Dear Student,

Welcome to Global History & Geography I Honors. We hope that you are enjoying the summer and keeping safe and healthy during the pandemic. While the summer is a time to relax, refresh, and reset, it is also a time to prepare for the rigors of Global Honors and its continuation in your sophomore year, World History Advanced Placement. Global Honors will be the first truly challenging history class you will take. The class requires critical thinking, the ability to contextualize, make connections between places and times, craft an argument and defend it with concrete historical evidence.

This year’s summer assignment asks you to read two articles. The first, written by Peter N. Stearns, explains reasons why one should study history. The second, authored by Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, explains what it means to think critically about history.

As you read these articles, which are both linked above and attached below, annotate the readings and take notes. Write questions you may have in the margins. Underline/highlight sections you deem important. Place and asterisk next to parts you find interesting. And circle words you don’t know and then write the definition in the margin. There is nothing to submit. These notes are for your own benefit.

Additionally, contemplate the following questions and be prepared to discuss them as we examine ideas of why we study history and how we study history in the second week of school:

1. What is an additional reason (one not mentioned in Stearns’ article) that we should study history?
2. How does the approach to studying history articulated by Andrews and Burke differ from your own past experiences in social studies classes?

This should be completed by Tuesday, September 13, 2022. You will be able to use your annotated articles for the class discussion and lesson.

History is a complex subject. The academic discipline of History is one of the youngest of the humanities – which includes philosophy, theology, law, politics, ethics, and literature, amongst other disciplines. Its youth and complexity are exacerbated by its subject material, which in essence includes everything. It is our hope that you will view the summer reading assignment as an opportunity to expand your historical interests and knowledge, as well as prepare for the rigors of Global History and Geography Honors.

Sincerely,

Paul Davis       Mark Spiconardi       Ashley Tomaselli
Global History and Geography Honors Teachers
Why Study History? (1998)

By Peter N. Stearns

People live in the present. They plan for and worry about the future. History, however, is the study of the past. Given all the demands that press in from living in the present and anticipating what is yet to come, why bother with what has been? Given all the desirable and available branches of knowledge, why insist—as most American educational programs do—on a good bit of history? And why urge many students to study even more history than they are required to?

Any subject of study needs justification: its advocates must explain why it is worth attention. Most widely accepted subjects—and history is certainly one of them—attract some people who simply like the information and modes of thought involved. But audiences less spontaneously drawn to the subject and more doubtful about why to bother need to know what the purpose is.

Historians do not perform heart transplants, improve highway design, or arrest criminals. In a society that quite correctly expects education to serve useful purposes, the functions of history can seem more difficult to define than those of engineering or medicine. History is in fact very useful, actually indispensable, but the products of historical study are less tangible, sometimes less immediate, than those that stem from some other disciplines.

In the past history has been justified for reasons we would no longer accept. For instance, one of the reasons history holds its place in current education is because earlier leaders believed that a knowledge of certain historical facts helped distinguish the educated from the uneducated; the person who could reel off the date of the Norman conquest of England (1066) or the name of the person who came up with the theory of evolution at about the same time that Darwin did (Wallace) was deemed superior—a better candidate for law school or even a business promotion. Knowledge of historical facts has been used as a screening device in many societies, from China to the United States, and the habit is still with us to some extent. Unfortunately, this use can encourage mindless memorization—a real but not very appealing aspect of the discipline. History should be studied because it is essential to individuals and to society, and because it harbors beauty. There are many ways to discuss the real functions of the subject—as there are many different historical talents and many different paths to historical meaning. All definitions of history's utility, however, rely on two fundamental facts.

History Helps Us Understand People and Societies

In the first place, history offers a storehouse of information about how people and societies behave. Understanding the operations of people and societies is difficult, though a number of disciplines make the attempt. An exclusive reliance on current data would needlessly handicap our efforts. How can we evaluate war if the nation is at peace—unless we use historical materials? How can we understand genius, the influence of technological
innovation, or the role that beliefs play in shaping family life, if we don't use what we know about experiences in the past? Some social scientists attempt to formulate laws or theories about human behavior. But even these recourses depend on historical information, except for in limited, often artificial cases in which experiments can be devised to determine how people act. Major aspects of a society’s operation, like mass elections, missionary activities, or military alliances, cannot be set up as precise experiments. Consequently, history must serve, however imperfectly, as our laboratory, and data from the past must serve as our most vital evidence in the unavoidable quest to figure out why our complex species behaves as it does in societal settings. This, fundamentally, is why we cannot stay away from history: it offers the only extensive evidential base for the contemplation and analysis of how societies function, and people need to have some sense of how societies function simply to run their own lives.

**History Helps Us Understand Change and How the Society We Live in Came to Be**

The second reason history is inescapable as a subject of serious study follows closely on the first. The past causes the present, and so the future. Any time we try to know why something happened—whether a shift in political party dominance in the American Congress, a major change in the teenage suicide rate, or a war in the Balkans or the Middle East—we have to look for factors that took shape earlier. Sometimes fairly recent history will suffice to explain a major development, but often we need to look further back to identify the causes of change. Only through studying history can we grasp how things change; only through history can we begin to comprehend the factors that cause change; and only through history can we understand what elements of an institution or a society persist despite change.

**The Importance of History in Our Own Lives**

These two fundamental reasons for studying history underlie more specific and quite diverse uses of history in our own lives. History well told is beautiful. Many of the historians who most appeal to the general reading public know the importance of dramatic and skillful writing—as well as of accuracy. Biography and military history appeal in part because of the tales they contain. History as art and entertainment serves a real purpose, on aesthetic grounds but also on the level of human understanding. Stories well done are stories that reveal how people and societies have actually functioned, and they prompt thoughts about the human experience in other times and places. The same aesthetic and humanistic goals inspire people to immerse themselves in efforts to reconstruct quite remote pasts, far removed from immediate, present-day utility. Exploring what historians sometimes call the "pastness of the past"—the ways people in distant ages constructed their lives—involves a sense of beauty and excitement, and ultimately another perspective on human life and society.

**History Contributes to Moral Understanding**

History also provides a terrain for moral contemplation. Studying the stories of individuals and situations in the past allows a student of history to test his or her own moral sense, to
hone it against some of the real complexities individuals have faced in difficult settings. People who have weathered adversity not just in some work of fiction, but in real, historical circumstances can provide inspiration. "History teaching by example" is one phrase that describes this use of a study of the past—a study not only of certifiable heroes, the great men and women of history who successfully worked through moral dilemmas, but also of more ordinary people who provide lessons in courage, diligence, or constructive protest.

**History Provides Identity**

History also helps provide identity, and this is unquestionably one of the reasons all modern nations encourage its teaching in some form. Historical data include evidence about how families, groups, institutions and whole countries were formed and about how they have evolved while retaining cohesion. For many Americans, studying the history of one’s own family is the most obvious use of history, for it provides facts about genealogy and (at a slightly more complex level) a basis for understanding how the family has interacted with larger historical change. Family identity is established and confirmed. Many institutions, businesses, communities, and social units, such as ethnic groups in the United States, use history for similar identity purposes. Merely defining the group in the present pales against the possibility of forming an identity based on a rich past. And of course nations use identity history as well—and sometimes abuse it. Histories that tell the national story, emphasizing distinctive features of the national experience, are meant to drive home an understanding of national values and a commitment to national loyalty.

**Studying History Is Essential for Good Citizenship**

A study of history is essential for good citizenship. This is the most common justification for the place of history in school curricula. Sometimes advocates of citizenship history hope merely to promote national identity and loyalty through a history spiced by vivid stories and lessons in individual success and morality. But the importance of history for citizenship goes beyond this narrow goal and can even challenge it at some points.

History that lays the foundation for genuine citizenship returns, in one sense, to the essential uses of the study of the past. History provides data about the emergence of national institutions, problems, and values—it’s the only significant storehouse of such data available. It offers evidence also about how nations have interacted with other societies, providing international and comparative perspectives essential for responsible citizenship. Further, studying history helps us understand how recent, current, and prospective changes that affect the lives of citizens are emerging or may emerge and what causes are involved. More important, studying history encourages habits of mind that are vital for responsible public behavior, whether as a national or community leader, an informed voter, a petitioner, or a simple observer.
What Skills Does a Student of History Develop?

What does a well-trained student of history, schooled to work on past materials and on case studies in social change, learn how to do? The list is manageable, but it contains several overlapping categories.

The Ability to Assess Evidence. The study of history builds experience in dealing with and assessing various kinds of evidence—the sorts of evidence historians use in shaping the most accurate pictures of the past that they can. Learning how to interpret the statements of past political leaders—one kind of evidence—helps form the capacity to distinguish between the objective and the self-serving among statements made by present-day political leaders. Learning how to combine different kinds of evidence—public statements, private records, numerical data, visual materials—develops the ability to make coherent arguments based on a variety of data. This skill can also be applied to information encountered in everyday life.

The Ability to Assess Conflicting Interpretations. Learning history means gaining some skill in sorting through diverse, often conflicting interpretations. Understanding how societies work—the central goal of historical study—is inherently imprecise, and the same certainly holds true for understanding what is going on in the present day. Learning how to identify and evaluate conflicting interpretations is an essential citizenship skill for which history, as an often-contested laboratory of human experience, provides training. This is one area in which the full benefits of historical study sometimes clash with the narrower uses of the past to construct identity. Experience in examining past situations provides a constructively critical sense that can be applied to partisan claims about the glories of national or group identity. The study of history in no sense undermines loyalty or commitment, but it does teach the need for assessing arguments, and it provides opportunities to engage in debate and achieve perspective.

Experience in Assessing Past Examples of Change. Experience in assessing past examples of change is vital to understanding change in society today—it's an essential skill in what we are regularly told is our "ever-changing world." Analysis of change means developing some capacity for determining the magnitude and significance of change, for some changes are more fundamental than others. Comparing particular changes to relevant examples from the past helps students of history develop this capacity. The ability to identify the continuities that always accompany even the most dramatic changes also comes from studying history, as does the skill to determine probable causes of change. Learning history helps one figure out, for example, if one main factor—such as a technological innovation or some deliberate new policy—accounts for a change or whether, as is more commonly the case, a number of factors combine to generate the actual change that occurs.

Historical study, in sum, is crucial to the promotion of that elusive creature, the well-informed citizen. It provides basic factual information about the background of our political institutions and about the values and problems that affect our social well-being. It also contributes to our capacity to use evidence, assess interpretations, and analyze change and continuities. No one can ever quite deal with the present as the historian deals with the
past—we lack the perspective for this feat; but we can move in this direction by applying historical habits of mind, and we will function as better citizens in the process

**History Is Useful in the World of Work**

History is useful for work. Its study helps create good businesspeople, professionals, and political leaders. The number of explicit professional jobs for historians is considerable, but most people who study history do not become professional historians. Professional historians teach at various levels, work in museums and media centers, do historical research for businesses or public agencies, or participate in the growing number of historical consultancies. These categories are important—indeed vital—to keep the basic enterprise of history going, but most people who study history use their training for broader professional purposes. Students of history find their experience directly relevant to jobs in a variety of careers as well as to further study in fields like law and public administration. Employers often deliberately seek students with the kinds of capacities historical study promotes. The reasons are not hard to identify: students of history acquire, by studying different phases of the past and different societies in the past, a broad perspective that gives them the range and flexibility required in many work situations. They develop research skills, the ability to find and evaluate sources of information, and the means to identify and evaluate diverse interpretations. Work in history also improves basic writing and speaking skills and is directly relevant to many of the analytical requirements in the public and private sectors, where the capacity to identify, assess, and explain trends is essential. Historical study is unquestionably an asset for a variety of work and professional situations, even though it does not, for most students, lead as directly to a particular job slot, as do some technical fields. But history particularly prepares students for the long haul in their careers, its qualities helping adaptation and advancement beyond entry-level employment. There is no denying that in our society many people who are drawn to historical study worry about relevance. In our changing economy, there is concern about job futures in most fields. Historical training is not, however, an indulgence; it applies directly to many careers and can clearly help us in our working lives.

Why study history? The answer is because we virtually must, to gain access to the laboratory of human experience. When we study it reasonably well, and so acquire some usable habits of mind, as well as some basic data about the forces that affect our own lives, we emerge with relevant skills and an enhanced capacity for informed citizenship, critical thinking, and simple awareness. The uses of history are varied. Studying history can help us develop some literally "salable" skills, but its study must not be pinned down to the narrowest utilitarianism. Some history—that confined to personal recollections about changes and continuities in the immediate environment—is essential to function beyond childhood. Some history depends on personal taste, where one finds beauty, the joy of discovery, or intellectual challenge. Between the inescapable minimum and the pleasure of deep commitment comes the history that, through cumulative skill in interpreting the unfolding human record, provides a real grasp of how the world works.
What Does It Mean to Think Historically?

Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke | Jan 1, 2007

Introduction

When we started working on Teachers for a New Era, a Carnegie-sponsored initiative designed to strengthen teacher training, we thought we knew a thing or two about our discipline. As we began reading such works as Sam Wineburg's *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, however, we encountered an unexpected challenge. If our understandings of the past constituted a sort of craft knowledge, how could we distill and communicate habits of mind we and our colleagues had developed through years of apprenticeship, guild membership, and daily practice to university students so that they, in turn, could impart these habits in K–12 classrooms?

In response, we developed an approach we call the "five C's of historical thinking." The concepts of change over time, causality, context, complexity, and contingency, we believe, together describe the shared foundations of our discipline. They stand at the heart of the questions historians seek to answer, the arguments we make, and the debates in which we engage. These ideas are hardly new to professional historians. But that is precisely their value: They make our implicit ways of thought explicit to the students and teachers whom we train. The five C's do not encompass the universe of historical thinking, yet they do provide a remarkably useful tool for helping students at practically any level learn how to formulate and support arguments based on primary sources, as well as to understand and challenge historical interpretations related in secondary sources. In this article, we define the five C's, explain how each concept helps us to understand the past, and provide some brief examples of how we have employed the five C's when teaching teachers. Our approach is necessarily broad and basic, characteristics well suited for a foundation upon which we invite our colleagues from kindergartens to research universities to build.

Change over Time

The idea of change over time is perhaps the easiest of the C's to grasp. Students readily acknowledge that we employ and struggle with technologies unavailable to our forebears, that we live by different laws, and that we enjoy different cultural pursuits. Moreover, students also note that some aspects of life remain the same across time. Many Europeans celebrate many of the same holidays that they did three or four hundred years ago, for instance, often using the same rituals and words to mark a day's significance. Continuity thus comprises an integral part of the idea of change over time.

Students often find the concept of change over time elementary. Even individuals who claim to despise history can remember a few dates and explain that some preceded or followed others. At any educational level, timelines can teach change over time as well as the selective process that leads people to pay attention to some events while ignoring
others. In our U.S. survey class, we often ask students to interview family and friends and write a paper explaining how their family’s history has intersected with major events and trends that we are studying. By discovering their own family’s past, students often see how individuals can make a difference and how personal history changes over time along with major events.

As historians of the American West and environmental historians, we often turn to maps to teach change over time. The same space represented in different ways as political power, economic structures, and cultural influences shift can often put in shocking relief the differences that time makes. The work of repeat photographers such as Mark Klett offers another compelling tool for teaching change over time. Such photographers begin with a historic landscape photograph, then take pains to re-take the shot from the same site, at the same angle, using similar equipment, and even under analogous conditions. While suburbs and industry have overrun many western locales, students are often surprised to see that some places have become more desolate and others have hardly changed at all. The exercise engages students with a non-written primary source, photographs, and demands that they reassess their expectations regarding how time changes.

**Context**

Some things change, others stay the same—not a very interesting story but reason for concern since history, as the best teachers will tell you, is about telling stories. Good story telling, we contend, builds upon an understanding of context. Given young people’s fascination with narratives and their enthusiasm for imaginative play, pupils (particularly elementary school students) often find context the most engaging element of historical thinking. As students mature, of course, they recognize that the past is not just a playful alternate universe. Working with primary sources, they discover that the past makes more sense when they set it within two frameworks. In our teaching, we liken the first to the floating words that roll across the screen at the beginning of every *Star Wars* film. This kind of context sets the stage; the second helps us to interpret evidence concerning the action that ensues. Texts, events, individual lives, collective struggles—all develop within a tightly interwoven world.

Historians who excel at the art of storytelling often rely heavily upon context. Jonathan Spence’s *Death of Woman Wang*, for example, skillfully recreates 17th-century China by following the trail of a sparsely documented murder. To solve the mystery, students must understand the time and place in which it occurred. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich brings colonial New England to life by concentrating on the details of textile production and basket making in *Age of Homespun*. College courses regularly use the work of both authors because they not only spark student interest, but also hone students’ ability to describe the past and identify distinctive elements of different eras.

Imaginative play is what makes context, arguably the easiest, yet also, paradoxically, the most difficult of the five C’s to teach. Elementary school assignments that require students to research and wear medieval European clothes or build a California mission from sugar
cubes both strive to teach context. The problem with such assignments is that they often blur the lines between reality and make-believe. The picturesque often trumps more banal or more disturbing truths. Young children may never be able to get all the facts straight. As one elementary school teacher once reminded us, "We teach kids who still believe in Santa Claus." Nonetheless, elementary school teachers can be cautious in their re-creations, and, most of all, they can be comfortable telling students when they don't know a given fact or when more research is necessary. That an idea might require more thought or more research is a valuable lesson at any age. The desire to recreate a world sometimes drives students to dig more deeply into their books, a reaction few teachers lament.

In our own classes, we have taught context using an assignment that we call "Fact, Fiction, or Creative Memory." In this exercise, students wrestle with a given source and determine whether it is primarily a work of history, fiction, or memory. We have asked students to bring in a present-day representation of 1950s life and explain what it teaches people today about life in 1950s America. Then, we have asked the class to discuss if the representation is a historically fair depiction of the era. We have also assigned textbook passages and Don DeLillo's *Pafko at the Wall*, then asked students to compare them to decide which offers stronger insights into the character of Cold War America. Each of these assignments addresses context, because each asks students to think about the distinctions between representations of the past and the critical thinking about the past that is history. Moreover, each asks students to weave together a variety of sources and assess the reliability of each before incorporating them into a whole.

**Causality**

Historians use context, change over time, and causality to form arguments explaining past change. While scientists can devise experiments to test theories and yield data, historians cannot alter past conditions to produce new information. Rather, they must base their arguments upon the interpretation of partial primary sources that frequently offer multiple explanations for a single event. Historians have long argued over the causes of the Protestant Reformation or World War I, for example, without achieving consensus. Such uncertainty troubles some students, but history classrooms are at their most dynamic when teachers encourage pupils to evaluate the contributions of multiple factors in shaping past events, as well as to formulate arguments asserting the primacy of some causes over others.

To teach causality, we have turned to the stand-by activities of the history classroom: debates and role-playing. After arming students with primary sources, we ask them to argue whether monetary or fiscal policy played a greater role in causing the Great Depression. After giving students descriptions drawn from primary sources of immigrant families in Los Angeles, we have asked students to take on the role of various family members and explain their reasons for immigrating and their reasons for settling in particular neighborhoods. Neither exercise is especially novel, but both fulfill a central goal of studying history: to develop persuasive explanations of historical events and processes based on logical interpretations of evidence.
Contingency

Contingency may, in fact, be the most difficult of the C’s. To argue that history is contingent is to claim that every historical outcome depends upon a number of prior conditions; that each of these prior conditions depends, in turn, upon still other conditions; and so on. The core insight of contingency is that the world is a magnificently interconnected place. Change a single prior condition, and any historical outcome could have turned out differently. Lee could have won at Gettysburg, Gore might have won in Florida, China might have inaugurated the world’s first industrial revolution.

Contingency can be an unsettling idea—so much so that people in the past have often tried to mask it with myths of national and racial destiny. The Pilgrim William Bradford, for instance, interpreted the decimation of New England’s native peoples not as a consequence of smallpox, but as a literal godsend. Two centuries later, American ideologues chose to rationalize their unlikely fortunes—from the purchase of Louisiana to the discovery of gold in California—as their nation’s "Manifest Destiny." Historians, unlike Bradford and the apologists of westward expansion, look at the same outcomes differently. They see not divine fate, but a series of contingent results possessing other possibilities.

Contingency demands that students think deeply about past, present, and future. It offers a powerful corrective to teleology, the fallacy that events pursue a straight-arrow course to a pre-determined outcome, since people in the past had no way of anticipating our present world. Contingency also reminds us that individuals shape the course of human events. What if Karl Marx had decided to elude Prussian censors by immigrating to the United States instead of France, where he met Frederick Engels? To assert that the past is contingent is to impress upon students the notion that the future is up for grabs, and that they bear some responsibility for shaping the course of future history.

Contingency can be a difficult concept to present abstractly, but it suffuses the stories historians tend to tell about individual lives. Futurology, however, might offer an even stronger tool for imparting contingency than biography. Mechanistic views of history as the inevitable march toward the present tend to collapse once students see how different their world is from any predicted in the past.

Complexity

Moral, epistemological, and causal complexity distinguish historical thinking from the conception of "history" held by many non-historians. Re-enacting battles and remembering names and dates require effort but not necessarily analytical rigor. Making sense of a messy world that we cannot know directly, in contrast, is more confounding but also more rewarding.

Chronicles distill intricate historical processes into a mere catalogue, while nostalgia conjures an uncomplicated golden age that saves us the trouble of having to think about the past. Our own need for order can obscure our understanding of how past worlds
functioned and blind us to the ways in which myths of rosy pasts do political and cultural work in the present. Reveling in complexity rather than shying away from it, historians seek to dispel the power of chronicle, nostalgia, and other traps that obscure our ability to understand the past on its own terms.

One of the most successful exercises we have developed for conveying complexity in all of these dimensions is a mock debate on Cherokee Removal. Two features of the exercise account for the richness and depth of understanding that it imparts on students. First, the debate involves multiple parties; the Treaty and Anti-Treaty Parties, Cherokee women, John Marshall, Andrew Jackson, northern missionaries, the State of Georgia, and white settlers each offer a different perspective on the issue. Second, students develop their understanding of their respective positions using the primary sources collected in Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents by Theda Perdue and Michael Green. While it can be difficult to assess what students learn from such exercises, we have noted anecdotally that, following the exercise, students seem much less comfortable referring to "American" or "Indian" positions as monolithic identities.

Conclusion

Our experiments with the five C’s have confronted us with several challenges. These concepts offer a fluid tool for engaging historical thought at multiple levels, but they can easily degenerate into a checklist. Students who favor memorization over analysis seem inclined to recite the C’s without necessarily understanding them. Moreover, as habits of mind, the five C’s develop only with practice. Though primary and secondary schools increasingly emphasize some aspects of these themes, particularly the use of primary sources as evidence, more attention to the five C’s with appropriate variations over the course of K–12 education would help future citizens not only to care about history, but also to contemplate it. It is our hope that this might help students to see the past not simply as prelude to our present, nor a list of facts to memorize, a cast of heroes and villains to cheer and boo, nor as an itinerary of places to tour, but rather as an ideal field for thinking long and hard about important questions.

—Flannery Burke and Thomas Andrews are both assistant professors of history and Teachers for a New Era faculty members at California State University at Northridge. Burke is working on a book for the University Press of Kansas tentatively entitled Longing and Belonging: Mabel Dodge Luhan and Greenwich Village’s Avant-Garde in Taos. Andrews is completing a manuscript for Harvard University Press, tentatively entitled Ludlow: The Nature of Industrial Struggle in the Colorado Coalfields.

Notes


