

The *Reading Like a Historian* curriculum engages students in historical inquiry. Each lesson revolves around a central historical question and features sets of primary documents modified for groups of students with diverse reading skills and abilities. This curriculum teaches students how to investigate historical questions employing reading strategies such as sourcing, contextualizing, corroborating, and close reading.

### How do I use these lessons in my classroom?

The lessons in this curriculum can be taught in succession, but are designed to stand alone and supplement what teachers are already doing in the classroom. Most lessons are designed to take a full class period, though some extend over several periods. Lessons generally follow a three-part structure:

**1. Establish or review relevant historical background knowledge and pose the central historical question.** Each lesson approaches background knowledge differently. For some, there are designed PowerPoints, in others a video clip from United Streaming/Discovery Education\* effectively establishes historical context. Many lessons ask students to read a relevant selection from their textbook and answer questions. In some we've outlined mini-lectures or included a timeline about the period that teachers and students might reference as they read through the documents. While establishing background knowledge is important, it's only a first step in the inquiry process, and shouldn't extend beyond opening the lesson. This content introduces and frames the central historical question, motivating students to investigate the documents for that lesson.

**2. Students read documents, then answer guiding questions or complete a graphic organizer.** Lesson plans in *the Reading Like a Historian* curriculum feature documents that address the central historical question; most use two or more documents with conflicting perspectives or accounts. The teacher's decisions on how or whether to assign homework plays a big part in pacing the more elaborate lessons. Depending on the lesson plan, students will engage in different activities as they read and interpret the documents. The *Reading Like a Historian* curriculum offers four basic lesson structures:

a) *Opening Up the Textbook (OUT)*: In these lessons, students examine two documents: the textbook and a historical document that challenges or expands the textbook's account.

b) *Cognitive Apprenticeship*: These lessons are based in a theory that cognitive skills must be visible in order for students to learn how to practice them. Here, a teacher explicitly models historical reading skills (sourcing, contextualization, corroboration, close reading). The full sequence begins with cognitive modeling, followed by teacher-led guided practice, and ultimately independent student practice.

c) *Inquiry*: Most lessons in the curriculum include elements of historical inquiry, where students investigate historical questions, evaluate evidence, and construct historical claims. Some, however, are designed around a process of inquiry, where students develop hypotheses through analyzing sets of documents. Such inquiries are best suited for multiple class periods.

d) *Structured Academic Controversy (SAC)*: For these lessons, students work in pairs and then teams as they explore a historical question. After taking opposing positions on a question, they try to arrive at a consensus or at least clarify their differences.

**3. Whole-class discussion about a central historical question using documentary evidence to support claims.** The final segment of the *Reading Like a Historian* lesson plan is probably the most important. Unfortunately, it is often dropped due to time constraints. Only in whole-class discussion can students see that history is open to multiple interpretations, and that the same piece of evidence can support conflicting claims. Students often find this activity foreign and uncomfortable at first, but through practice can gain an understanding of their role as knowledge-makers in the history classroom.



| Historical Reading Skills                                 | Questions   | <i>Students should be able to . . .</i>  | Prompts  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <p><b>Sourcing</b><br/><br/>(Before reading document)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the author's point of view?</li> <li>• Why was it written?</li> <li>• When was it written?</li> <li>• Is this source believable? Why? Why not?</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Identify author's position on historical event</b></li> <li>• <b>Identify and evaluate author's purpose in producing document</b></li> <li>• <b>Predict what author will say BEFORE reading document</b></li> <li>• <b>Evaluate source's believability/ trustworthiness by considering genre, audience, and author's purpose.</b></li> </ul> | <p>This author probably believes...</p> <p>I think the audience is...</p> <p>Based on the sourcing information, I <b>predict this author will...</b></p> <p>I do/don't trust this document because...</p>          |
| <p><b>Contextualization</b></p>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What else was going on at the time this was written?</li> <li>• What was it like to be alive at this time?</li> <li>• What things were different back then? What things were the same?</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Use context/background information to draw more meaning from document</b></li> <li>• <b>Infer historical context from document(s)</b></li> <li>• <b>Recognize that document reflects one moment in changing past</b></li> <li>• <b>Understand that words must be understood in a larger context</b></li> </ul>                               | <p>I already know that ____ is happening at this time...</p> <p>From this document I would guess that people at this time were feeling...</p> <p>This document might not give me the whole picture because ...</p> |
| <p><b>Close Reading</b></p>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What claims does the author make?</li> <li>• What evidence does the author use to support those claims?</li> <li>• How is this document make me feel?</li> <li>• What words or phrases does the author use to convince me that he/she is right?</li> <li>• What information does the author <i>leave out</i>?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Identify author's claims about event</b></li> <li>• <b>Evaluate evidence/reasoning author uses to support claims</b></li> <li>• <b>Evaluate author's word choice; understand that language is used deliberately</b></li> </ul>   | <p>I think the author chose these words because they make me feel...</p> <p>The author is trying to convince me... (by using/saying...)</p>  |
| <p><b>Corroboration</b></p>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do other pieces of evidence say?</li> <li>• Am I finding different versions of the story? Why or why not?</li> <li>• What pieces of evidence are most believable?</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Establish what is true by comparing documents to each other</b></li> <li>• <b>Recognize disparities between two accounts</b></li> </ul>  | <p>This author agrees/ disagrees with...</p> <p>This document was written earlier/later than the other, so...</p>  |

# What is History?

**History is an *account* of the past.**

- Accounts/narratives differ depending on one's perspective.
- We rely on evidence to construct our accounts of the past.
- We must question the reliability of each piece of evidence.
- Any single piece of evidence is insufficient.
- We must consult multiple pieces of evidence in order to build a plausible account.

## Sourcing

Before reading the document  
ask yourself:

- Who wrote this?
- What is the author's point of view?
- Why was it written?
- When was it written? (A long time or short time after the event?)
- Is this source believable? Why? Why not?

## Imagining the Setting (Contextualizing)

- What else was going on at the time this was written?
- What was it like to be alive at this time?
- What things were different back then? What things were the same?
- What would it look like to see this event through the eyes of someone who lived back then?

## Close Reading

- What claims does the author make?
- What evidence does the author use to support those claims?
- How is this document supposed to make me feel?
- What words or phrases does the author use to convince me that he/she is right?
- What information does the author *leave out*?

## **Cross-Checking (Corroboration)**

- What do other pieces of evidence say?
- Am I finding the same information everywhere?
- Am I finding different versions of the story? (If yes, why might that be?)
- Where else could I look to find out about this?
- What pieces of evidence are most believable?