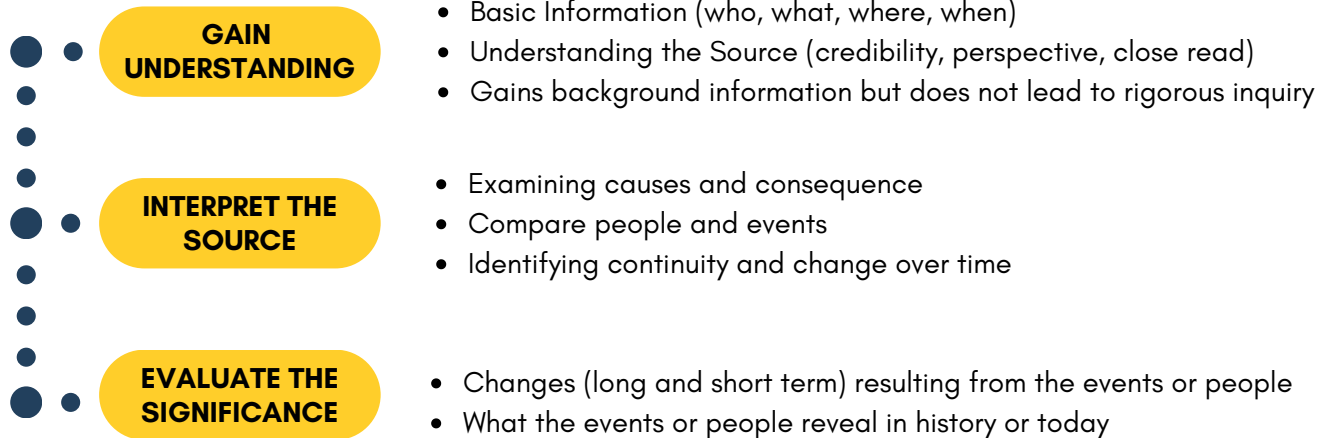


Crafting Historical Questions

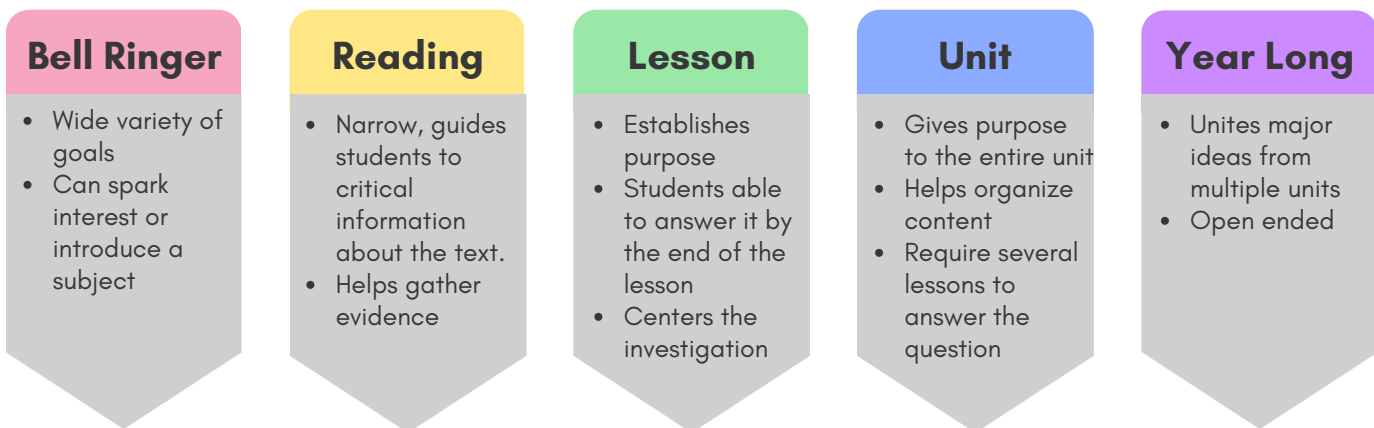
STEP 1: IDENTIFY PURPOSE

The purpose of a historical inquiry question should help define the scope of investigation for students. A good inquiry question will allow students to evaluate sources effectively as they know the end goal. Some categories of questions include:



STEP 2: QUESTION LEVEL

After identifying the purpose for the question, consider where and when the question will exist in the class. Is it to capture students' attention? Or guide their yearly thinking? Something in between?



Examples

Why does the weather change what happens at school each day?

In the letters written by pioneers on the Oregon Trail, how does the environment affect their journey?

How does the environment affect how people live?

In what ways has each region of the United States changed over time?

How has the geography of North America and the people who settled here shaped its history?

Crafting Historical Questions

STEP 3: DRAFT & REVISE

Strong inquiry questions begin with an interrogative word or phrase: *How, Why, To what extent, In what ways*. Use some of the sentence stems below to help generate draft questions:

Gain Understanding

- Basic information (who, what, where, when)
 - **Who was involved in...**
 - **When did ___ happen...**
- Understanding the source (credibility, perspective, close read)
 - **Whose is included or missing in...**
 - **What beliefs/ideas about ___ are included in...**
 - **Where can we find information to double-check...**
 - **What were the arguments for and against...**

Interpret the Source

- Cause and consequence
 - **What led to...**
 - **To what extent did ___ influence...**
- Comparison
 - **In what ways are ___ similar/different?**
- Continuity and change over time
 - **In what ways do the views of ___ show continuity/change in...**
 - **How does ___ event show continuity/change in...**

Evaluate the Significance

- **Why was ___ significant?**
- **What do the sources tell us about...**
- **How did ___ challenge the common views of...**
- **What can we learn from...**
- **In what ways is this important to...**

WHAT TO AVOID

Some types of questions can be problematic as they cannot be easily answered with evidence, may lead students down the wrong historical path, or even put them in the position of defending terrible actions. A few types of questions to avoid are:

- Avoid assumptions in the question that can sway student thinking.
 - E.g., Why was Abraham Lincoln a great president?
- Students should never be in a position to justify unethical events.
 - E.g., Explain why Hernan Cortes justified in colonizing what is known today as Mexico?
- Avoid inquiry questions that can only be answered with an opinion, not by the evidence in the provided sources.
 - E.g., Who was the most important historical person?
- Ahistorical questions that have no basis on evidence.
 - E.g., If Frederick Douglass was alive today, what would he think about the fight for LGBTQ+ rights?

Crafting Historical Questions

STEP 4: EVALUATE

Just as with all writing, the heart of the process is in the revision. Even with something as small as a question, revising it can mean the difference between a short shallow student answer, and one that has depth. The goal for historical inquiries is for students to take the evidence provided by the teacher, critically analyze, and then interpret. The questions should ideally allow students to practice a historical thinking skill such as argument, reasoning, comparison, contextualization, interpretation, and/or synthesis. The goal of evaluating and revising the question is to ensure that the question (and student's answers) achieves the learning goal.

For all questions:

- Is the question clear? Is the vocabulary accessible for my students?
- Does it address the learning goal or skill I have for this instructional component?
- Can the answer be backed by evidence from the provided sources?

For interpret or evaluate questions also ask:

- Is this open-ended and does it allow for many possible answers?
- Does this question require students to think critically?
- Is this topic significant? Should students spend time in its investigation?
- Is it an interesting question that will hold my students' attention?