

Guideposts for the Big 6 Historical Thinking Concepts (Seixas and Morton, 2013)

| <p style="text-align: center;">HISTORICAL THINKING CONCEPT (can only be understood with historical content and can be seen as strategies that historians use in response to 6 key problems)</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">GUIDEPOSTS (these are big ideas related to each concept that give us a “way-in” to the historian’s way of thinking)</p> |
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| <p>HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Events, people, or developments have historical significance if they resulted in change. That is, they had deep consequences, for many people, over a long period of time. 2. Events, people, or developments have historical significance if they are revealing. That is, they shed light on enduring or emerging issues in history or contemporary life. 3. Historical significance is constructed. That is, events, people, and developments meet the criteria for historical significance only when they are shown to occupy a meaningful place in a narrative. 4. Historical significance varies over time and from group to group. |
| <p>EVIDENCE</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. History is interpretation based on inferences made from primary sources. Primary sources can be accounts, but they can also be traces, relics, or records. 2. Asking good questions about a source can turn it into evidence. 3. Sourcing often begins before a source is read, with questions about who created it and when it was created. It involves inferring from the source the author’s or creator’s purposes, values, and worldview, either conscious or unconscious. 4. A source should be analyzed in relation to the context of its historical setting: the conditions and worldviews prevalent at the time in question. 5. Inferences made from a source can never stand alone. They should always be corroborated—checked against other sources (primary or secondary). |
| <p>CONTINUITY AND CHANGE</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continuity and change are interwoven; both can exist together. Chronologies—the sequencing of events—can be a good starting point. 2. Change is a process, with varying paces and patterns. Turning points are moments when the process of change shifts in direction or pace. 3. Progress and decline are broad evaluations of change over time. Depending on the impacts of change, progress for one people may be decline for another. 4. Periodization helps us organize our thinking about continuity and change. It is a process of interpretation, by which we decide which events or developments constitute a period of history. |
| <p>CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Change is driven by multiple causes, and results in multiple consequences. These create a complex web of interrelated short-term and long-term causes and consequences. |

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| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. The causes that lead to a particular historical event vary in their influence, with some being more important than others. 3. Events result from the interplay of two types of factors: (1) historical actors, who are people (individuals or groups) who take actions that cause historical events, and (2) the social, political, economic and cultural conditions within which the actors operate. 4. Historical actors cannot always predict the effect of conditions, opposing actions, and unforeseen reactions. They have the effect of generating unintended consequences. 5. The events of history were not inevitable, any more than those of the future are. Alter a single action or condition, and an event might have turned out differently. |
| <p>HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An ocean of difference can lie between current worldviews (beliefs, values, and motivations) and those of earlier periods of history. 2. It is important to avoid presentism—the imposition of present ideas on actors in the past. Nonetheless, cautious reference to universal human experiences can help us relate to the experiences of historical actors. 3. The perspectives of historical actors are best understood by considering their historical contexts. 4. Taking the perspective of historical actors means inferring how people felt and thought in the past. It does not mean identifying with those actors. Valid inferences are those based on evidence. 5. Different historical actors have diverse perspectives on the events in which they are involved. Exploring these is key to understanding historical events. |
| <p>THE ETHICAL DIMENSION</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Authors make implicit or explicit ethical judgments in writing historical narratives. 2. Reasoned ethical judgements of past actions are made by taking into account the historical context of the actors in question. 3. When making ethical judgments, it is important to be cautious about imposing contemporary standards of right and wrong on the past. 4. A fair assessment of the ethical implications of history can inform us of our responsibilities to remember and respond to the contributions, sacrifices and injustices of the past. 5. Our understanding of history can help us make informed judgments about contemporary issues, but only when we recognize the limitations of any direct “lessons” from the past. |

Source: Seixas, Peter C., and Tom Morton. *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts*. Toronto: Nelson Education, 2013. Print.