

Historical Thinking Mentorship Project

Section 1. Historical Thinking Concept

Chosen concept: Historical Perspectives

Student explanation for learners: “Historical Perspectives” is one of the Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts determined by the famous historian, Peter Seixas. This concept helps us understand how people in the past saw the world based on the context, beliefs, and values of their own time. Historians use this concept to interpret the past more fairly and accurately. This way of thinking helps us avoid judging people in history based on our current society’s standards by asking: *What did people know at the time? What mattered to them? What pressures or ideas shaped their choices?* By looking at the past this way, we can gain a better understanding of how peoples’ actions were shaped by their historical context, especially when those actions may not make sense or even seem wrong to us now. Essentially, Historical Perspectives is about trying to understand peoples’ views within the world they lived in.

Historical Perspectives also teaches us that there is never just “one narrative” in history. Different people often experience the same event in very different ways depending on their identity, background, and positionality. Historians gain greater historical perspective by examining various sources, such as letters, photographs, speeches, and government records to piece together different viewpoints and build a fuller understanding of the past. This way of thinking helps us become more thoughtful, understanding, and open-minded when considering other peoples’ stories. Most importantly, it demonstrates how history is not only about learning what happened, but also understanding why people understood events differently and how that shaped the world we live in today.

Section 2. Curricular Alignment

Grade level: Grade 10 Academic Canadian History (CHC2D)

Ontario curriculum Overall Expectation: Strand C2. Communities, Conflict, and Cooperation (1929-1945): “Analyse some key interactions within and between communities in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, and between Canada and the international community, with a focus on key issues that affected these interactions and changes that resulted from them” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2026).

Teacher facing curricular note: Historical Perspectives is a historical thinking concept that encourages students to reflect on, interpret, and value the different voices on a historical event within the period of the event. This concept corresponds with Strand C2 of the Grade 10 Academic Canadian History curriculum, by guiding students to recognize different voices from different communities in Canada between 1929 to 1945. Encountering different historical voices allows students to develop their critical thinking and judgmental skills, which contributes to the implementation of historical mindedness in student learning. By interpreting the purpose behind the voice of a community and comparing it with other voices, students are guided to think beyond the historical content itself. This interpretation will then highlight the potential conflicts and cooperations between different communities in Canada during 1929 to 1945, as well as the benefits and impacts behind these community interactions. Historical Perspectives leads students to recognize the significance of interpreting different voices from different communities, and how these voices contribute to the shaping of present-day Canada. This connection between the past and present allows students to see how the learning of history is relevant to them, their community, and other communities in Canada today. Thus, considering the influence of various historical voices helps students to learn how to avoid biases when examining a historical event within its age.

Section 3. Primary Source and Worked Example

Primary sources

1. [David Gamble transcript \(Canadian War Museum\)](#)
 - a. [Video Interview](#)
 - b. This oral-history source describes why many First Nations men served in WWII and how Indigenous veterans were often treated unfairly after the war. It is useful for showing the gap between service to Canada and unequal recognition at home.
2. [Photograph of Masumi Mitsui Holding a Picture of Himself as a First World War Soldier](#)
 - a. This photograph presents Masumi Mitsui, a Japanese Canadian veteran, holding an image of his younger military self. It visually highlights the contrast between his service to Canada and the discrimination Japanese Canadians faced during the Second World War.
3. [Gilbert Bradley and Gordon Bowsher - More Primary Source Photos](#)
 - a. These photographs add visual evidence to the letters and help students better understand the relationship and historical context of the two men. They support students in thinking about how personal lives were often hidden or silenced in wartime history.
4. [Douglas Melford Wardell Johnson and Susan Washington](#)
 - a. This oral-history source reflects on the experiences of a Black Canadian veteran and the racism he faced after military service. It helps students examine how war did not erase discrimination within Canadian society.

Context for learners:

This primary source is an oral-history interview with David Gamble, an Indigenous veteran who served in the Canadian military during World War Two. Oral histories are recorded personal accounts that allow us to hear directly from individuals about their lived experience.

In this interview, Gamble explains why many Indigenous men chose to enlist, due to motivations such as a sense of duty, a search for opportunity and a desire for recognition. However, he also reflects on the challenges of Indigenous peoples face after returning home including unequal treatment, lack of recognition, and ongoing discrimination in society.

When you engage with this source, it is important to consider how Gamble's experiences compare to dominant narratives of Canadian soldiers in World War Two. Think about whose stories are highlighted in history and whose are left out. This primary source will help you explore the gap between serving Canadians in war and being treated in Canadian society afterwards.

Modelled historical thinking:

Historical Perspectives means trying to understand what people in the past thought, believed, and experienced without judging them by today's standards. When historians use this concept, they look closely at a person's background, personal experiences, and the context in which they were living in.

1. Start by identifying the source.

Modelled thinking: David Gamble is an Indigenous veteran who served in the Canadian Navy. In this interview clip, he reflects on why Indigenous Peoples fought in wars and how they were treated afterward. Knowing his identity helps us understand why he might have a different perspective than prevalent narratives.

2. Next, focus on his perspective.

Modelled thinking: Ask yourself what he values and what experiences may have shaped his thinking. Gamble explains that Indigenous soldiers fought to protect their land and way of life, rather than out of loyalty to the Crown. He also describes how Indigenous veterans were treated unfairly after the Second World War, especially when compared to white soldiers, who received land and financial support after the war. This suggests that his perspective is shaped by both pride in military service and frustration in social inequality.

3. Avoid presentism.

Modelled thinking: This means not judging the past using today's values. Instead of asking why Indigenous Peoples would fight for a country that treated them unfairly, a historian asks what reasons have made sense at the time. Gamble shows that decisions were influenced by a desire to protect community, culture, and land, even if the government did not treat Indigenous veterans equally.

4. Consider other perspectives.

Modelled thinking: Gamble's account represents one experience, but others may have seen things differently. For example, white Canadian soldiers may have felt that they were

rewarded fairly after the war. Government officials at the time may have justified their decisions differently as well. Comparing perspectives helps us see that history is not just one single story.

5. Why does this perspective matter?

Modelled thinking: Gamble connects his past experiences to the present by arguing that reconciliation is long overdue. His perspective helps explain why issues between Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian government continue today. Understanding these experiences gives us a more complete and unbiased view of Canadian history.

Example of a strong historical perspective response:

“David Gamble’s perspective shows that Indigenous soldiers fought to protect their land and way of life rather than the Crown. His perspective also highlights the unequal treatment Indigenous veterans faced after the war compared to white soldiers. This perspective challenges the traditional narrative of the Canadian military service and helps explain why reconciliation remains as an important issue today.”

**Please refer to the visual tool for a step-by-step thinking process, which includes guiding questions that will support your historical analysis.*

Teacher note:

In this interview, students can observe and learn about the military experience of an Indigenous soldier fighting in the Second World War to serve the Canadian military. Students are expected to compare the contribution of Indigenous soldiers with how they were treated by the government after the war. This source highlights the interaction between Indigenous soldiers, white Canadian soldiers, and the Canadian government. These three groups of individuals represent three distinct historical voices in Canada during the event of WWII. Students are encouraged to identify and draw conclusions on the condition of this cooperation (e.g., positive/negative, effective/challenging, etc.). Since this source delivers an Indigenous perspective on WWII and Canada’s involvement in the war, it allows students to explore an unofficial and non-governmental point of view. Students also need to acknowledge how this individual perspective of David Gamble derives from the view of an ordinary soldier, which is a personal account of the world war. In terms of learning accommodations, teachers need to consider the learning experience of their ELL learners and students with an IEP. Some essential accommodations may include providing a copy of the transcript to students, allowing students to turn on video captions, and offering one-on-one guidance to fill in the knowledge gap of students on the background context of this source.

Section 4. Visual Accompaniment to the Primary Source

Type of visual or organizer: Graphic Organizer / Classroom Poster

Description of the tool:

Students can use this visual as a step-by-step guide to analyze primary sources by thinking like a historian. Beginning with identifying the source and moving through understanding perspective, considering the context, comparing viewpoints, and making meaning, the organizer prompts students to closely read and observe a source by answering guiding questions at each stage. The inclusion of model thinking in each section supports students in interpreting evidence and forming their own responses, helping them move beyond surface-level observations and toward deeper analysis. This visual poster scaffolds the process of questioning, interpreting, and evaluating the source, allowing students to build a more complete and critical understanding of the historical perspective being presented.

Here is a link to the visual organizer: <https://canva.link/w2fe4wpgvto603i>.

Possible structure for the organizer (helping students to interpret a source):

LEVEL 1: IDENTIFICATION - The Basics (who, what, when):

1. What type of evidence is this source? (e.g., visual, oral, written, or artifact)
2. Who is the author? Are they an expert in the field?
3. When was this source published or written? What is special about this timing?

LEVEL 2: COMPREHENSION - The Content & Structure (how):

4. What overall message did this source emphasize?
5. How was this source structured? (e.g., tone/voice, form, etc.)
6. What conclusion did this source draw, if any?

LEVEL 3: ANALYSIS - The Intent & Impact (why):

7. Who can be a potential audience for this source?
8. What is the ultimate goal of this source?

LEVEL 4: EVALUATION - Critical Evaluation (the “hidden” layer):

9. What are some possible biases from this source?
10. What is missing from this source? Any hidden voices?

LEVEL 5: CONCLUSION - Extend Your Thinking:

11. Did this source change your understanding of the event?
12. What connection(s) can you draw between this and the other sources? Any rising tension between these sources?

Pedagogical purpose:

The pedagogical purpose of this assignment is to have students understand historical perspectives through analyzing primary sources. The resource we created supports historical thinking by guiding students through a clear progression from observation to interpretation in five steps, helping them build complex understandings of a source. Beginning with identification, students focus on concrete details (who, what, when), which grounds their thinking in evidence. The structure then brings them toward comprehension and analysis, prompting students to consider how the source is constructed and why it was created, which encourages attention to perspective, audience, and purpose. The scaffold approach to teaching allows for cognitive thinking development by breaking down the thinking process into manageable steps, enabling students to move beyond surface-level observations toward more sophisticated, evidence-based interpretations.

Section 5. Scholarly Rationale for Pedagogical Design

Citations:

Allender, T., Clark, A., & Parkes, R. (Eds.). (2012). *Historical thinking for history teachers: A new approach to engaging students and developing historical consciousness*. Routledge.

Seixas, P., Morton, T., Colyer, J., & Fornazzari, S. (2013). *The big six : historical thinking concepts*. Nelson Education.

Seixas, P., & Peck, C. (2004). Teaching historical thinking. In A. Sears & I. Wright (Eds.), *Challenges and Prospects for Canadian Social Studies* (pp. 109-117). Vancouver: Pacific Educational Press.

Scholarly rationale:

This teaching tool is grounded in research on historical thinking and disciplinary literacy, which emphasizes that students learn history most effectively through interpretive and analytical engagement rather than memorization of facts. The focus on Historical Perspectives reflects the work of Peter Seixas, who argues that understanding the past requires recognizing that people in different times held different values, beliefs, and experiences (Seixas et al., 2013). He states that “people in the past not only lived in different circumstances but also experienced and interpreted the world through different belief systems,” and students often fall into the error of “presentism,” assuming people in the past thought the same way they do (Seixas & Peck, 2004, p. 113).

This approach is also supported by Sam Wineburg's conception of historical thinking as an "unnatural act," in which learners must actively suspend presentist assumptions and instead situate evidence within its historical context (Allender et al., 2012, p. 28). Wineburg emphasizes that historical understanding is not intuitive but developed through guided practice in sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration. Accordingly, this resource intentionally provides multiple, diverse primary sources to encourage students to engage in disciplinary thinking practices such as sourcing and contextual interpretation.

Overall, this teaching tool reflects a commitment to evidence-based history education, where students are supported in developing historical literacy through engagement with authentic sources and structured opportunities for interpretation. By grounding instructional choices in established scholarship, this rationale demonstrates that the design of the following tool is guided by informed professional judgment and the principle of warranted assertibility, rather than intuition alone.

5 STEPS TO THINKING LIKE A HISTORIAN: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Group Members: Julia DiPaolo, Emily Wessman, Jenny Liu



PRIMARY SOURCE CONTEXT

This source is an oral history interview with David Gamble, an Indigenous veteran. He explains why many Indigenous men chose to serve, while also describing the discrimination they faced after returning home.

As you engage with this source, **consider how his experiences compare to the typical stories told about Canadian soldiers** in World War Two. Think about whose voices are included in history—and whose are missing.

2 | FOCUS ON PERSPECTIVES

Ask: What does this person believe or value?

- What message are they communicating?
- What seems important to them?



Model thinking:

"He explains that Indigenous soldiers fought to protect their land and way of life, not just for the Crown."

1 | IDENTIFICATION

Ask: Who created this? What is it?

- Who is the speaker/author?
- What type of source is this?
- When/where was it created?

Model thinking:

"David Gamble is an Indigenous veteran sharing his experiences. His identity will shape how he understands war and Canada."



David Gamble | Clip

Canadian navy veteran David Gamble describes how the Canadian government has treated Indigenous veterans, and he explains why Indigenous people have fought for Canada even when Canada hasn't treated them fairly.

Canadian War Museum

3 | CONSIDER CONTEXT & EXPERIENCES

(Why do they think this way?)

Ask: What shaped this perspective?

- What historical events or conditions matter?
- What experiences influenced their view?

Model thinking:

"Unequal treatment after the war helps explain why his perspective includes both pride and frustration."



4 | CRITICAL EVALUATION (THE "HIDDEN" LAYER)

Ask: Who might see this differently?

- What would another group say?
- Whose voices are missing?



Model thinking:

"A white Canadian soldier might describe being rewarded after the war, which is very different from Gamble's experience."

5 | WHY DOES THIS PERSPECTIVE MATTER?

Ask: Why does this perspective matter?

- What made sense at the time?
- What does this help us understand today?



Model thinking:

"This perspective helps explain why reconciliation is still an important issue today."

References

- Allender, T., Clark, A., & Parkes, R. (Eds.). (2012). *Historical thinking for history teachers: A new approach to engaging students and developing historical consciousness*. Routledge.
- Bell, B. (2017, February 10). *Gay WW2 soldier's love letters reveal hidden history*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-38932955>.
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- Seixas, P., Morton, T., Colyer, J., & Fornazzari, S. (2013). *The big six : historical thinking concepts*. Nelson Education.
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