

Historical Significance

An event or person has historical significance if it / he / she is important for us today. For example, a war almost always has long-lasting significance for a country. When Germany invaded Tunisia, it was almost impossible for French rule to take hold again in Tunisia after the war had ended. However, something or someone does not have to be so obviously important. The trigger for the Jasmine Revolution came from just one person in the South of Tunisia, but the consequences of that person's act led to the overthrow of Ben Ali, and the establishment of a new government.

Having said that, whether something is significant does depend on the historian's perspective (or in this case, the children's perspective, acting as historians). For example, a child's grandmother is definitely significant to them, but not significant to most other people. However, if that child's grandmother was the servant of one of the Beys, and kept a diary each day, which allowed us, as historians, to understand normal people's lives during the time of the Beys, suddenly she has much wider historical significance.

So how do we help students to think about the historical significance of a person or event, in order to help develop their historical thinking, and their understanding of heritage? Try asking them to think about the questions below:

1. **How** were people affected by the event or person?
2. **How many** people were affected by the event or person?
3. **How long** did the effect on those people last?
4. **How** does the event or person help us to think about issues in modern day Tunisia?

In fact, you can go a step further, because the significance of an event may change over time. For example, in the time of the Beys, one man's execution triggered huge change in governance (see the Mission about the Beys). You could argue that those changes directly affected governance in Tunisia today. However, as time has moved on, other events have had a greater effect on governance in modern-day Tunisia, and so that man's execution may be less significant now, than it was in 1900.

When making students think about the questions above, they are intended to prompt discussion, not to have correct answers. To help them discuss effectively, make sure that they really understand what event or person they are talking about. In fact, you may want them to write a summary at the top of a big sheet of paper, and then record their thoughts underneath about the questions above.

The event or person may form part of a larger story too, and if that's the case, then ensure they understand that. For example, understanding the influence of Punic people on Tunisian food (those people who originally lived in Carthage), may require students to understand the influence of Berber and Roman people on Tunisian food as well.