

Habits of the Mind

National Council for History Education

1. **Significance of the Past** ...understand the significance of the past to their own lives, both private and public, and to their society...*What would your daily life be like if you had no memory? What would you have to learn again everyday (where to go, what to do, how to do it)? How old are your favorite places?*
2. **What's Important, and What's Not**... distinguish between the important and the inconsequential, to develop the "discriminating memory" needed for discerning judgment in public and personal life...*How can a timeline show us what events are important? How do we decide what to put in and leave out of a timeline? How do newspaper editors decide what goes on the front page?*
3. **Historical Empathy**... perceive past events and issues as they were experienced by people at the time, to develop historical empathy as opposed to present-mindedness...*What is the background for this event? What conditions were people living under? What were their hopes and fears? What went on before the event happened? How was that event viewed by a person at the time? What did that event mean to other people living at the time?*
4. **Shared Humanity**... acquire at one and the same time a comprehension of diverse cultures and of shared humanity...*What things are the same and what are some differences between now and the past? How do I resemble and differ from people in the past? What fears and hopes do we share with people in the past? Name some things everyone needs. What is the "Golden Rule"?*
5. **Change and Consequences**...understand how things happen and how things change, how human intentions matter, but also how their consequences are shaped by the means of carrying them out, in a tangle between purpose and process...*How can a timeline show us what has changed? How can photographs show us and how can older people tell us? What hopes did an inventor have for an invention, or a leader for a new law or policy? Were its effects entirely good? Did it create new problems? If so, how do people today contend with its problems?*
6. **Change and Continuity**... comprehend the interplay of change and continuity, and avoid assuming that either is somehow more natural, or more to be expected, than the other...*What was life like "long ago" in the place where we live? How have things changed? Has anything stayed the same? Name something that changes in some ways but stays the same in other ways.*
7. **History is Unfinished Business**... prepare to live with uncertainties and exasperating—even perilous—unfinished business, realizing that not all "problems" have solutions...*Are there any stories of past events in the place where you live that are still not "over" or finished? What examples of unfinished business are there in the story of our country's struggle for freedom?*
8. **Campaign Against Monocausality**...grasp the complexity of historical causation, respect particularity, and avoid excessively abstract generalizations...*How do "word wheels" or "history webs" show the many connections among events in the past? Do events in the past usually have more than one cause and effect? What are the causes of an important event in U.S. or World History?*
9. **History's Tentative Nature**... appreciate the often tentative nature of judgments about the past, and thereby avoid the temptation to seize upon particular "lessons" of history as cures for present ills...*Did events of the past have to turn out the way they did? Because something happened a certain way in the past, does that mean that a similar situation today will unfold with the same result? Why or why not?*
10. **People Who Made a Difference**... recognize the importance of individuals who have made a difference in history, and the significance of personal character for both good and ill...*Who were some persons who made a difference in critical moments of U.S. or World History? What character traits have leaders in our country demonstrated? What makes a hero or heroine?*
11. **The Unintended and Unexpected**... appreciate the force of the nonrational, the irrational, the accidental, in history and human affairs...*How can the discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus be called an "accident of history"? What if something had not happened (Lincoln killed, Panama Canal built, electricity harnessed, airplanes invented)? Which past events had an element of surprise or chance?*
12. **Time and Place are Inseparable**... understand the relationship between geography and history as a matrix of time and place, and as context for events...*Where did an event in history happen? Why there? Why are historical landmarks located where they are? Why are cities located where they are? How has weather affected historical events?*
13. **Evaluating Evidence**... read widely and critically in order to recognize the difference between fact and conjecture, between evidence and assertion, and thereby to frame useful questions...*What questions can you ask about a historical event or story? What is an eyewitness to an event? What is a "primary source" of information? What is evidence?*

Vital Themes and Significant Questions



Civilization, cultural diffusion, and innovation.

What things make a community thrive in all areas of human endeavor? What makes a civilization thrive? What are the indispensable features that characterize "civilization"? How have the conditions of people's work changed over time? How do ideas "travel" over time and place, and end up influencing people far away and afterwards?



Conflict and cooperation.

What have been some of the problems and struggles face by people in the past? What kinds of issues have brought people to war? How have people tried to make peace or prevent war? How has trade caused conflict or promoted cooperation? What has happened in the past that helps to explain the present?



Human interaction with the environment.

How does place/location affect human life and society? How did climate and resources affect the story of our state's past? What has been the role of agriculture in the growth of societies? What are some important natural and cultural features of a place where a historical event happened?



Comparative history of major developments.

How can children's lives of long ago be compared with today? How can major processes, such as obtaining food and water, be compared between long ago and now?



Values, beliefs, political ideas, and institutions.

What does being a "citizen" mean? Why do societies create rules and laws? What does it mean to be "fair"? How do societies try to make life "fair" to citizens? What central religious beliefs have inspired people's actions? What have different people expected of themselves and their children? How have people governed themselves in the past?



Patterns of social and political interaction.

What are the customs or ways of living of past societies? What are some patterns of migration in our country's story? What are some of the stories of immigrants to our state? Did people in past societies live in families? Did they go to school?