think about the balance between these influences, to explain how the causes affected the consequences, is essential to help them to understand their heritage. For example, in the Beys Mission, children are asked to make a list of the individuals, groups and social forces involved, and then place a cross between them to show the relative importance of all three in making Mohammed II publish the Fundamental Pact.

As you work more with cause and consequence, you'll see that there are different types of cause, such as social, political, economic, cultural or psychological. Consequences can be direct or indirect, and may be intended or unintended, immediate or delayed. To help children engage with these ideas, you could ask them to list such different types of cause and consequence. To identify something as a cause though, there must be a reason to think it caused the consequence. Many events may precede a consequence, but only some of them are causes.