

# Historical Enquiry



## What is Historical enquiry?

Historical enquiry is the process by which students use the same methods as a professional historian when investigating an aspect of history. The method of carrying out an enquiry is usually easier for students to understand if they are clarified and used with them as early as possible in the primary school and become part of their experience revisited continuously across each of the key stages

## The Enquiry Process

In order to make the processes of independent enquiry explicit to the students, teachers can provide the evidence at the beginning of an enquiry to generate ideas and questions.

As the students mature they become more independent and can be asked to generate their own questions and locate their own sources of information.

Teachers then begin the enquiry by asking students to

- Find something in the evidence which they think would be an interesting problem to solve or a situation or issue which needs explaining. What questions would they ask to solve the problem?
- Suggest hypotheses based on what they have read, seen or found out.
- Make guesses and speculate on possible explanations
- Test their hypotheses by using further evidence which will help them to confirm or dispute their original ideas.
- Make final judgements based on the available evidence

For younger children the enquiry process means they have to think their way through a problem by;

- asking and framing question
- undertaking research
- making judgments
- effectively communicating answers.

Visit this site to view a presentation on how to carry out an enquiry

<http://prezi.com/kegvpqwn6ezy/the-enquiry-process-in-history/>

## Planning to teach historical enquiries

Planning to teach enquiries involves teachers in

- Developing their personal knowledge of the concepts needed to carry out the enquiry. For example the skills and processes and the historical concepts they wish to focus on.
- Choosing topics which have sufficient content to allow for in-depth work in developing the enquiry.
- Finding sources which enables the children to base their answers on processing authentic evidence
- Considering if the sources are trustworthy and their relative value to a particular enquiry.
- Recognising the importance of developing the language of historical enquiry (*source, evidence, hypothesis, validity/interpretation*) in developing students thinking learning and understanding about the past.
- Providing opportunities for students and younger children to arrive at their own conclusions and make their own judgments.
- Facilitating the students in discussing how to communicate and present their answers.
- Setting questions which will help to shape and direct the enquiry

**Teach the language of enquiry** as early as possible.

- Use words to describe the processes as they are being taught, for example *check, test, hypotheses, claims, speculate, evaluate and revise*.
- Familiarise the students with words which help them to deal with uncertainty in their initial ideas and indeed their conclusions for example *probably, probable, possible*.
- Make wall displays of enquiry words and terms and encourage students to reference them in their explanations.

## Plan enquiries which are focused on diversity

- At KS1 children can be made aware of other peoples' opinions and values and can be given opportunities to explore alternative points of view in history topics which help them to clarify and express their thoughts and feelings about different people in the past.
- At KS2 children learn in more depth about different lifestyles, and ways of life in the past, and become more aware of how these are different to their own.
- In post primary schools teachers should focus enquiries on divergent political views within the same groups of people in the past and alternative perspectives of individuals within the same group.

## Design good enquiry questions

- In order to develop good enquiry skills in younger children, teachers must first frame the enquiry around interesting questions from topics and stories which stimulate their interest and motivate them to ask their own questions.

- Asking the children at KS1 questions about how they are different or similar to other children will help develop their sense of their own identity and how this relates to other identities in the class.
- Questions focused on the actions of key people in the past and the exploration of their motives will introduce the children to the idea that people have viewpoints that can differ from their own.
- Questions focused on the use of historical sources such as photographs, eye witness accounts and film enable the children to begin to develop their historical understanding of concepts such change and continuity, or cause and consequence.
- Asking children questions about the different ways the past has been represented and why there are different versions of the past will begin to develop the children's awareness of how history has been interpreted.
- Framing good enquiry questions for older students, which are sufficiently rigorous to allow issues to be addressed in an historical way, can be difficult. They require teachers to consider what constitutes a rigorous enquiry question in its own right, as well as what concepts (*cause, consequence, change and continuity, significance, context and chronology*) and processes the question will focus on.

The historian Michael Riley suggests using the following criteria when setting enquiry questions to KS3 students.

- Captures the interest and imagination of your students.
- Places an aspect of historical thinking, concept and process at the heart of the enquiry.
- Results in a final concluding activity through which the students can genuinely answer the enquiry question

### **Plan enquiry questions about historical concepts.**

- Enquiries which are focused on developing historical understanding of concepts and the historical processes underpinning them, provide students with the tools for doing history and for thinking historically. The skills and processes used to undertake historical enquiries (posing questions, hunting out sources, extracting evidence, developing and testing hypotheses, reporting conclusions), when linked to learning objectives about historical concepts, can engage students in rigorous yet stimulating enquiries.

### **Possible strategies for teaching aspects of historical concepts**

- **Living timelines** which are physically constructed by the students themselves and where they are asked to place events both chronologically and thematically within and across different periods of time. Revisiting events with hindsight, and reframing initial thinking on both vertical and horizontal timelines as more knowledge is gained, can show students that situations which occurred in one period of time may not remain the same, while other situations will stay the same..
- **Line graphs** can be used to show changes and continuities over a period of time in relation to specific criteria. For example;

- reactions and tensions or different perspectives such as moral, religious or political convictions.
- failures and successes of political movements or leaders.
- long term patterns of change and long term and short term causes of events
- interpretations and how they have been used by different groups and in different periods of time. Asking older students questions about historians' views. For example would all historians see the issue in the same way?
- **Making comparisons** For enquiries based on cause and consequence students could classify the different types of causes and consequences. For instance, long and short term causes, economic, social and political causes and the role of particular individuals for similar or different events. Students could then compare them in terms of how important they were as factors for change rather than the long term and short term issues. When focusing an enquiry on significance students could select from a list of events and dates those they regard as the most significant, in terms of being turning points, or the most important causes and consequences, and explain their choices to other students.
- **Debates and Discussions** Organising small group discussions or debates around topics where there is a lot of controversy can provide worthwhile opportunities for students to engage in more open ended work of a problem solving nature. This can lead to further development of higher levels of conceptual thinking.
  - **A carousel debate** can build up the students confidence in discussion techniques as it allows them to sample a wide range of views and often results in them refining and expanding their original ideas or thoughts on an issue. The class is divided into two groups forming two concentric circles with the inner circle facing the outer circle. When a question has been posed they discuss and exchange views in pairs for a set time. The circles then rotate in opposite directions and discussion continues until the students have experienced a wide range of partners. Students may find as this activity progresses that their arguments became stronger and opinions and summaries clearer and more coherent.
  - **Snowballing** is a useful strategy as it enables students to think about their own response to an issue and to consider other peoples thoughts as well. Students are asked to describe a historical situation and write down their initial thoughts. Then in pairs they compare their answers and reach an agreed position.

Students then move to groups of four and then eight to continue the process and reach further agreed positions.

This strategy enables students to priorities their ideas about a situation in history, and by comparing answers, refine their ideas to reach an agreed position.

- **Each One Teach One** is an alternative strategy to lecturing for transferring large amounts of facts and key information, particularly at the start of an enquiry, or for consolidating information at the end of an enquiry. Teacher distributes a list of cause and consequence statements about a particular topic, one to each student, and allows time for them to familiarise themselves with their statement. Students are then asked to explain their statements to each other and allowed to move around the classroom so that they can communicate with as many other students as possible. After the students have had enough time to transfer their information they can be asked to consider what

connections they made between the different causes and consequences and which ones they considered were the most important to help them to answer their enquiry question.

Below are some contexts for using these discussion strategies

- Ask students to consider counterfactual and counter possibility questions about change and continuity, for example what might have happened, after they have studied an event. If events had happened at a different time or in a different order, challenge them to think for themselves and make judgments about the past. Asking students to consider what might have happened if the circumstances had been different may also reinforce the students understanding of the significance of what actually happened. For A level students an alternative is to consider something which did not happen and ask them to suggest possible consequences if the event had taken place.
- Describing and explaining turning points, including periods of stagnation and rapid change, regressions and progression. Students acquire an appreciation the nature of change, why changes have occurred at a particular time, the rate at which change occurred and the impact of the changes in terms of short and long term consequences and changes for better or worse
- Considering the inevitability of events and changes may provide a more exciting aspect to an event and may also introduce an element of surprise to discussions. After they have studied an event students can be asked to consider whether and how the event might have turned out differently or if it could have been avoided. They may also be asked to discuss whether an event might have had a different outcome if one of the causes had a different. With older students this may lead on to further discussions about the role of chance and accident.

### **Develop in depth enquiries which explore community based historical perspectives**

Teaching historical events which are commemorated today may raise uncomfortable issues for some students about the difference between what they have learned about history at home and in their communities and what is being taught in the history classroom. They may come to the history lessons with a one sided view of events in the past as they rarely encounter differences of opinion or even another perspective from within their own communities, choosing what to remember rather than focusing on what really happened.

Teaching these sensitive aspects of history is most effective when there is a strong focus on independent enquiry with the students being given the time and space to reflect on the complex nature of historical understanding of past events.(TEACH Report 2007).

With this in mind it may be useful for teachers to consider the following points when planning to teach enquiries about commemoration of events in the past.

Teachers should seek to provide opportunities for students to;

- recognise how members of a community can select historical events to support that community's particular views or viewpoint.
- explore different perspectives within their communities can help develop their understanding of how members of the same community make meaning of past events.

- develop enquiries which build in time for informed debates and discussions which will enable students to confront ambiguity and to see that claims have to be justified with informed knowledge.

## **Primary Examples of Enquiries**

In Foundation and Key Stage 1 history is taught as an integral part of three aspects of the World Around Us, including Geography and Science and Technology. At this stage the emphasis is on the development of social relationships and how the children interact with one another and how they settle disagreements. They also develop a sense of who they are and their place in the world and how this relates to other children in the class.

The enquiry process at KS1 is about the children being given opportunities to work as a historian by

- Asking questions
- Making observations
- Explaining and drawing conclusions

## **KS1**

Using the locality as a stimulus to develop an enquiry question about remembering aspects of life in the past and how this can be different from one locality to another. Studying how life has changed over time and the different experiences which people have had enables young to appreciate the diversity of society.

Using examples of how different people in the past have been remembered in the locality for example through statues, memorials, street names, memorial gardens. Children could use these different forms of commemoration to explore aspects of social class, such as the reasons why some people are considered important enough to have more than one form of commemoration, such a street named after them and a statue.

Using personal stories and family histories to develop an enquiry on what different people remember or think is important to remember. For example different school experiences, differences between boys and girls and rich and poor people in the past.

Enquiries built around stories of people from different locations play an important role in encouraging children to question stereotypes and to recognise alternative viewpoints. History provides opportunities for children to engage with these issues through the use of stories and accounts about different people in the past.

“Research suggests that from an early age children begin to identify with particular communities and may make prejudiced statements.” (Connolly: 2002).

Extending children’s awareness of different viewpoints through the use of historical examples may contribute to children’s developing awareness of different life styles and values.

## **KS2**

At KS2 the children can be given more opportunities to know how a historian works by increased engagement with primary sources of evidence. By asking their own questions, and selecting evidence from sources to help answer these questions, they will begin to reach more informed conclusions about the past.

Use of the locality at KS2 provides a rich context for children to investigate issues concerning remembrance in public spaces and the effects this can have on people and the physical environment. Children could use the PRONI website at [www.proni.gov.uk/nd4/local\\_history](http://www.proni.gov.uk/nd4/local_history) to find out what is being commemorated in their communities and then go on to consider how things are commemorated e.g. by whom and when? Children could consider the consequences of these commemorations on the community in terms of expressions of differences about identity, conflict and background.

An enquiry focused on the commemoration of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria provides opportunities for examining interpretations through the wide range of commemorative memorabilia. Issues of diversity and alternative viewpoints from different groups of people such as rich and poor living in Britain at the time can be focussed on. Using a range of sources from videos, films, eye witness accounts, images of factory conditions and cartoons, the children can be encouraged to ask their own questions about what the evidence is telling them about Victorian society. The teacher can display their questions and ask the children to consider which of the questions would help them to carry out an enquiry on why different groups of people had different views about living in Britain during Queen Victoria's reign. Teacher and children could use the criteria for a good enquiry question to decide which question would be the most appropriate to use.

## **Post Primary Examples of enquiries**

### **KS3**

The commemoration of events in Northern Ireland 100 years ago has produced an enormous amount of literature, TV documentaries and museum exhibitions. These provide opportunities for children to consider how commemoration of these events has been represented publically. Children may have visited some of the centenary events and exhibitions. This student led enquiry would use information gained from the visit to an exhibition on commemoration (for example the Decade of Anniversaries exhibition at the City Hall and the Ulster Says No exhibition at the Linen Hall Library, Belfast) to provide a context for developing the children's skills at formulating their own enquiry questions. and then carrying out their own enquiry.

The context of partition can provide the opportunity to explore the viewpoints of different groups of people, for example the partition of Ireland in 1921, or India in 1947. This could develop into an enquiry on how a country should be ruled and whether countries who wanted their independence should have been allowed to leave the British Empire. Teachers could use [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) to find a good range of original source material for this enquiry

Teaching about different interpretations of history is challenging for KS3 students but using them as a focus for an in depth enquiry will enable students to see that argument and debate are central to history. By examining how people in later times have presented the past in

pictures, plays, films, reconstructions, museum displays, and fictional and non-fictional accounts students can deepen their understanding of the contested nature of history.

Focusing an enquiry question around interpretations such as a film/poem/ music/or piece of art or an exhibition develops students awareness on the reliability of the interpretations by examining how they have been constructed and for what purpose and for whom, has the message been distorted?

## **KS4**

Providing students with opportunities to engage in interesting and challenging enquiry where the emphasis is on application of their knowledge and not just its acquisition is good practice at this stage. It gives the students experience of working things out for themselves and less time is spent on acquiring information and knowledge by way of notes and past paper questions.

One example is an enquiry about aspects of the Holocaust such as obedience and conformity in Nazi Germany from the point of view of German police men who disobeyed orders to kill Jews, as opposed to the more traditional view of policemen obeying orders through fear. This provides opportunities for students to test a hypothesis or to put forward a case by asking questions from evidence presented and their own research. Requiring the students to explain how they will present their findings allows them to apply what they have learned in an interesting and novel way.

An enquiry can be built around a controversial or emotive issue. Pupils studying the Holocaust for their Controlled Assessment Task could explore human behaviour and the reasons why people in the past acted as they did. They can interrogate sources on a range of different ways in which groups of ordinary people in Germany and other countries treated the Jews and how this conflicts with the more traditional view of the treatment of the Jews. The students could be given opportunities to debate and discuss the dangers of stereotyping and how historians can help to challenge these views through the critical analysis of sources.

## **A Level**

Build an enquiry around exploring alternative perspectives of Home Rule by providing the students with an extract from a lecture on [YouTube](#) from one historian called “The Divergent Views of the Ulster Covenant”. Students in groups are asked to work out from the lecture the main arguments for each of the different views. The next step is to answer the question, “Would other historians agree with the historian’s interpretation?” by considering different historians viewpoints. Students could present their findings using a consequence wheel (Diana Laffan). They place the evidence from the first historian in the centre of the wheel. They then place the views of the other historians who agree with this evidence in the next ring of the wheel and the evidence from historians who disagree in the outer ring of the wheel. Students then decide which of the historians has made the strongest argument and the reasons why, before making their judgment.