

Historical inquiry

When children try to make sense of their history, and work out what it means for them, they are building a sense of heritage. This kind of 'intangible' heritage is important; the meaning which a child makes from real historical buildings and artefacts is important to their identity and their understanding of the history of their country.

Historical inquiry helps a student to ask questions about their heritage, using similar approaches to those used by a professional historian. They decide upon evidence needed to answer those questions, they interpret the evidence, and explain and communicate the meaning of the evidence. By involving children in inquiry, they increasingly take initiative, and become more autonomous and self-directed. Because of this, their learning builds on their existing ideas and understanding.

Historical inquiry involves students asking and answering questions about people, objects, buildings and artefacts, such as 'what is it?', 'why is it significant' and 'what does it mean to us today?'. Questions are asked which begin with 'Who?', 'What?', 'When?', 'Why?' and 'How?'. In the Missions on this site, students are asked to engage in this kind of thinking. In doing so, they engage with key historical concepts, including

- Continuity and change. For example, exploring questions like 'How did society change?', 'Why did society change?', 'What stayed the same?', 'Did change last a long time?'
- Cause and consequence. For example, exploring questions such as 'What caused it to happen?', 'What are the consequences of what happened?', 'What can we learn from what happened?'
- Historical significance. For example, exploring questions such as 'Was it significant?', 'Why was it significant?', 'How significant is it?'
- Use of primary sources. For example, looking at historical documents and artefacts, and asking what information can be gained from them, who wrote them, why they were written in particular ways, and what possible explanations could there be for the way in which they are written.
- Taking a historical perspective. For example, examining 'How did people react?', 'Did different people react differently?', 'Why did people react differently?', 'How did people's reactions cause change?'

You will find a separate briefing document for each of these historical concepts on this site. In each mission on this site, you will see students engaging with one or more of these concepts, and in working in one or more phases of inquiry, which include:

- Making observations, asking questions, developing hypotheses, planning what evidence to collect
- Collecting and collating evidence to confirm or refute their original ideas.
- Interpreting and analysing the evidence
- Concluding and communicating
- Discussing and reviewing the evidence

When you plan to teach historical inquiry, you should try to use the language of inquiry. For example, you should use words like *test*, *suggest*, *speculate*, *hypothesise*, and *think*. Because the conclusions students make will not be definite, the words *probably*, and *possibly* are important for students to use. There are good websites about planning lessons which involve historical inquiry, which are easy to find through an Internet search engine. The Missions try to achieve some or all of the following useful strategies.

1. Provide sources of evidence which enables children to make conclusions on the basis of evidence.
2. Provide sources of evidence which enable children to consider if they are trustworthy or useful to a particular inquiry.
3. Given opportunities for students to make their own judgements and build their own conclusions.
4. Help the students to discuss and communicate their answers.
5. Capture students' interest and imagination.
6. Helps students to realise which inquiry process or historical concept they are working on.

It is probably obvious that students cannot engage in historical inquiry if they spend all lesson listening to the teacher. The Missions are a good first step to enacting inquiry ideas into teaching and learning. Other good ideas to help students think about historical inquiry include the following.

1. Living timelines. Ask students to organise events both chronologically and thematically within and across periods of time can help students test their initial ideas about when and why things occur. They can decide if explanations for events in one time period are the same as explanations for events in a different time period.
2. Drawing a line graph can help track changes and continuity over time. For example, attitudes to alcohol have changed in Tunisia since Roman times. They may also help students to identify causes for events, and uncover long term and short term patterns of change.
3. Debate and discussion. Enabling students to think together is more effective than thinking alone. The approaches in Box 1 may be useful.

Box 1. Strategies for discussion

a) Pair talk

Easy to organise even in cramped classrooms. This is ideal to promote high levels of participation and to ensure that the discussions are highly focused, especially if allied to tight deadlines. Use in the early stages of learning for pupils to recall work from a previous lesson, generate questions, work together to plan a piece of writing, or to take turns to tell a story. Use pairs to promote 'response partners' during the drafting process, and to work as reading partners with an unfamiliar text. Ideal for quick-fire reflection and review and for rehearsal of ideas before presenting them in the whole class.

b) Pairs to fours

Pupils work together in pairs – possibly friendship, possibly boy-girl, etc. Each pair then joins up with another pair to explain and compare ideas.

c) Listening triads

Pupils work in groups of three. Each pupil takes on the role of talker, questioner or recorder. The talker explains something, or comments on an issue, or expresses opinions. The questioner prompts and seeks clarification. The recorder makes notes and gives a report at the end of the conversation. Next time, roles are changed.

d) Envoys

Once groups have carried out a task, one person from each group is selected as an 'envoy' and moves to a new group to explain and summarise, and to find out what the new group thought, decided or achieved. The envoy then returns to the original group and feeds back. This is an effective way of avoiding tedious and repetitive 'reporting back' sessions. It also puts a 'press' on the envoy's use of language and creates groups of active listeners.

e) Snowball

Pairs discuss an issue, or brainstorm some initial ideas, then double up to fours and continue the process, then into groups of eight in order to compare ideas and to sort out the best or to agree on a course of action. Finally, the whole class is drawn together and spokespersons for each group of eight feedback ideas.

f) Carousel discussion

This allows students to engage with a range of opinions and ideas, helping them to refine or develop their initial ideas. The students are arranged in two circles, with an inner circle and an outer circle. A student in one circle faces a student in the other. The pair of students talks about the focus (which could be a question, could be information they have to convey, etc.) for a set time (e.g. 3 minutes). The circles then rotate to create new pairs and the discussion begins again.

g) Rainbow groups

A way of ensuring that pupils are regrouped and learn to work with a range of others. After small groups have discussed together, pupils are given a number or colour. Pupils with the same number or colour join up, making groups comprising representatives of each original group. In their new group pupils take turns to report back on their group's work and perhaps begin to work on a new, combined task.

h) Jigsaw

A topic is divided into sections. In 'home' groups of four or five, pupils allocate a section each, and then regroup into 'expert' groups. In these groups, experts work together on their chosen area, then return to original 'home' groups to report back on their area of expertise. The 'home' group is then set a task that requires the pupils to use the different areas of 'expertise' for a joint outcome. This strategy requires advance planning, but is a very effective speaking and listening strategy because it ensures the participation of all pupils.