

# Steps to Successful Heritage Fair Projects

(Adapted from BC Heritage Fairs)

1. Definitions
2. Prompts for Inquiries Based on Historical Thinking
3. Historical Thinking Routines
4. Heritage Fairs Research Organizer (BLM)
5. Reflection on Process (BLM)

## 1. Definitions: What do we mean when we talk about...?

### Inquiry

Inquiry requires that students formulate and clarify questions, investigate problems, analyze relevant information, and develop rational conclusions supported by evidence.

An inquiry usually begins with (1) creating an inquiry question or questions (2) gathering evidence to answer that question (s) (3) assessing and interpreting ideas from a range of resources, and formulating reasoned opinions. Step 3 may be repeated as long as time permits and interest continues. For longer inquiries students may (4) present their new understanding to others and (5) reflect on the process.

The sequence may vary. For example, the inquiry could begin with a question or an initial hypothesis before researching evidence. Reflection isn't really a separate stage as it should take place throughout the inquiry, as well as at the end.

Whether it is referred to as an inquiry, essential, driving, focus, or just plain **big** question, almost all teacher guides on inquiry and project-based learning insist that students start with a question. Writers on teaching historical thinking also emphasize the importance of the right questions in order to actively engage the past. The question should guide students to understand some aspect of historical thinking.

The inquiry question provides purpose and direction to activities that might otherwise seem disconnected. Once students have a good question, they need to reflect on it frequently as they research and certainly before they begin to prepare their Heritage Fair presentation.

A teacher may pose a broad inquiry question and ask students to develop and

investigate more focused questions and pool their conclusions. For a theme on war and peace Ted Meldrum of Mount Douglas Secondary suggests the inquiries "Why do people go to war?" or "What are the common traits in conflicts?" Students study different conflicts, share their answers and draw conclusions.

## **Inquiry-Based, Project-based learning**

*Students investigate meaningful questions that require them to gather evidence and think critically.*

Larmer and Mergendollar in an article in *Educational Leadership*<sup>1</sup> argue that it is the depth of student learning, not the form of the final product that distinguishes a high quality project. They identify seven essentials for meaningful projects:

- a need to know – an entry point that engages interest and initiates questioning;
- a driving question (see the explanation of inquiry question above);
- student voice and choice;
- 21<sup>st</sup> century skills – the authors describe these as collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and the use of technology;
- inquiry and innovation;
- feedback and revision;
- a publicly presented product.

## **Historical Thinking**

*Histories are the stories we tell about the past. Historical thinking is the creative process that historians go through to interpret the evidence of the past and generate these stories<sup>2</sup>.*

From textbooks to history web sites, we usually see the end product of a historian's thinking, not the steps in his or her inquiry. In general, teachers have been content to tell these stories about the past and to have students tell them back in essays or projects. Historical thinking, however, focuses on the process.

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[1 Available on-line at](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/sept10/vol68/num01/Seven_Essentials_for_Project-Based_Learning.aspx)

[http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational\\_leadership/sept10/vol68/num01/Seven\\_Essentials\\_for\\_Project-Based\\_Learning.aspx.](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/sept10/vol68/num01/Seven_Essentials_for_Project-Based_Learning.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> Seixas, P. and Morton, T. *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts*. (2013) Toronto: Nelson, 2.

## ***Historical Thinking Concepts***

Six historical thinking concepts called “Benchmarks of Historical Thinking” have been identified by Peter Seixas through his work at the University of British Columbia’s Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness. These six concepts were designed to help students think more deeply about the past and how it can be linked to the present. Teachers can use these Historical Thinking Concepts to extend and deepen the learning of an SCO. The concept is best achieved when embedded within a learning activity. The six concepts include:

**1. Historical Significance** – looks at why an event, person, or fact from the past is important. (E.g., what is the significance of a particular person in history? What would have happened if this person had not existed? Compare two places and develop arguments on which place had a greater significance.)

**2. Evidence** – looks at primary and secondary sources of information. (E.g., what do primary documents tell about living in a particular time period?)

**3. Continuity and Change** – considers what has changed with time and what has remained the same. (E.g., what cultural traditions have remained the same and what traditions have been lost over time?) Includes chronology and periodization, which are two different ways to organize time and which help students to understand that events happen between marks on a timeline.

**4. Cause and Consequence** – examines why an event unfolded in a particular manner and investigates the possibility of a number of causes. (There is almost always more than one cause for an event.) Explain that causes are not always obvious and can be varied and interwoven. (E.g., how has the exchange of

technologies over time changed the traditions of a culture?)

**5. Historical Perspective** – any historic event involves people who may have held different perspectives on an event ( e.g. How can a place be found or *discovered* if people already live in the location?) Perspective taking is about trying to understand a person’s perspective of an event as it happened.

**6. Moral Dimension** – assists in making ethical judgments about past events after objective study. (We strive to learn from the past in an effort to understand how events occurred and how they continue to influence our lives.) Moral judgment, within a historical context, is a difficult concept as it requires a suspension in present-day understandings/concepts. (e.g., the Canadian government issuing a formal apology in 2006 to the Chinese Canadian community for the use of a head tax and the exclusion of Chinese immigrants to Canada.)

Source: Seixas, Peter. *Benchmarks of Historical Thinking: A Framework for Assessment in Canada*. Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness. UBC (2006)

## **Heritage Fair**

*A heritage fair is a showcase of history projects on some aspect of Canadian history created by students from grades 4 to 9.*

Students choose a topic ranging from family to national history, research it and present their findings in a medium of their choice to classmates, parents and others at a school fair. After the school fairs, some students are invited to take part in a Provincial Fair. At these fairs, students are interviewed by judges and take part in engaging activities related to heritage and history.

All of the elements of meaningful projects, inquiries, and historical thinking are encouraged in a Heritage Fair.

## **Appendix 2: Prompts for Inquiry Questions Based on Historical Thinking**

If you want to focus on a particular concept in historical thinking, here are some prompts to help create inquiry questions:

*Historical Significance:*

Why is X (person, event, development) important?

How is X connected to us today?

Why should we care about X?

*Evidence:*

What can we learn from X (source or trace from the past)?

What is the story behind this X?

What story should we believe (where there are two or more competing accounts)?

What kind of a person was he or she (based on evidence)?

*Continuity and Change:*

What kind of a change was X?

What changed and what stayed the same at this time?

Was this event a turning point?

*Cause and Consequence:*

Why did X happen?

How did X make a difference?

What helped/hindered X from making a difference?

What would explain X?

What happened to X?

How has X changed our lives?

*Historical Perspective:*

What were X (group of people) thinking?

What might explain X (an action or belief) that seems so strange?

Why might X (person or group) have not really understood what Y (person or group) was doing/believed in?

What do you think made people fight/refuse to fight or feel ashamed/feel proud about these events?

*Ethical Dimension:*

How should we remember X?

How does the context of the time explain X (actions or beliefs)?

What lessons, if any, can we learn from X?

Are we condemned to repeat the past? Or could we learn something from X?

### **Appendix 3: Historical Thinking Routines**

All classrooms have routines such as putting your name on the paper or using a topic sentence. Below are routines to promote students' historical thinking.

Each routine:

- targets specific types of thinking
- consists of only a few steps
- is easy to learn and teach
- needs to be used over and over again<sup>3</sup>

Teach your students only as many routines as they can handle.

#### **1. Generating Questions:**

1. Brainstorm a list of at least 12 questions about the topic or source. Use these question-starts to help you think of interesting questions:

*Why should we remember...?*

*What kind of a change was...?*

*What could we learn from...?*

*How does this explain...?*

*What difference did... make?*

*How is this connected to...?*

*What might be the reasons...?*

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<sup>3</sup> Based on the ideas of the Visible Thinking Project,

[http://pzweb.harvard.edu/vt/VisibleThinking\\_html\\_files/VisibleThinking1.html](http://pzweb.harvard.edu/vt/VisibleThinking_html_files/VisibleThinking1.html).

2. Review the brainstormed list and star the questions that seem most interesting. Then, select one or more of the starred questions to discuss with a partner.
3. Reflect: How do you know you have a good question? Would it make a good Heritage Fairs project? What possible answer do you have to your question? Where could you go to learn more and test your answer?

### **2. Deciding on Relevance** (Best if combined with teaching students how to skim read)

1. Skim the source. Decide if the information in this source...
  - a. clearly helps answer your inquiry question (directly relevant)?
  - b. gives useful background (generally relevant)? or
  - c. is not relevant?
2. If the information is relevant, go back to look at it more thoroughly and put a star next to generally relevant information and two stars next to information that is directly relevant.

### **3. Connecting New Ideas to Prior Knowledge**

1. How does the information or ideas from this source support what you already know?
2. In what ways does the information extend your thinking in new ways?
3. In what ways does the information challenge your thinking?
4. What questions do you have now?

### **4. Making Inferences**

Teach students the difference between face value interpretation of a source and inferences. Once students understand what an inference is, Marzano suggests four questions to deepen student's understanding<sup>4</sup>:

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<sup>4</sup> Marzano, R. (2010). Teaching inference. *Educational Leadership*, 67(7), 80-01. Available online at <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr10/vol67/num07/Teaching-Inference.aspx>.

1. What is my inference?

*This question helps students become aware when they have made an inference beyond clear face value information.*

2. What information did I use to make this inference?

*It's important for students to understand the various types of context they use to make inferences. This may include information presented in the source or it may be background knowledge.*

3. How accurate was my thinking?

*Once students have identified the premises on which they've based their inferences, they can engage in the most powerful part of the process — examining the validity of their thinking.*

4. Do I need to change my thinking?

*The final step in the process is for students to consider possible changes in their thinking. The point here is not to invalidate students' original inferences, but rather to help them develop the habit of continually updating their thinking as they gather new information.*

## **5. Interpreting .**

1. What's going on? (or What is your answer so far to your inquiry question?)

2. What makes you say that?

The Visible Thinking Project calls this simple routine "What makes you say that?"<sup>5</sup> It helps students describe what they see or know and build explanations based on evidence. It can be used to interpret a single source or to draw conclusions from a number of sources in a longer inquiry. If used to interpret a single source first instruct students to observe carefully and begin with questions such as What do you see? or What do you notice?

## **6. Expressing Certainty**

Students need to know that it is okay in history to be uncertain. We can't always find definite answers to our questions because we may not have enough sources or they may not tell us everything we want to know. Sources may also, disagree.

1. List two things that you know for certain about your topic.

2. List two things that you do not know for certain.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



3. Reflect: How certain are you of your answer to your inquiry question? Do you have enough information to finish your research? What is sufficient evidence?

(See Appendix Document Summary of Scope and Sequence of Inquiry/Communication/Participation.)

## Appendix 4: BLM Heritage Fairs Research Organizer

Use only as many of the categories and questions as you think your students are able to answer.

### Heritage Fairs Research Organizer

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>My Inquiry Question:</b>
<b>Source:</b> What is the title if any? What kind of a source is it (photo, letter, etc)? Who created it? When and where?
<b>Context:</b> What other events or developments were happening at the time the source was created? How might they have influenced this source?
<b>Description:</b> What do you notice that's important about this source? What do you notice that's interesting? Is there anything that is puzzling?
<b>Inferences about the creator (e.g., photographer, author) and audience:</b> Who was intended to use, see or read this source? What was the creator setting out to do? To what groups might the creator have belonged? How might the background of the creator and the audience have influenced this source?
<b>Inferences to answer inquiry question:</b> How does this source help you answer your inquiry question? How does it fit with other evidence? What further questions do you have?

## Appendix 5: BLM Reflection on Process

### Heritage Fair Project Self-Assessment<sup>6</sup>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Criteria	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely
<b>Research Questions</b>				
I understood my inquiry questions before beginning my project, and tried to answer them as I did my research.				
<b>Research</b>				
I identified sources that helped answer my inquiry.				
I recognized where I needed more information and looked for sources to find it.				
I recorded the sources of my information.				
<b>Analysis of Sources</b>				
I described all of the key details from my sources.				
I analyzed the possible purpose and values of the authors (photographer, etc.).				
I drew conclusions about how the sources answered my questions and what they did not tell me.				
I wrote notes in my own words and did not copy directly unless I quoted the source.				
<b>Conclusions</b>				
I drew thoughtful conclusions about my inquiry based on a review of my research findings.				
<b>Content and Organization</b>				
My exhibit title communicates the big ideas of my exhibit and captures attention.				
My interpretation of the primary sources is written in short paragraphs organized around a topic sentence.				
Each of my paragraphs draws the attention of viewers to key elements of the source and helps them understand the big ideas or my exhibit.				
<b>Writing</b>				
My text engages viewers because it relates to their personal experience, asks a provocative question, or includes a quotation that draws them into the content.				
The writing is grammatically correct.				
<b>Presentation</b>				
The exhibit attracts viewers, holds their attention, and helps them understand big ideas.				

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from D'Acquisto, Linda. *Learning on Display: Student-Created Museums That Build Understanding*. Alexandria, Virginia: ASCD, 2006 in Seixas, P. and Morton, T. *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts*. (2013) Toronto: Nelson, 73.

