

Generating historical argument in the history classrooms: some issues and examples relating to causation and change

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Shemilt on the dangers of not teaching history as *a discipline*:

'... to subscribe to populist and mythic constructions of the past is to remain trapped in the codes and culture of the street gang, to invoke persuasive and partial histories that reinforce simple truths and even simpler hatreds.' (Shemilt 2000, 100)

The **discipline** of history

'... is distinguished from other forms of interpretation of the past by the fact that historians are expected to make their assumptions, concepts and methods explicit, so that they can be critically assessed by an academic community of practice and to present arguments for interpretive decisions that they make.'

(Chapman 2011, 101).

History's 'how'

History's big ideas or structures that shape typical historical questions, drive historical argument and organise historical writing (commonly called the "second-order concepts" of the discipline):

- **cause** & consequence;
- **change** and continuity;
- similarity, difference and **diversity**;
- historical **significance**;
- **evidence** – her rules and conventions: reliability, typicality, utility;
- **interpretations** – their construction, form, purpose and audience.

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Part 1: Historical Causation

Focus:

How can history teachers:

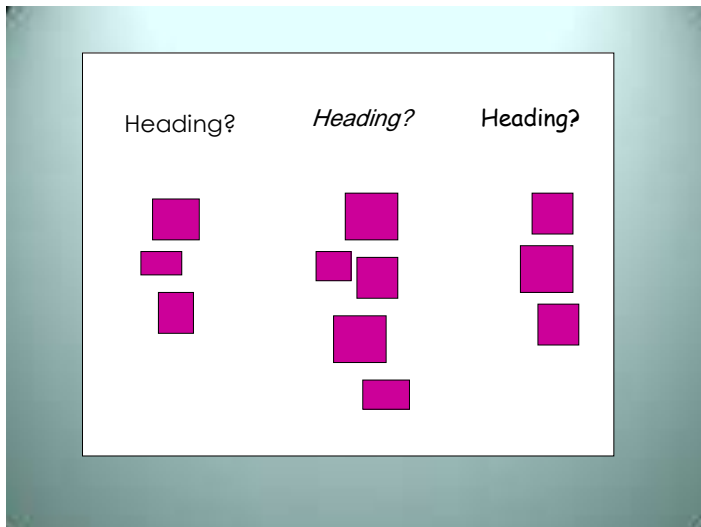
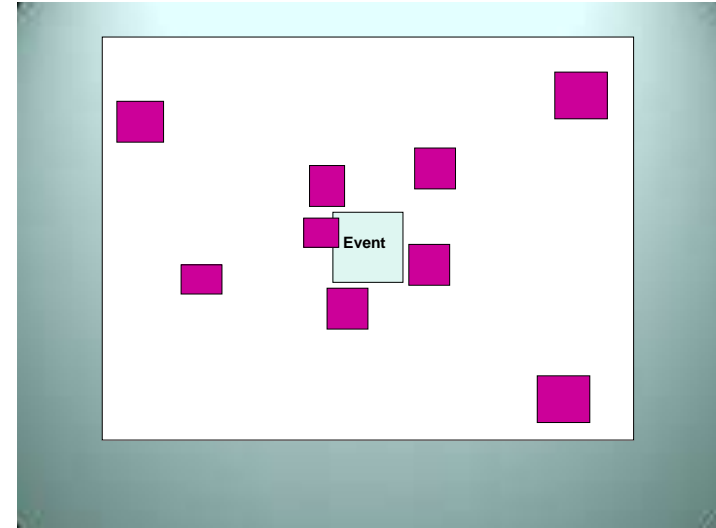
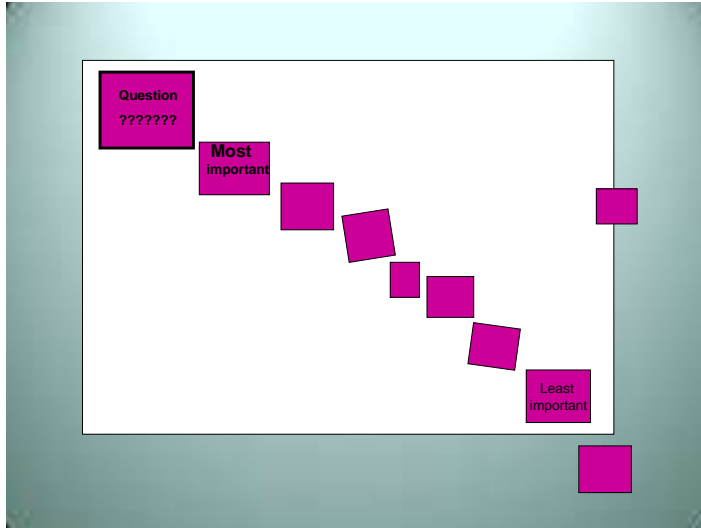
- help students to build and test their own arguments about causation?
- find lines of enquiry into causation problems, for students to pursue?

Typical causation questions

- Why was there a revolution in Russia in 1914?
- How far did the Treaty of Versailles cause the Second World War?
- How important was Islamic science in bringing about the Renaissance?
- Why was there a Protestant Reformation in Christian Europe?
- Why was King Louis XVI executed?
- Why was William Duke of Normandy's conquest of England successful?
- Were internal factors or external factors more important in ending apartheid in South Africa?

Your enquiry question

Why did the Great Fire of 1666 destroy so much of London?



Do the lower-order thinking
for them so that they can do
the higher-order thinking *for*
themselves.

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Part 2: Historical change and continuity

Focus:

How can history teachers:

- help students to build and test their own arguments about change and continuity?
- find lines of enquiry into change and continuity issues, for students to pursue?

What do we want pupils to *do* with change and continuity?

What is there to argue *about*?

What *kind of historical thinking* is required when engaging with such questions?

Typical causation questions

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We might want them to reach and support judgements concerning:

- **speed, pace or rate of change**
- **degree or extent of change (its balance with continuity)**
- **nature or type of change**

Typical change/continuity questions

- In what ways did London change during the 17th century?
- What kind of change was the Russian revolution?
- How much change and how much continuity did Russia experience between 1850 and 1950?
- Who experienced change during the French Revolution?
- When did South Africa change most quickly?
- How much did Spain change between 700 and 1200?
- *What* changed in Cordoba between 700 and 1500?
- When did the emancipation of women begin? (end?!)

- What kind of change was the Russian revolution?
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- **speed, pace or rate of change?**
- **degree or extent of change (its balance with continuity)?**
- **nature or type of change?**

Get them to challenge or re-invent labels

- When was the (Protestant) Reformation?
- When were the 1960s?
- When did the French Revolution end?
- When did the Enlightenment begin?
- What was the Enlightenment?
- Were the Dark Ages always dark?
- **What shall we call the Middle Ages?**
- When did the “emancipation of women” end?
- When did the “emancipation of women” begin?

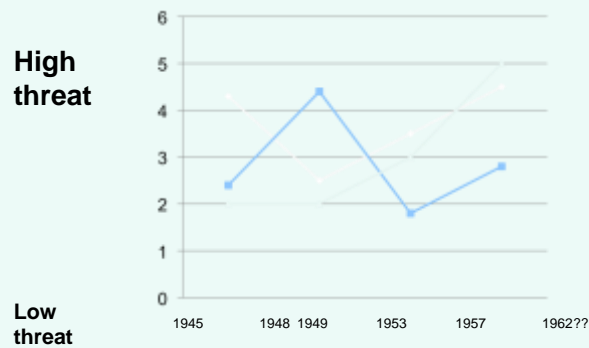
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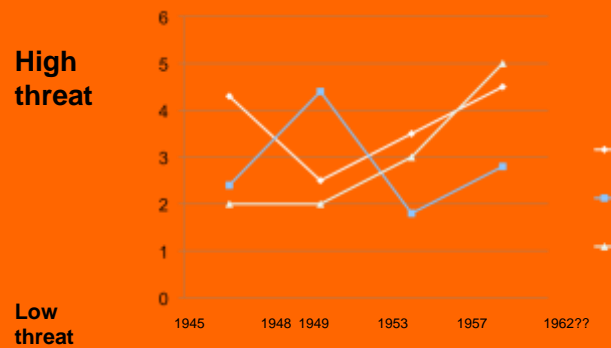
What kind of historical thinking is required when engaging with such questions?

1. Creative graphs and analytic/active timelines

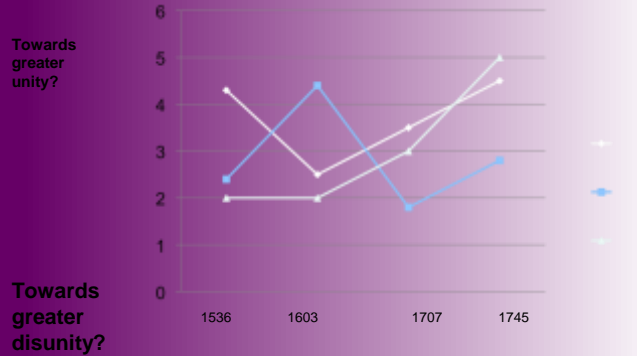
How did levels of threat change during the Cold War?



How did levels of threat change during the Cold War?



Did the British Isles become more or less unified between 1500-1800?



Articles by practising teachers

Tim Jenner, From human scale to abstract analysis:
Teaching History 139.

From human-scale to abstract analysis:

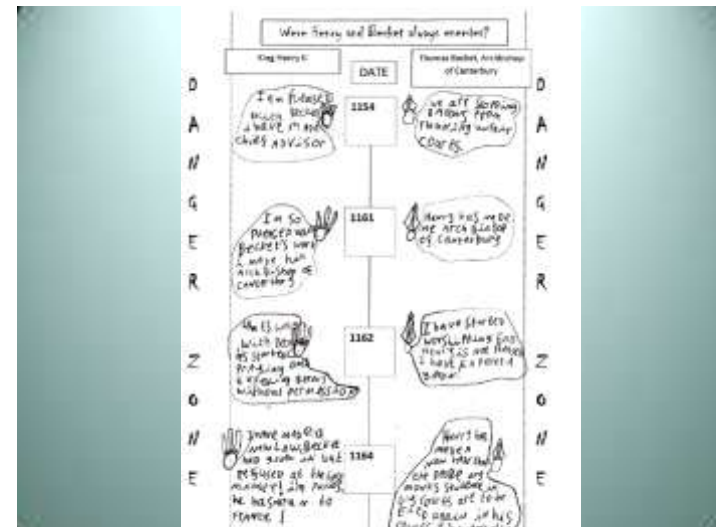
Year 7 analyse the changing relationship of Henry II and Becket

Tim Jenner was working on a casation enquiry with his Year 7 students when he noticed that weak conceptions of change were limiting their ability to produce powerful and period-sensitive arguments. He therefore decided to digress into a temporary but explicit focus on analysing historical change. He created a deceptively simple and very engaging device to help his students chart the pattern of the changing relationship between Henry II and his troublesome archbishop. Jenner used this to explore his students' thinking, to strengthen their confidence with chronology and substantive knowledge and also to reflect on the potential of his activity for future, more abstract consideration of the nature of historical

A mini-enquiry about historical change: how it arose

Some historical questions are so intriguing, so readily reported, that it would be almost unimaginable for a history department to eschew them in planning their Key Stage 3 scheme of work. 'Why did William win the battle of Hastings?' is perhaps the history teacher's favourite, although 'Why was Thomas Becket murdered?' is a close second. That both of these popular enquiries focus conceptually upon causation is no coincidence. 'Why?' questions are history's bread and butter, and will never be wanting, especially in the earliest stages of secondary school history.

I cannot help but feel, however, that in establishing so firmly the place of these questions at Key Stage 3, we have also solidified their answers. Not unlike the pupil who fails to realize that there were three main types of cause for Harold's lack of success at Hastings, William's lack and Harold's mistakes. The teaching of causation in Year 7 has developed so fruitfully that approaches to practice are well established and their principles widely debated by teachers, researchers and teacher-researchers. Probably as a result of this rich discourse and seas of ideas, I have seen my pupils produce answers to 'Why?' questions in Year 7 which I would have struggled to credit at GCSE. Undoubtedly this is cause for celebration, but perhaps also it is a sign that we must update the



From human-scale to abstract analysis:

Year 7 analyse the changing relationship of Henry II and Becket

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A mini-enquiry about historical change: how it arose

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2. Metaphors

metaphors for historical change and continuity

Ask children to generate their own or to think about how well these fit:

- Was the change like a volcano?
- Was it more like a snowball going down hill?
- Was it like the tide (the sea coming in)?
- Was it like a tsunami?
- Was it like an oil slick?

metaphors

for historical change and continuity

Rachel Foster's ROAD MAP

Speed cameras, dead ends, drivers and diversions: Year 9 use a road map to problematise change and continuity.



Rachel
Foster

2008

'Speed
Cameras,
dead ends,
drivers and
diversions:

Year 9 use
road map to
problematise
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*Teaching
History
131*



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*Teaching
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1. Creative graphs and analytic/active timelines
2. Devising metaphors
3. Playing with the boundaries of words

2005: James Woodcock

'Does the linguistic release the conceptual', *Teaching History*, 119

His focus was on causation.

- latent
- underlying

- exacerbate
- nurture

- inevitable
- inexorable

Puzzling over change with more
powerful verbs... and nouns

This evolved into...

OR

This developed into...

This emerged...

OR

This became more common ...

Was this a change in a structure?

OR ... a system? OR ... a culture?

Playdoh challenge 1

revolution

Playdoh challenge 2

fluctuation

Playdoh challenge 3a

stability

Plasticene challenge 3b

stagnation

The wonderful 're' words!

- refresh, renew, revise, rework, restore, recycle, reform, relive, revive, rekindle, refresh, regenerate, reconstruct.

The Renaissance... .. *what...?* ... the ideas of the classical world?

refreshed, renewed, revised, reworked, restored, recycled, reformed, relived, revived, rekindled, refreshed, regenerated, reconstructed...?

- refresh, renew, revise, rework, restore, recycle, reform, relive, revive, rekindle, refresh, regenerate, reconstruct?
- These words get at the heart of the structural relationships between change and continuity. How could you build them into the problems that shape your 'change' enquiries?

trans-

- transformation
- translation
- transition

Playdoh Challenge 4

transition

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- transform
- translate
- transfigure
- transmogrify

Plasticene Challenge!

transition

Danger!

What can go wrong?

Oh no!!

“Please miss, how many ‘change’ words do we have to get into our second paragraph to pass?”

How to keep the magic of words

- Give them choices; make them into a puzzle; invite argument.
- Make it part of an *enquiry journey*, not an isolated exercise.
- Think about positioning – where/when should you introduce an activity with words in your ‘change’ enquiry lesson sequence, and why?

1. Creative graphs and analytic/active timelines
2. Devising metaphors
3. Playing with the boundaries of words
4. Questioning generalisations

What *can* we say about ...?

Is it dodgy? Can you knock it down?



GENERALISATION

How can you make it stand up? Can you improve it?

Can you knock these generalisations down?

- During the nineteenth century, the franchise gradually extended to include most adult males. The century saw a growing realisation of the political agency of the working man.
- By the 1950s an expectation of secondary schooling was the norm in Britain. Since c.1900, the expectation had been steadily transformed from secondary school for the ablest or richest few, to secondary school for all.
- The change that Russian people experienced in its governance in the first half of the 20th century proved to be superficially structural, but not cultural, and not – in the deepest sense – even political.

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