

ASSESSING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

ASSESSING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Activity Description: Use criteria to assess the historical significance of historical events.

Historical Thinking Concept(s): Historical significance

ACTIVITY

INSTRUCTIONS

Launch the inquiry

- Display one SIT card and read out the description on the front and back. Ask students to consider the following inquiry question: Is this historical event significant?
- Invite students to share their initial thoughts about whether the event is significant and the evidence and reasoning that supports their conclusion.
- Inform students that decisions about which events, people, and developments from the past are important to learn and know about focuses on historical significance. The past is everything that ever happened to everyone everywhere, but we cannot study or remember everything. History by its nature is selective, and when learning history we regularly make decisions about what to study, how to describe it, and how events and trends fit into larger narratives about the past. This requires that historians and history students continually assess which aspects of the past are historically significant.
- Explain that in this activity students will use criteria to assess the historical significance of events featured on the cards and make decisions about the events that are most historically significant.

Introduce and model thinking strategy

- Ask students to think of a historical event that occurred during their lifetime that they think will be historically significant in the future. Invite students to share their selected events and explain why they are historically significant.
- Explain to students that although they might not have recognized it, they used criteria to make decisions about the historical significance of their selected events. Inform students that the goal is to identify and understand criteria that will help them make reasonable decisions about historical significance.
- Introduce criteria commonly used for assessing the historical significance of events using one of the events students identified in the previous activity, or the event discussed in the inquiry launch.
- Explain each criterion and model how to assess the historical significance of the event by responding to the question posed for each criterion.
 - *Prominence at the time:* Was the event recognized as important at the time it occurred?
 - *Impact:* How deeply felt, widespread, and long-lasting were the consequences of the event?
 - *Revealing:* Does the event highlight or symbolize important issues or trends in the past or present?
- Ask students to use the criteria to assess their selected event. Invite students to share their responses to each criterion, and their overall assessment of the historical significance of the event. Ask students whether using the criteria changed their thinking about the historical significance of the event.
- Explain to students that when assessing the historical significance of an event it is also important to consider scale. Some events are so significant that everyone in the world should know about them, but other events might not be significant at all, or only significant to individuals and family members.

(continued on next page)

ASSESSING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

ACTIVITY

Introduce and model thinking strategy (continued)

INSTRUCTIONS

- Ask students to use the following criteria to assess the scale of historical significance for their selected event:
 - *Global*: Almost everyone in the world should know about it
 - *National*: Almost everyone in the country where it occurred should know about it
 - *Regional*: Almost everyone in the region or who belongs to a specific group(s) should know about it
 - *Individual*: Only the descendants and family of the people involved need know about it
 - *Not at all significant*: No one needs to remember it
- Invite students to share their responses and explanations.

Practice the strategy

- Distribute the Blackline Master (BLM) *Assessing an event's historical significance* and explain how to use it to assess the significance of events on the cards.
- Select and display the front and back of one SIT card for students.
- Ask students to assess its historical significance using the prompts on the *Assessing an event's historical significance* BLM.

Check understanding

- Invite students to share their ratings for each criterion, their overall rating of the historical significance of the event, and the scale of significance. Ask students to share the evidence that supports their ratings.
- Ask students to use the assessment criteria on the *Assessing understanding of historical significance* BLM to self- or peer-assess their abilities to assess historical significance and explain the concept in their own words.
- Invite students to share any questions or confusions they may have about historical significance or the criteria. Ask students to share what they might have overlooked or might do differently next time.

Apply learning

- Select specific cards that you would like students to analyze the historical significance of, are relevant to the historical topic(s), time period(s), or theme(s) being investigated, and appropriate for the age and background knowledge of the students. For students with limited knowledge about the historical events selected, consider starting with cards students already know about, before introducing cards focused on new events.
- Distribute the *Rating the historical significance of multiple events* BLM and explain how to use it to assess and rank the significance of multiple events.
- Ask students to assess the historical significance of the events on the selected cards, provide evidence to support their ratings, and organize the events from most to least significant.
- Teachers can use the *Supporting teacher assessment* chart to make observations about students' learning, provoke conversations with students about their learning, and assess students' demonstrations of learning. Teachers should focus on the evidence and reasoning students offer to justify their ratings rather than just their conclusions.

ASSESSING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

ACTIVITY

INSTRUCTIONS

Reflect and assess thinking

- Invite students to reflect on the following questions and share with others:
 - Which event was the most significant? Least significant?
 - Were your ratings more similar or different than other students?
 - Why were your ratings different than some students?
 - Which criterion is most difficult to understand?
 - What do you understand about historical significance now that you did not understand before?
- Invite students to use the assessment criteria on the *Assessing understanding of historical significance* BLM to self- or peer-assess their abilities to assess the significance of historical events featured on the cards.

Extend understanding

- Teachers can extend students' understanding of assessing significance by using the following methods:
 - Ask students to assess the significance of historical or contemporary events they have not learned about.
 - Increase the number of events students are asked to rank.
 - Invite students to work on their own, in pairs, or small groups.

ASSESSING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Assessing an event's historical significance

Historical event:					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	5
	Not significant				Very significant
Prominence at the time: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was it considered important at the time? • How long did it exist or operate for? 	Rating (1–5): Evidence:				
Impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How deeply were the consequences? • How widespread were the consequences? • How long lasting were the consequences? 	Rating (1–5): Evidence:				
Revealing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the event highlight, represent, or symbolize important issues or trends in the past or present? 	Rating (1–5): Evidence:				
Scale of significance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all significant: no one needs to remember the event <input type="checkbox"/> Individually significant: only the descendants and family of the people involved should know about the event <input type="checkbox"/> Regionally significant: almost everyone who lives in the region should know about the event <input type="checkbox"/> Nationally significant: almost everyone in the country where it occurred should know about the event <input type="checkbox"/> Globally significant: almost everyone in the world should know about the event 					
Explanation:					

ASSESSING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Assessing understanding of historical significance

I can explain what historical significance is and why it is important.

Evidence:

I've got it

I'm still working on it

I can identify and describe criteria for assessing the historical significance of events.

Evidence:

I've got it

I'm still working on it

I can use criteria to assess the historical significance of events.

Evidence:

I've got it

I'm still working on it

I can support my judgments about the historical significance of events with relevant evidence.

Evidence from sample answer:

I've got it

I'm still working on it

ASSESSING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Rating the historical significance of multiple events

Criteria	Event:	Event:	Event:	Event:	Event:
Prominence at the time: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the event noticed as important when it occurred? How long did it exist or operate for? 	1 Evidence:	2 Evidence:	3 Evidence:	4 Evidence:	5 Evidence:
Impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How deeply felt were the consequences? How widespread were the consequences? How long lasting was the impact? 	1 Evidence:	2 Evidence:	3 Evidence:	4 Evidence:	5 Evidence:
Revealing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the event highlight, represent, or symbolize important issues or trends in the past or present? 	1 Evidence:	2 Evidence:	3 Evidence:	4 Evidence:	5 Evidence:
Scale of significance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not at all significant Individually significant Regionally significant Nationally significant Globally significant 	Scale: Explanation:	Scale: Explanation:	Scale: Explanation:	Scale: Explanation:	Scale: Explanation:

ASSESSING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Supporting Teacher Assessment: Assessing historical significance

The table below provides prompts to help teachers make observations about students' learning, provoke conversations with students, and assess students' demonstrations of learning.

Observation What teachers should look and listen for when observing students.	Conversation Question prompts for teachers to provoke a conversation with students	Demonstrations of Learning Criteria for assessing students' products or demonstrations of learning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do students discuss the three criteria when assessing the significance of historical events? • Do students provide evidence or justification for their assessments of historical significance? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this event historically significant? • Were many people aware of the event at the time it occurred? • How many people were affected by this event? • What were the consequences of the event? • How long lasting were the consequences of the event? • What evidence supports your conclusion about the significance of the event? • Are your answers justified by the evidence you provided? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can explain what historical significance is and why it is important. • Students identify and describe criteria for assessing the historical significance of events. • Students use criteria to assess the significance of historical events. • Students' historical significance ratings are reasonable and supported by relevant evidence. • Students consider different scales of significance to rate the significance of multiple events.