

Grades 9-12

Learning about historical perspective

Overview

This lesson is one of a series that introduces six historical thinking concepts developed by Peter Seixas of the University of British Columbia. Each lesson supports teachers in using a video to introduce one of the concepts. The videos are available at <http://www.tc2.ca/videos.php>. The lessons are available in different versions for grades 6-8 and grades 9-12.

This lesson's written materials and five-minute video, *Historical Perspective*, is an engaging way to introduce students to the concept of historical perspective. It features Chinese Canadians' attitudes towards Canadian society during the early part of the 20th century and asks the question, *Are we using our knowledge of the values and beliefs existing at the time to interpret the people, events and practices of the past?* The video examines the example of the Chinese Students Soccer Team, who won the British Columbia Mainland Cup in 1933. Second, the question is asked, *Are the interpretations representative of the beliefs, values and practices of the time or have important differences been overlooked?* Adoption of Western cultural practices among early 20th century Chinese Canadian immigrants is the example used to explain this concept.

Historical perspective

We cannot transport ourselves back in time, so it is difficult to understand what the past meant to the people who lived it. Though our goal in history is to understand bygone times, our attempts are often clouded by our current concerns, beliefs and values, which obscure our understanding of the concerns, beliefs, and values of the people we are studying. How, then, do we understand a past that is so different from our present views and beliefs? Historical perspective involves viewing the past through the social, intellectual, and emotional lenses of the time in order to understand what life was like for those living then.

Objectives

- identify the historical values, beliefs and practices of a different time
- become aware of the differences between our worldview and the worldviews of the past
- determine whether presentism is influencing our interpretation of the time
- determine whether our interpretation is representative of a number of people and groups
- identify the diverse perspectives on any event in the past

This resource was developed with contributions from:



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Suggested activities

BEFORE THE VIDEO

Provide an example

Open by asking students how they would feel if they got a letter five months after it was sent. Then have them read the following scenario and speculate briefly with a partner on what it might have been like for people in the past to have to wait this long to receive return correspondence from their home country.

In 1858 people living in the British colony of Vancouver Island waited four to five months to receive a response to a letter sent from Victoria to London, England. This meant that important news from friends and family or advice and instructions from superiors took almost one-half year to receive.

Address the problem of presentism

Many students' modern-day perspective will be influenced by the fact that they live in an age with near instantaneous access to information and contact with others. Explain to students that adopting a historical perspective is not a matter of thinking of how they personally would have felt in a particular historical situation but how the people at the time would likely have felt. Understanding how they feel about receiving a letter five months after it was sent is different than understanding what this meant to people living in 1858.

Consider contextual information

In order to understand the logic of a group's actions or opinions, students need to learn about the time and place and put themselves into the mindset of the time by considering two kinds of contextual information:

- broad knowledge about a period and place in time
- specific information about the practices, values or beliefs

Reconsider the historical perspective

After considering this new information, invite students to reconsider how someone at the time would have felt about having to wait four to five months to receive a response to a letter. Ask students to share their responses with either a partner or the rest of the class (possible responses: *excited, happy, and more connected to their home country than ever before*).

Connect to the lesson

Ask students to consider what winning something like a sports tournament or writing contest would mean to them. Inform them that they are going to learn about a team of Chinese Canadian students who won a prestigious football tournament in 1933 and will be considering what this win meant from the perspective of the time.

DURING THE VIDEO

Invite students to view the video, *Historical Perspective*. Ask students to adopt a historic perspective while viewing the examples of Chinese Canadian immigrants in the early 20th century. If possible, provide students with multiple opportunities for viewing.

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AFTER THE VIDEO

Introduce steps for historical perspective taking

Provide students with the following thinking strategy, a series of four steps, to assist them when inferring or analyzing historical perspective:

1. Consider what the event means from a present perspective (this identifies the presentism which students will need to avoid).
2. Identify the values, beliefs and practices of the time the event took place.
3. Determine whether presentism has influenced their interpretation.
4. Determine whether their interpretation is representative of the social norms of the time.

Develop historical perspective

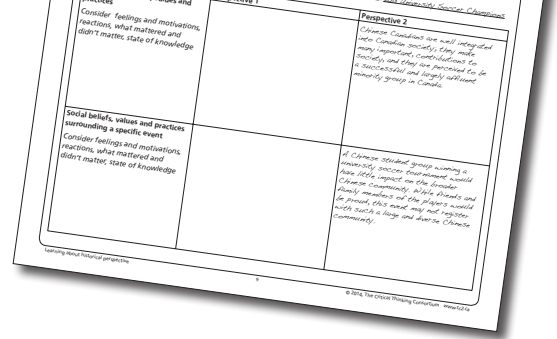
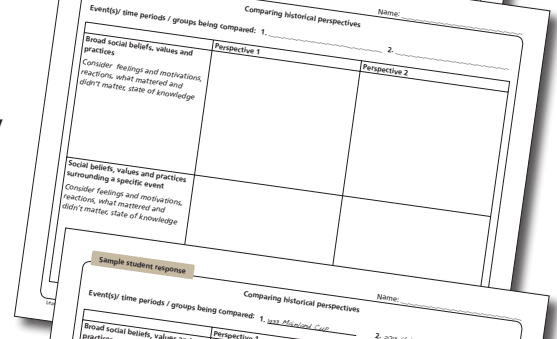
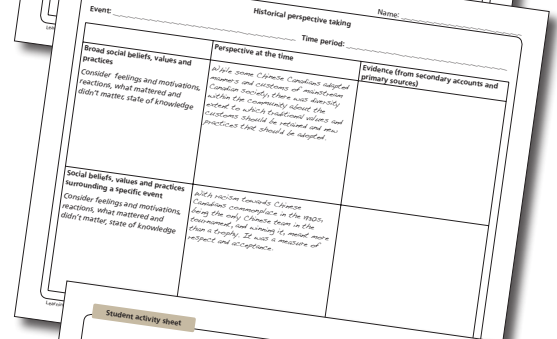
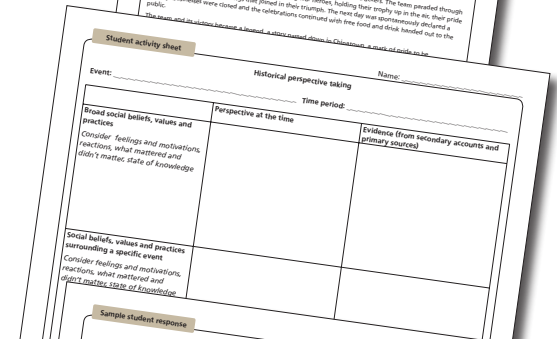
Invite students to use the activity sheet, *Historical perspective taking* to analyze the perspective of the Chinese Students Soccer Team. This can be done in one of two ways. One approach is to ask students to analyze the perspective of Chinese Canadians in 1933 about the win of the Chinese Students Soccer Team using evidence from the video and the information sheet, *1933 Champions: The Chinese Students Soccer Team*. In this case, students would fill out both columns of the activity sheet.

Alternatively, ask students to infer the perspective of Chinese Canadians in 1933 about the win of the Chinese Students Soccer Team with limited evidence from the video only. In this case they would complete the middle column and leave the evidence column blank. If desired, share the evidence found in *Sample response: Historical perspective taking*. Then, after a discussion of their responses, provide students with the information sheet and invite them to rework their speculations and complete column 3 as they do so.

Compare perspectives

Ask students to use the activity sheet, *Comparing historical perspectives*, to compare the historical perspective of the Chinese Canadian community regarding the Chinese students who won the game in 1933 and a community's perspective regarding a university soccer champion team today. If desired, share the examples found in *Sample response: Comparing historical perspectives*. If students have the background knowledge, or access to appropriate resources, you may wish to have them compare perspectives of the 1933 Chinese Canadian community and the white BC community at the same time.

Discuss with students the implications of this exercise with respect to examining the historical perspective of an event or time period: perspective differs between groups living in the same period.



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Form and share judgments

Ask students in pairs or small groups to discuss and come to a consensus regarding the points they feel are most important and convincing concerning the differences between a current day view of a community team winning a soccer championship and the view of the Chinese Canadian community in 1933. Ask students to present their points to others, perhaps by writing a short paragraph to express their historical perspective or by giving a brief presentation to the class.

Assess for understanding

You may wish to ask students to use the rubric, *Assessing understanding of historical perspective*, with this activity. This self-assessment can be used to help further identify what aspects of the concept students understand and what aspects need review.

The rubric is titled "Self-assessment rubric" and "Assessing understanding of historical perspective". It includes a name field and a scale from 1 to 5. The scale is defined as: 1 (Complete confusion), 2, 3, 4, 5 (Total understanding). Below the scale, it asks the student to rate their understanding of five aspects of historical perspective. Each aspect has a table for "Level of understanding" and "Evidence/Explanation".

Aspect of understanding	Level of understanding	Evidence/Explanation
1. Understand what it means to try to adopt a historical perspective.	1 2 3 4 5	
2. Explain how worldviews in the past that differ from modern worldviews, taking into account historical values, beliefs and practices.	1 2 3 4 5	
3. Explain what phenomena it and how it may influence our interpretation of the past.	1 2 3 4 5	
4. Explain how historical perspectives might vary among a variety of groups.	1 2 3 4 5	
5. Develop perspectives for a specified historical period based on the following criteria: - Depict prevailing attitudes: Offer a snapshot of life as people at the specified time have experienced it. - Show diverse perspectives: Use representative of diverse people in the time of duration. - Based on evidence: Are supported with accurate historical evidence.	1 2 3 4 5	

TAKING IT FURTHER

The following activities might be used to further develop the concept of historical perspective:

- Invite students to consider perspectives of people living in times being studied. (e.g., How did soldiers, Canadians generally and the British perceive their involvement in World War I?)
- When studying historical figures, consider perspectives of the times they lived in. (e.g., Why might some women have opposed suffrage?)
- Look at a controversial issue/event/action and infer the perspective of many groups. (e.g., Did Canada respond appropriately to the October Crisis?)
- Identify and consider perspectives of groups of people not mentioned, or briefly mentioned in textbooks. (e.g., Aboriginal peoples, women, children, labourers and other people often not considered)

1933 Champions: The Chinese Students Soccer Team



A photo of the 1933 soccer team. Standing (left to right) William Lore, Gibb Yip, Jackson Louie, Jack Soon, Shupon Wong, Horne Yip, Charlie Louie, Gam Jung, George Lam. Sitting: Lem On, Dock Yip, Art Yip, Quene Yip, Frank Wong, Buck S. Chung.

July 1st: Dominion Day. However, to the Chinese people living in Vancouver in the 1930s July 1st was known as 'humiliation day.' This was a reference to the 1923 Immigration Act, passed on July 1st and outlawing all Chinese immigration, with few exceptions.

The racism against Chinese Canadians during this period was official – as well as unofficial. Chinese Canadians were not allowed to vote or become professionals. They were viewed with suspicion, fear, and sometimes hatred by the white majority. Chinatown was considered a hotbed for crime: an undesirable ghetto inhabited by undesirable people. With the Depression raging, and racism and regulation limiting opportunities for employment, Vancouver's Chinese Canadian community was troubled and oppressed in practically every aspect of life.

And yet, the spring of 1933 brought cause for wild celebration, due to the Chinese Students Soccer Team, which was only Chinese Canadian soccer team in the country. On May 29, in the final minutes of the province's First Division League championship game, the match was tied. Then, the light and nimble Jack Soon scored and the East Vancouver field was swarmed with ecstatic supporters eager to share in the team's victory. The Chinese Student Soccer Team had won the prestigious B.C. Mainland Cup, beating the University of BC varsity team.

That night, the main streets of Chinatown were alive with bands and firecrackers. The team paraded through the crowd in an open car, like a convoy of returning war heroes, holding their trophy up in the air, their pride matched by the cheering throngs that joined in their triumph. The next day was spontaneously declared a holiday: businesses were closed and the celebrations continued with free food and drink handed out to the public.

The team and its victory became a legend, a story passed down in Chinatown, a mark of pride to be remembered throughout the decades.

Source: <http://www.canada.com/story.html?id=b0f277bd-c4b9-421a-a764-c8ca995f2763>

Student activity sheet

Name: _____

Historical perspective taking

Event: _____ Time period: _____

	Perspective at the time	Evidence (from secondary accounts and primary sources)
<p>Broad social beliefs, values and practices</p> <p><i>Consider feelings and motivations, reactions, what mattered and didn't matter, state of knowledge</i></p>		
<p>Social beliefs, values and practices surrounding a specific event</p> <p><i>Consider feelings and motivations, reactions, what mattered and didn't matter, state of knowledge</i></p>		

Historical perspective taking

Event: _____ Time period: _____

	Perspective at the time	Evidence (from secondary accounts and primary sources)
<p>Broad social beliefs, values and practices</p> <p>Consider feelings and motivations, reactions, what mattered and didn't matter, state of knowledge</p>	<p><i>While some Chinese Canadians adapted manners and customs of mainstream Canadian society, there was diversity within the community about the extent to which traditional values and customs should be retained and new practices that should be adopted.</i></p>	
<p>Social beliefs, values and practices surrounding a specific event</p> <p>Consider feelings and motivations, reactions, what mattered and didn't matter, state of knowledge</p>	<p><i>With racism towards Chinese Canadians commonplace in the 1930s, being the only Chinese team in the tournament, and winning it, meant more than a trophy. It was a measure of respect and acceptance.</i></p>	

Comparing historical perspectives

Event(s)/ time periods / groups being compared: 1. _____ 2. _____

	Perspective 1	Perspective 2
<p>Broad social beliefs, values and practices</p> <p><i>Consider feelings and motivations, reactions, what mattered and didn't matter, state of knowledge</i></p>		
<p>Social beliefs, values and practices surrounding a specific event</p> <p><i>Consider feelings and motivations, reactions, what mattered and didn't matter, state of knowledge</i></p>		

Comparing historical perspectives

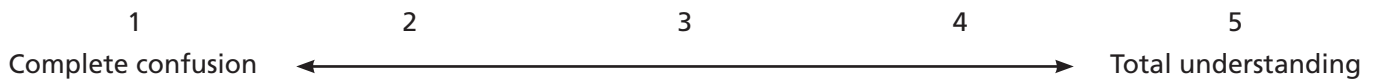
Event(s)/ time periods / groups being compared: 1. 1933 Mainland Cup _____

2. 2013 University Soccer Champions _____

	Perspective 1	Perspective 2
<p>Broad social beliefs, values and practices</p> <p><i>Consider feelings and motivations, reactions, what mattered and didn't matter, state of knowledge</i></p>		<p><i>Chinese Canadians are well integrated into Canadian society; they make many important, contributions to society, and they are perceived to be a successful and largely affluent minority group in Canada.</i></p>
<p>Social beliefs, values and practices surrounding a specific event</p> <p><i>Consider feelings and motivations, reactions, what mattered and didn't matter, state of knowledge</i></p>		<p><i>A Chinese student group winning a university soccer tournament would have little impact on the broader Chinese community. While friends and family members of the players would be proud, this event may not register with such a large and diverse Chinese community.</i></p>

Assessing understanding of historical perspective

Rate your level of understanding for each aspect using the following scale:



In rating your understanding consider the extent to which you are able to:

- accurately explain the relevant concept(s) in your own words
- give specific and informative examples and evidence to support your ideas

Aspect of understanding	Ratings
I understand what it means to try to adopt a historical perspective.	Level of understanding: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence/explanation:
I can explain how worldviews in the past may differ from modern worldviews, taking into account historical values, beliefs and practices.	Level of understanding: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence/explanation:
I can explain what presentism is and how it may influence our interpretation of the past.	Level of understanding: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence/explanation:
I can explain how historical perspectives might vary among a variety of groups.	Level of understanding: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence/explanation:
I can develop perspectives for a specified historical period based on the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depicts prevailing attitudes: Offers a snapshot of life as people at time would likely have experienced it • Shows diverse perspectives: Are representative of diverse people at the time • Based on evidence: Are supported with accurate historical evidence 	Level of understanding: 1 2 3 4 5 Evidence/explanation: