

Historical Thinking Mentorship Project

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Section 1. Historical Thinking Concept

Chosen concept: Continuity and Change

Think about what the world would look like in fifty years **if nothing ever changed**. Would you be happy? Maybe bored? What about if for the next week **nothing stayed the same**. Every day you have new classes, new teachers, new friends, new languages being spoken around you, and new technologies. Would you want to live in such chaos? Sometimes when historians look at the past, they look for moments of change: when did a country, a society, or a person become something new? Doing this helps historians break the past into chunks that we can talk about. Think about this like a movie. If you wanted to discuss a film, you might call attention to a scene where a character goes through an important life change. Breaking an event into pieces like this is called *periodization*. But historians know that not everything changes all at once. Let's return to the movie example. Say the character goes through a breakup and realizes something dark about herself: she's not as innocent as she thought. Does this mean she is completely changed? Not necessarily. She still has the same parents, the same job, the same physical appearance, and lives in the same city. These *continuities* are just as important to historians. When they *periodize*, they take into account both what changed and what did not. Without thinking about one or the other, our representations of the past would look like unchanging, frozen photographs or chaotic explosions that cannot be understood. This is why thinking about *continuity and change* is so important.

Student explanation for learners:

What is *continuity*? What is *change*? We know what these words mean to us in our everyday lives: the school year is a *continuity* (it continues), and the new semester is a *change*. Historians use these words in similar ways: the Great War was a *continuity*, the gas attack at Ypres was a *change*.

Everyday, we respond to these continuities and changes with feelings. When we arrive at school each morning, we might feel bored with the *continuity* of our routine. We need a change. Maybe we daydream about a vacation or a day off. When we have an assembly, we might feel relieved or excited about the *change* in our schedule, the escape from routine. But the *continuity* of a routine can be comforting. Think about an activity that you know will always help you relax. Maybe you are anxious about an upcoming *change*: how would you feel about a pop quiz?

These *continuities* and *changes* existed for the people in the past, too. Think about how you would feel if you grew up on a wheat farm and one day had to leave because all of your crops died of drought and locusts. Where would you go? How would you and your family survive? What if you were the prime minister? How would the citizens of your country adapt to this change?

Section 2. Curricular Alignment

Grade level: CHC2D (Grade 10)

Ontario curriculum Overall Expectation: D1. Social, Economic, and Political Context: Describe some key social, economic, and political trends, events and developments in Canada between 1945 and 1982, and explain how they affected the lives of people in Canada, including First Nations, Metis, and Inuit individuals and communities

The historical thinking concept of Continuity and Change supports learning within the expectation of D1. Social, Economic, and Political Context. As students can apply the concept of continuity and change to what has continued to remain the same socially, economically and politically as well as what has changed. As students watch the [*Farewell to Oak Street*](#) documentary and digest the information being presented to them in regards to the pre and post living situation of people involved in a public housing project in Toronto. When students are able to understand the general notion of continuity and change, they begin to recognize how continuity and change can exist at the same time and impact multiple layers of society. Furthermore, how progress in one area or for one subset of people can lead to decline or stagnation for another. As students delve deeper into this historical thinking concept it will assist them in learning about the D1. curriculum expectation and support them in their interest and engagement with history as they will be able to make connections using continuity and change with contexts that have and are still persistent with their daily lives, allowing them to make real world connections that increase a level of complex understanding.

Teacher facing curricular note:

The relationship between the concept of continuity and change and the curriculum expectation is that this concept provides a groundwork to arrange and understand the historical information that is being presented within history class. The expectation requires a description of social, economic and political trends that have taken place in Canada over the course of 1945-1982. Through this you begin to understand the impacts that these trends have made on people's lives within that time-frame: what has stayed the same and what has changed. By assessing those differences and similarities the relationship between the concept and the curriculum expectation becomes clearer, as learning continues in regards to social, economic,

and political trends that have taken place in Canada. You are able to use continuity and change as an analytical lens that surpasses the surface level information and delves deeper into who has experienced changes? Who has not? How has that made an impact? Is change fast or slow? Or does it ebb and flow? These are just some of the questions that may surface when examining the relationship between the curriculum expectations and the historical thinking concept.

Section 3. Primary Source and Worked Example

Primary source selection:

Produced in 1953 by the National Film Board, *Farewell to Oak Street* (1953) is a documentary that portrays postwar suburbanization in Canada as a force of moral and social reconstruction. By representing a dramatic “before and after” in the lives of working-class families who moved from Oak Street to Regent Park, the film suggests that public housing projects and postwar development could “save” the working-class from their “backward” lifestyles. As a primary source, the film offers historical evidence that students may use to consider not its subjects but the ideas, values, and beliefs that shaped its production.

Context for learners:

Farewell to Oak Street (1953) is a documentary film about families moving from one neighbourhood to another. At the time the film was made, white middle-class Canadians (the film’s target audience) had negative opinions about families in poverty: they thought that...

Most importantly, they felt that the lower classes should be rescued or saved from their living conditions. If working families could afford public housing, it was thought, they could participate in a moral Canadian society. Analyze the documentary subjects as characters. What behaviours does the film seem to disapprove of? How does the film fix these behaviours? Is there anything distinctly “unCanadian” about working families? Do you think that the director/producer is right to construct an ideal Canadian identity?

Modelled historical thinking:

This film is all about change. But what kinds of change? The characters are the same people throughout, but their behaviour at the beginning of the film is different to their behaviour at the end. The first step a historian would take is to observe and document these changes. Focus on what is literally being shown to you in *Farewell to Oak Street*. After you have documented some changes, focus on one of two that strike you as important. This can be based on a feeling—you will analyze this next.

Consider the one or two changes that struck you. What do you think the film is saying by showing you these changes? Are these people's lives getting better? Worse? How do you know?

Lastly, put your observations and analysis in context. What is going on in post-war Canada? How might popular social values have influenced the film's portrayal of these characters? Most audience members would have been middle class, but how do you think working-class people would have felt about the film?

Teacher note:

Teachers might use this film to teach about spatiality in history; they can use it to teach how space, and our representations of space in the media, shape social life and identity. When watching the film, consider how it represents identity. If students struggle to understand how Canadian identity is formed in history, teachers might instruct students to consider how the film would like Canadians to live their lives. Consider prompting students to pay attention to how the film portrays family relationships before and after families move house. What does this change suggest about the families depicted? What does this change suggest about the people who made the film?

We suggest introducing this film as a primary source, something to be interrogated. Students might take the film's representation of poor families as historical fact. It is essential to stress that all texts portray a version of the past, not the past as it was. It is their job as historians to determine what biases might be present in a text.

Section 4. Visual Accompaniment to the Primary Source

Farewell Oak Street Reflection

Name: _____

Date: _____

- 1. While watching the video, note the conditions of both Oak Street before the new development and of Regent Park after the development. Consider changes and continuities to both physical landscape and family life.

Oak Street	Continuities	Regent Park

-
-
-
-
-
-

- [illegible]

Description of the tool:

Students use this visual organizer to analyze the primary source *Farewell Oak Street* by identifying what changes and what stays the same over time. They first record observations from the film in a “before and after” format. To help develop analytic skill, it is important for students to first focus on the chart individually. They then identify continuities that are less obvious or not emphasized in pairs, facilitating discussion and hopefully moving students past a surface level interpretation as the continuities are less obvious. This process supports close viewing and critical reading by encouraging students to move beyond surface-level observations and question how the film constructs its message through an analysis of continuity and change. Also, this exercise places value on continuity and change by asking students why certain changes are highlighted. It suggests that in this context, change is seen as net good while continuities are undermined or overlooked. By comparing change with continuity, students are prompted to interpret what may be missing or understated, helping them recognize bias and develop a deeper understanding of how historical narratives are shaped.

Pedagogical purpose:

The continuity and change visual organizer supports historical thinking by giving students a structured way to move from simply noticing details in *Farewell Oak Street* to forming deeper interpretations about its message. By separating observations into “before,” “after,” and “continuities,” students are required to categorize evidence rather than just list it, which helps them recognize patterns and relationships over time. As a result, the visual acts as cognitive support by structuring how students process information rather than simply displaying it. By organizing evidence into change and continuity, students are guided to see that meaning in *Farewell Oak Street* is not neutral, but constructed through selective emphasis. This structure prompts them to question why certain changes are highlighted while continuities are minimized, leading them to consider whose perspectives are being represented and whose are absent. In doing so, students move beyond description to interpretation, using the organizer to uncover bias and analyze how the film links the environment to social and moral assumptions. The visual therefore supports deeper historical thinking by making the process of questioning, comparing, and interpreting more explicit and accessible.

Section 5. Scholarly Rationale for Pedagogical Design

Scholarly rationale:

We choose to use a film as our source as it is more immersive and provides students with an opportunity to observe how life was during the time period. Using a video as our main source allows students to analyze experiences and perspectives through a more interactive lens that they

would not have otherwise. Due to students' consistent interaction with technology in their daily lives, having a video as their main source of information is a more digestible piece of content that helps them understand and make connections to the historical thinking concept and curriculum expectations. A study titled “Teaching in a Digital Age: How Educators Use Technology to Improve Student Learning (2016) discusses how students use technological resources to create connections to their work and broaden their learning outside of their educational community allowing them to feel more confident in their level of understanding and achievements (2016).

The design of this continuity and change organizer is grounded in the work of Peter Seixas and Sam Wineburg, particularly in *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts* (2013) and *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts* (2001), which emphasize that historical thinking involves organizing, questioning, and interpreting evidence rather than simply recalling facts. By structuring observations into “before,” “after,” and “continuities,” the organizer scaffolds students’ ability to analyze patterns over time and challenges narratives of simple progress. The visual structure acts as cognitive support, prompting students to slow down, revisit the source, and distinguish between what is emphasized and omitted. Paired discussion and narrative reframing further draw on Keith Barton and Linda Levstik in *Teaching History for the Common Good* (2004), highlighting how historical understanding is socially constructed through dialogue and perspective-taking. By rewriting a scene from the perspective of a resident or displaced individual, students are pushed to consider both change and continuity, examining what has been transformed while also recognizing what persists in people’s lives despite redevelopment. This approach aligns with Stéphane Lévesque’s work in *Thinking Historically* (2008), encouraging students to evaluate historical representations and bias, question dominant narratives, and develop a more critical understanding of how history is constructed and whose voices are privileged.

Citations:

Barton, K. C., & Levstik, L. S. (2004). *Teaching history for the common good*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Lévesque, S. (2008). *Thinking historically: Educating students for the twenty-first century*. University of Toronto Press.

McKnight, K., O’Malley, K., Ruzic, R., Horsley, M. K., Franey, J. J., & Bassett, K. (2016). Teaching in a Digital Age: How Educators Use Technology to Improve Student Learning. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 48(3), 194–211.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15391523.2016.1175856>

Seixas, P., & Morton, T. (2013). *The big six historical thinking concepts*. Nelson Education.

Wineburg, S. (2001). *Historical thinking and other unnatural acts: Charting the future of teaching the past*. Temple University Press.