

History toolkit

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History is a record or account of past events, people, places and ideas. It shows us patterns in human behaviour throughout different civilisations, empires, nations and peoples. Sometimes broad patterns repeat, but there are always new circumstances. Knowing about history helps us to understand the present and prepare for the future.

OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1A** What is history?
- 1B** What skills do historians need?
- 1C** How do historians use sources to find out what happened in the past?

GLOSSARY

ab urbe condita Latin for 'From the [time of the] founding of the City [of Rome]'

AD/CE *anno Domini* (after the birth of Christ)/of the Common Era

ancient history the period from when humans began to produce written records

archaeologists professional workers who recover and analyse material remains such as artefacts

BC/BCE before Christ/before the Common Era

BP before the present

chronology the order (sequence) of events

civilisation when large groups of people live together in complex and well-developed ways

corroborating verifying information by searching a range of sources

deciphered decoded or translated

evaluate (history) to judge the accuracy or reliability of a source

evidence primary and secondary sources

historians professional workers who research and write about the past

interpretations the views of people after the period of study (often found in secondary sources)

perspectives (history) the views of people in the period of study (often found in primary sources)

prehistory the time before human civilisations

primary source a document or item created in the period of study

secondary source a document or item created well after the period of study

1.0.1 A marine archaeologist holding an amphora (two-handled pottery jar), collected from the underwater excavation of the harbour at Caesarea Maritima, Israel. This ancient harbour was commissioned by King Herod the Great in 21 BC (BCE).

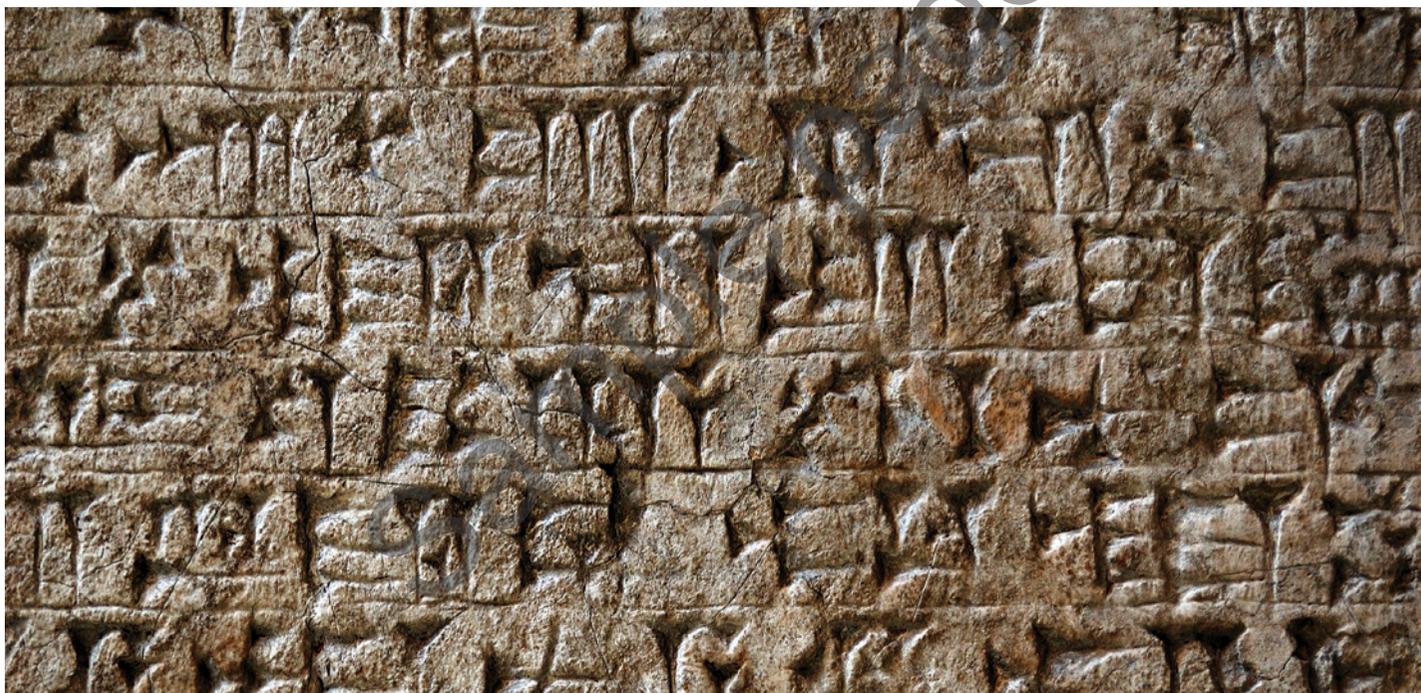
1.1 What is history?

Prehistory and ancient history

The period before civilisation is called **prehistory**. **Ancient history** began when humans started to produce written records. The earliest written records are usually simple lists of what people owed other people for goods. Ancient history began around 3500 BC. The period corresponds with the rise of **civilisations**, where large groups of people lived together in complex and well-developed ways. Ancient civilisations contained some of the earliest **evidence** of religion, commerce, culture, law and social development. The first civilisations were those of Sumer, Egypt and India. However, there is evidence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies dating back over 60 000 years.

Why study history?

History helps to explain why things are the way they are today: for example, why people in Australia drive on the left-hand side of the road, or why most Argentines speak Spanish. A good understanding of history is also useful when planning for the future because it shows common patterns of human behaviour and can help people avoid problems. Studying history teaches you many skills that you may need in other subjects and in the workplace, such as how to collect data and evidence, how to analyse that evidence, how to construct an argument, and how to communicate your findings to others. Better still, learning about the way people lived in the past is a form of time travel. It is fun to find out about the key moments of human drama that have shaped our world.



1.1.1 An inscription carved in stone showing cuneiform writing. Thousands of carvings and clay tablets provide us with information about almost every aspect of life in Sumer.

Activities

Remembering and understanding

- 1 Describe the difference between prehistory and history.
- 2 List three skills that can be gained by studying history.

Applying and analysing

- 3 Consider the types of tools that were needed to carve the cuneiform writing in the stone tablet (see Source 1.1.1). Make a list of tools that the ancient scribes might have used and compare them with the tools you need to write a letter today.

1.2 Introducing historical sources

Historians and **archaeologists** construct accounts of what has happened in the past from the ‘pieces of the puzzle’ that are available from source material. Source material can be classified as either primary or secondary.

Primary sources

Primary sources are sources that were created at or around the time being studied. There are three main types of primary source material: written, spoken and preserved.

Written



for example: inscription, map, letter, diary, photo, artwork

Spoken



for example: oral history, audio recording, film or video interview

Preserved



for example: temple, tomb, axe, canopic jar

1.2.1 Primary sources

Finding primary source material can be difficult. Some primary sources have been destroyed. Often, using primary source material is difficult as well. Obviously, not being able to read Ancient Greek will be a problem if your source is written in ancient Greek. Even when the primary source is in your own language there can still be obstacles. For example, in today’s usage a ‘craze’ may be the latest fashion, but



1.2.2 An artefact such as this glass perfume pot from ancient Greece is a primary source

it used to mean a crack in the glaze of pottery a hundred years ago.

Artworks can be valuable primary sources. They not only tell us about artistic techniques and materials, but also about what people thought, hoped for and feared. For instance, images of the Christian Heaven produced in Europe during the Middle Ages often show rich pastures and the presence of saints and cherubs (a type of angel often depicted as a winged child). When an understanding of these images is combined with an understanding of other artefacts that have survived (such as churches and religious sculptures), historians are able to produce comprehensive accounts of religious life in medieval Europe.



1.2.3 A written source from ancient Rome, such as this inscription of a letter (in Greek) from the Roman governor of Achaëa to the Greek city of Dyme, is a primary source. This inscription is in the Fitzwilliam Museum at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom.

Did you know?

First-hand accounts of life in ancient Rome

Valuable primary sources about ancient Rome are found in the works of Marcus Cicero (106–43 BC), a Roman statesman, lawyer, philosopher and orator. He wrote fourteen books, fifty-eight speeches and 800 letters.

Secondary sources

Secondary sources were created well after the time being studied. Often these are created by historians. However, they can also be created by other people who represent the period, for example, a historian, novelist or a filmmaker.

Historian



for example: Mary Beard (Roman Empire), Eric Hobsbawm (revolutions and empires), Bruce Pascoe (Aboriginal agriculture)

Novelist



for example: Leo Tolstoy (*War and Peace*), Charles Dickens (*Great Expectations*), Kate Grenville (*The Secret River*)

Filmmaker



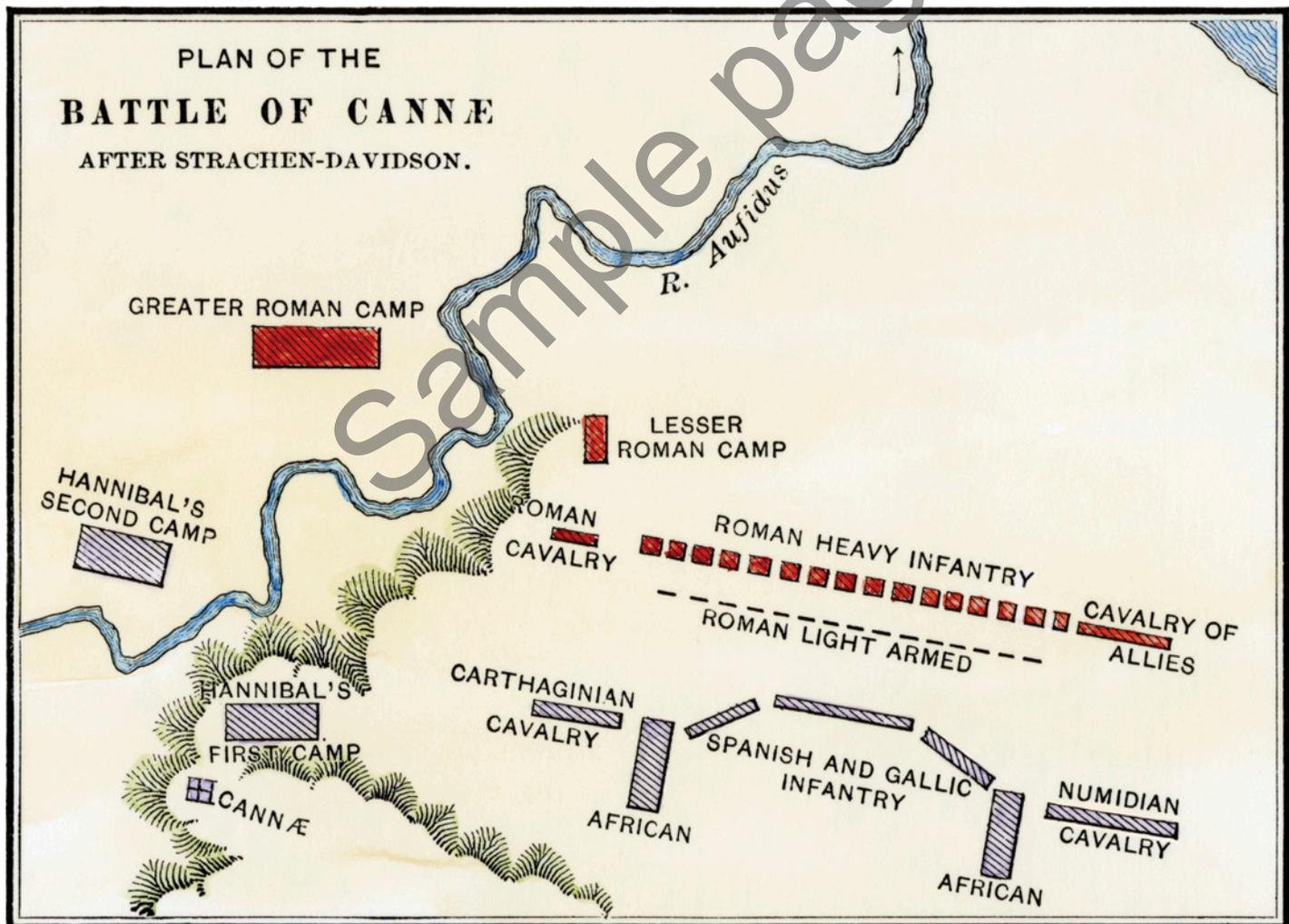
for example: Christopher Nolan (*Dunkirk*), Sofia Coppola (*Marie Antoinette*), Ridley Scott (*Gladiator*)

When secondary sources are produced by historians, they are constructed from primary sources and the work of other historians. These secondary sources recount events of the past. They also generalise, analyse, interpret and evaluate these events in the light of common or popular viewpoints associated with their own period.

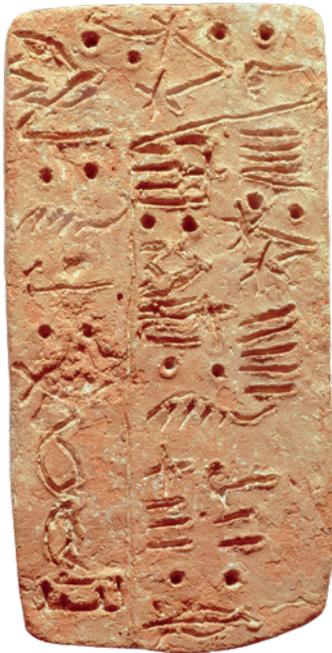
Interpreting sources

How do we make sense of, or interpret, source material? Sometimes this is difficult, especially if we don't understand the language the source is written in. For example, 'Linear A' is a form of writing used by the Minoans which has not been **deciphered** (translated or decoded) in modern times. Sometimes we need further information before correctly interpreting a source, such as finding out that *ab urbe condita* means 'From the [time of the] Founding of the City [of Rome]'.

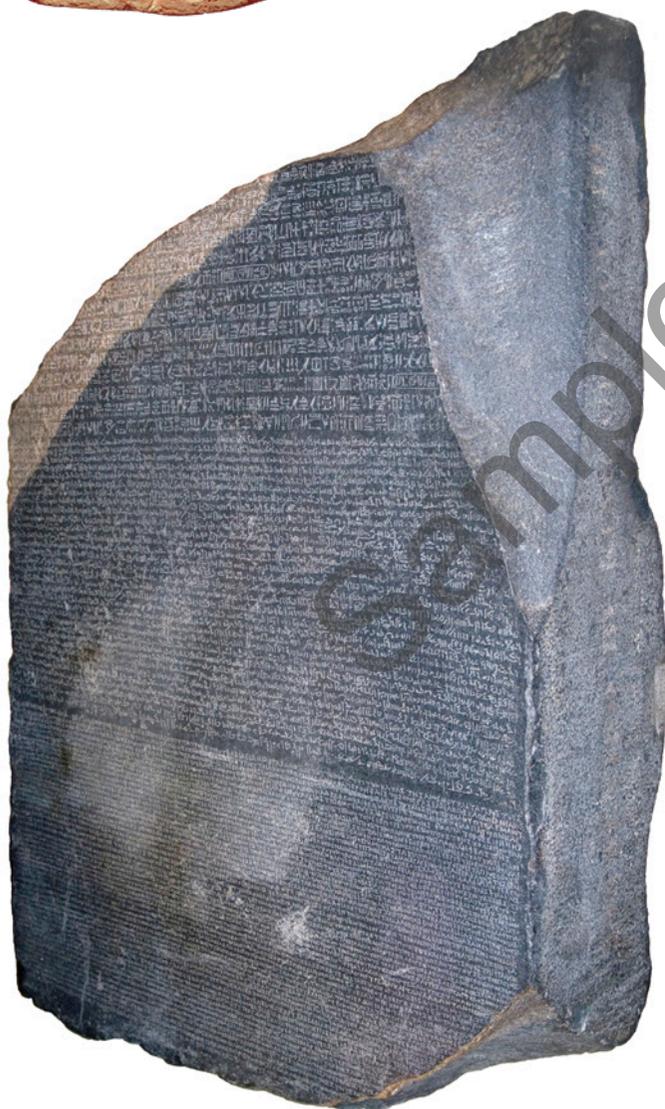
1.2.4 Secondary sources



1.2.5 This map is a secondary source. It deals with the Battle of Cannae, in which Hannibal (a famous general from Carthage) defeated the Romans during the Second Punic War in 216 bc.



1.2.6 An example of Linear A script, from the Minoan palace at Knossos, Crete, held by the Heraklion Museum in Greece



1.2.7 At its tallest point, the Rosetta Stone is 1.44 metres high. It weighs approximately 760 kilograms and is permanently displayed in the British Museum.

One example of interpreting a difficult source was the Rosetta Stone. Nearly 200 years ago, historians were able to develop a more accurate account of ancient Egyptian history by ‘cracking the code’ of the Rosetta Stone. The stone was created in 196 BC. It was a decree (an announcement) made by the then ruler of Egypt, Ptolemy V. The decree was written on the stone in three languages: the known Ancient Greek and Egyptian Demotic, and the unknown ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. The Rosetta Stone was discovered in 1799 AD, but was not fully deciphered until 1822, by Jean-François Champollion. The hieroglyphs were then able to be known.

Activities

Remembering and understanding

- 1 Draw two tables of two columns with six to eight rows each.
 - a In the first table, head the columns ‘Primary source’ and ‘Example’.
 - b In the second table, head the columns ‘Secondary source’ and ‘Example’.
 - c Fill in both tables using the information in this unit.
 - d Add to each table two or three of your own examples of each type of source.

Applying and analysing

- 2 Write a 150-word factual description of the Rosetta Stone. Note the main reason why the preservation and translation of this primary source was significant for our understanding of the past.

Historical skills

- 3 What hypothesis (which means to come up with a theory based on the available evidence) could you make about ancient Greek society from examining the perfume pot in Source 1.2.2?
- 4 How does the map in Source 1.2.5 help you to understand why Hannibal won the Battle of Cannae?
- 5 Imagine that you are the archaeologist who has uncovered the Rosetta Stone. What would have excited you and other historians as soon as you saw it?

1.3 Historical thinking

Why think historically?

Historical thinking helps us to sort and make sense of historical information. With so many events in the past, it is important for us to know:

- when an event occurred
- how we know about the event
- how the event changed things
- why the event occurred
- why we should care about the event now.

Historical thinking allows us to find as much ‘proof’ as possible so that we can understand how people lived in the past. This enables us to paint a picture in our minds of what the experiences of ancient people were and what their lives can teach us today.

Thinking like a historian helps us to develop twenty-first century skills. These include critical thinking, creativity, ethical understanding and knowledge of different cultures. Drawing on evidence and **corroborating** it (checking that it is valid and accurate against other sources) is a vital skill. In addition, corroborating evidence from sources and using it to construct an argument is an ability that is necessary in many professions.



1.3.1 Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issuing an apology to Australia's Stolen Generations in Melbourne's Federation Square on 13 February 2008. This was a highly significant event in Australia's history. The Stolen Generations were large groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families by Australian federal and state government agencies and church missions. This occurred for about 100 years from 1869.

Historical thinking concepts

The discipline of history requires five specific ways of thinking. The concepts involved in historical thinking are below.

- 1 *Chronology*: establishing when and in what order events occurred.
- 2 *Using sources as evidence*: analysing primary and secondary sources and using them to understand what happened in the past.

- 3 *Continuity and change*: evaluating how much a society changed or stayed the same over time.
- 4 *Cause and effect*: identifying how some events contributed to or directly caused other events.
- 5 *Historical significance*: understanding the importance of an object, person or event, at the time or later.

To see how these historical thinking concepts are applied to a real-life event, consider the first meeting between Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, and Mark Antony, Roman general, in Tarsus in 41 BC (see Source 1.3.2).



Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, meets Mark Antony, Roman general, in 41 BC

1.3.2 Historical thinking concepts



Chronology

When did it happen?
What happened before and after?



Sources as evidence

What do ancient sources say about it?
Do all sources agree on what happened?



Continuity and change

How did it change things?
What stayed the same?



Cause and effect

What caused them to meet?
What were the consequences of the meeting?



Historical significance

How many people were affected by it?
Why do people still talk about it?

Activities

Remembering and understanding

- 1 What does 'corroborating' mean in relation to history sources?

Historical skills

- 2 Summarise the five main historical thinking concepts in your own words.

1.4 Chronology

The **chronology**, or order, of events is important to an understanding of the complexities of the past. Until recently, the most common way of dating events in Australia and the Western world was to use **BC** and **AD**. The term 'BC' is an abbreviation for 'before Christ'; the term 'AD' is an abbreviation for *anno Domini*, which is Latin for 'in the year of the Lord'. These terms show a Christian perspective that was traditional among early modern historians. Some people felt that there should be more neutral terms when we refer to dates, so a new system was devised to refer to the same years: **BCE**, or 'before the Common Era', and **CE**, or 'of the Common Era'. The use of either system is acceptable. Occasionally, the term **BP**, or 'before present', is used to describe events that occurred in the past. Since the 'present' is always changing, this time scale can be confusing so the BP way of dating events is not common.

A timeline is a visual representation of time. Events are placed on a timeline in chronological order. That is, they are placed in the order of when they occurred, from the earliest to the most recent. Dates that are before 1 AD are recorded in descending order, counting down towards an imaginary 'year zero'. Dates from AD are recorded in ascending order from 1 AD.

Did you know?

You may not have been born when you think you were

The use of **BCE** and **CE** in place of **BC** and **AD** is sometimes considered an improvement to dating. This is not just because these terms are more inclusive of non-Christians, but also because historians now believe that Jesus Christ was born in about 3 or 4 BC!

Activities

Remembering and understanding

- 1 Why can using the **BP** dating system be a problem?

Applying and analysing

- 2 Write a paragraph explaining why some historians may choose to use the designations **BCE** and **CE** instead of **BC** and **AD**.

Historical skills

- 3 Write down, or sketch, three ideas for how you might format a timeline in a visually interesting way.



31 BC – 476 AD
Roman Empire

1.4.1 A sample annotated timeline for the period of the Roman Empire

1.5 Historical sources as evidence

Historians know about the past by working with primary and secondary sources. They collect evidence from as many sources as possible so that they can confirm what really happened. If historians only used a single source, they might be influenced by one opinion or perspective. Unfortunately, when studying ancient civilisations, we sometimes must rely on only one or two sources because there are no others available. Our understanding of an event can also change if new sources are discovered.

Good historians *ask questions* and *listen* to a source before they assume they understand it. They **evaluate** the source to assess how accurate and useful it is. One way of doing this is to corroborate the information in the source by finding other sources that agree with it or present similar information. As a general rule, if you find similar information in three trustworthy sources, you can consider the evidence fairly reliable.

1.5.1 Piltdown Man was a questionable source of evidence. Piltdown Man artefacts are exhibited at the Natural History Museum, London, UK. The 'discovery' was made by Charles Dawson in 1912 AD. In 1949, Dr Arthur Smith Woodward confirmed that Piltdown Man was the missing link between apes and humans. However, in 1953, tests on the remains cast doubt on this finding. Some researchers went so far as to brand the remains as fake. It was not until 2003 that two former British Museum employees were named as the probable hoaxers. They had a grudge against Dr Smith Woodward, who was their boss. It was established that the jawbone came from an orangutan.



Type and provenance

- Is it primary or secondary?
- When and why was it created?
- Who created it?

Content

- What is it saying or communicating?
- How does it convey its message? (For example, language, tone, use of symbols?)

Source

Context

- What was happening at the time?
- How might this have influenced the source's creator?

Evaluation

- How useful and reliable is it?
- Is it corroborated by other sources?

1.5.2 Asking questions of a source

Historical perspectives and interpretations

Historical sources often convey historical **perspectives** or **interpretations**. This is important to consider when you look at sources as evidence. In the context of studying history, perspectives refer to the views of people who were participants in the event; they are generally found in primary sources. Interpretations refer to the views of people commenting after the event; they are generally found in secondary sources. For example:

THE DISCOVERY OF TUTANKHAMEN'S TOMB



PERSPECTIVES



Howard Carter, archaeologist, 1922:

It was clear the place was a Pharaoh's tomb ... filled with magnificent equipment equal only to the wealth and splendour of the New Empire ... We were astonished by the beauty and refinement of the art displayed by the objects surpassing all we could have imagined.

INTERPRETATIONS



Dan Cruickshank, historian, 2004:

[Carter found] the sarcophagus of Tutankhamen with all the coffins inside it ... This was the first Royal tomb from ancient Egypt ever to be found intact, virtually untouched by tomb robbers. Carter must have been thrilled indeed.

1.5.3 Historical perspectives and interpretations

Activities

Remembering and understanding

- 1 Why is it important for historians to evaluate the accuracy and usefulness of a source whenever possible?

Applying and analysing

- 2 Create a poster that shows how you might evaluate and corroborate a source such as a letter home from a soldier during World War I. Use words and images.

Historical skills

- 3 Decide which of the following are historical perspectives and which are interpretations.
 - a Lenin gives a speech in 1917 arguing for revolution in Russia.
 - b A newspaper writes an editorial opposing Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1917.
 - c A historian writes a sympathetic account of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1935.
 - d A historian writes a negative account of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1935.

1.6 Continuity and change

History often focuses on moments of dramatic change. For example, the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage caused great social upheaval. However, aspects of political life in Rome stayed the same. For instance, an oligarchy (elite group) of nobles continued to control decision making in the Senate. This is an example of continuity.

Historians try to judge how much an event changed things. They often do this by comparing a society before and after a significant event.

Another way to assess continuity and change is by comparing one location at two points in time. This is shown below in Source 1.6.1.



1.6.1 Continuity and change in Chinatown, Melbourne

Activities

Remembering and understanding

- a** Explain what historians mean by moments of change and continuity.

b Why might historians tend to focus on moments of change rather than continuity?

Applying and analysing

- Using Source 1.6.1, find continuities and changes in Chinatown between 1867 and 2009.

1.7 Cause and effect



1.7.1 One consequence of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001 was a change in US foreign policy. The new policy included a 'war on terror', so the US president at that time, George W. Bush, ordered the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.

A key part of historical thinking is working out the causes and consequences (or effects) of past events. Historians must piece together what happened to see how one event led to another. However, it is important to remember that one event might occur before another without necessarily causing it. Historians often must work out whether consequences were intentional or unintentional. We should take care in the assumptions that we make because we

cannot know why people in the past made the choices they did. The only way we can know is if we have solid evidence about their decisions.

To see how a historian might identify the direct (short term) or indirect (long term) causes and effects of an event, consider the example provided in Source 1.7.3. This example is about the causes and effects of the rise of Alexander the Great, who was a ruler of ancient Macedonia in the fourth century BC.



1.7.2 US forces after their invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001

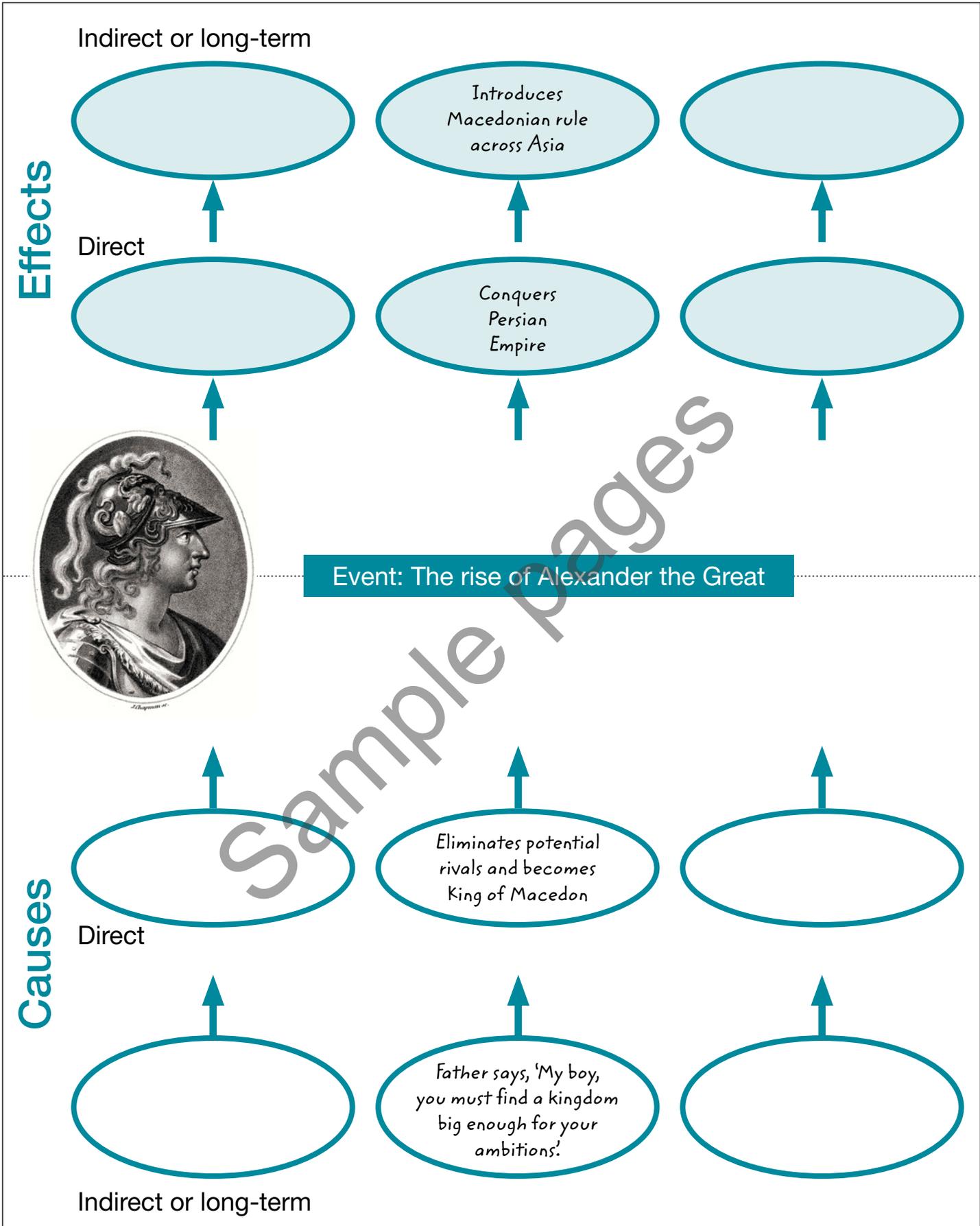
Activities

Remembering and understanding

- 1 What three aspects do historians need to be aware of when they are evaluating cause and effect?

Applying and analysing

- 2 Copy the cause and effect template into your exercise book and, working in pairs or small groups, complete the following activities.
 - a Find a direct and an indirect cause of Britain colonising Australia. Consider the immediate or short-term problems that the British believed a colony in Australia might solve, as well as the longer-term causes of these problems.
 - b Find a direct and an indirect effect or consequence of the British colonisation of Australia.



1.7.3 Cause and effect

1.8 Historical significance



1.8.1 The film *Gladiator* explores the Roman Empire, which is a historically significant period

Historians spend a lot of time assessing historical significance. This means working out why something mattered at the time and why it matters now. They sometimes refer to significant events as ‘turning points’.

When deciding the extent to which an event or person was significant, many historians consider three things:

- 1 Quantity: How many lives were affected?
- 2 Profundity: How deeply were people affected?
- 3 Durability: How long were people affected?

Using this approach, one would say that World War I was more historically significant than Australian Federation, even though both were significant.

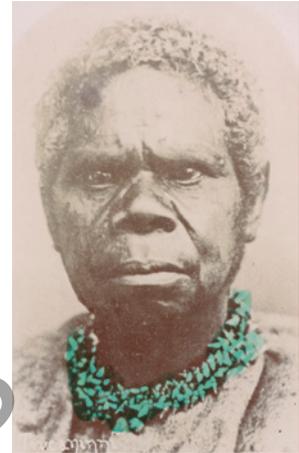
People sometimes disagree about an event’s significance. For example, some Australians consider 26 January 1788 as significant for marking the beginning of Australia as a successful democratic country. Others believe it is significant because it marks ‘Invasion Day’. As citizens, we should find out as much as we can about such events so that we can contribute in an informed way to public debates.

Did you know?

A significant Tasmanian

Truganini was a Nuenonne woman born on Bruny Island, Van Diemen’s Land (now Tasmania) in c. 1812 AD. Her deep knowledge of Aboriginal languages and customs was recorded in detail by Englishman George Augustus Robinson, who later became Protector of Aborigines. Truganini assisted Robison to find other Aboriginal Tasmanians for placement in his religious missions. She and others moved to

Robinson’s Flinders Island mission in 1835, where many people perished from poor nutrition and disease. After several relocations, including a trip to mainland Australia, Truganini died in Hobart in 1876. Her skeleton was exhumed 2 years later and placed on display in museums for many decades. On 30 April 1976, almost a hundred years after her death, Truganini’s ashes were finally laid to rest near her birthplace on Bruny Island. The removal and display of ancestors’ human remains has caused great distress for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



1.8.2 Portrait of Truganini, a hand-coloured photograph taken by Charles Alfred Woolley in 1866 AD, in the National Library of Australia

Activities

Remembering and understanding

- 1 What are historical turning points?

Applying and analysing

- 2 Research and identify a historical event that had high significance in terms of quantity, profundity and durability.

- 3 Why has it been important to return the remains of Truganini and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to their descendants?

Historical skills

- 4 In pairs, research the building of the pyramids of Giza and the building of the Great Wall of China. Compare the historical significance of the two projects.

1.9 The contribution of archaeology

Historians rely on archaeological findings when they study ancient civilisations. Archaeologists uncover most of this material evidence of ancient societies, which is usually in the form of human remains, tools and pottery.

Sometimes sites of archaeological interest are identified by accident such as during a construction project, or when something unexpected shows up in an aerial photograph. Often technologies are used to confirm whether it is worth excavating the site; for example, ground-penetrating radar, and infra-red and thermal imaging equipment. These sophisticated technologies are used because excavation work is expensive, and often requires a lot of time and effort.



1.9.1 Excavations at the Roman Forum in Rome. The site is marked out in a grid with string, a technique commonly used to assist untrained or inexperienced diggers and to ensure accurate record keeping.

Ancient Troy

Ancient Troy, on the coast of the Aegean Sea in present-day Turkey, was discovered by the archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann. It was excavated in four stages between 1871 and 1890. Ancient Troy was identified in Homer's *Iliad* as the city of King Priam.

Nine different cities were discovered in the same location (each with a different stratum, or layer of earth). The earliest Troy dates from between about 3000 and 2600 BC; the most recent, from about 334 BC to the fifth century AD.

Schliemann smuggled the artefacts he found out of Turkey to Berlin, Germany. They disappeared after World War II and were rediscovered in Moscow, Russia, in 1993. This treasure included gold jewellery (earrings, hair rings, beads and pendants) and a gold sauce boat and flask.



1.9.2 A relief of a horse and rider. This artefact belongs to the eighth stratum of Troy (785–700 BC); it is currently displayed at the Çanakkale Museum in Turkey.

Activities

Remembering and understanding

- 1 Why does the study of ancient civilisations often rely on archaeology?

Applying and analysing

- 2 Explain why ancient artefacts can be difficult to trace and recover.

Evaluating and creating

- 3 Create a time capsule of your life and culture that could be used by historians or archaeologists in the future to understand the life you live today. Include five to ten items that give as much information as possible about your life and society. Attach a note to each item explaining its meaning and importance to you.

Historical skills

- 4 Examine Source 1.9.1.
 - a List all the 'tools of the archaeologist' that you see in this photograph.
 - b Do the diggers look trained or untrained? What evidence do you have to make this judgement?
 - c What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of trained and untrained diggers on an excavation site?