

Unit 1, Lesson 1: What is history and why is it important?

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students learn to distinguish past, present, and future; categorize events in those three periods of time; then construct the understanding that history is the study of what happened in the past and that doing history and understanding the past has value.

Delaware Standard(s)

- **History Standard 2a, 4-5 [Analysis]:** Students will draw historical conclusions and construct historical accounts from primary and secondary source materials

Essential Questions

- What is history and why learn it?

Enduring Understandings

- Students will understand that history is the study of the past. Although historians argue that history does not repeat itself, it has been described as the best available guide to making decisions in the present.

Resources

- [Unit 1, Lesson 1: Google Slides](#)
- [Resource 1: Three Categories of Time](#)
- [Resource 2: What do historians do?](#)
- [Resource 3: Why is it important to learn and do history?](#)

Procedures

1. Explain to students that they are going to spend much of this year studying history. To start off their studies, they need to know what history is and why it is important. Tell them that, rather than giving them answers to questions such as *what is history* and *why should we learn it*, you will have them do a few activities to see if they can figure out some answers for themselves.
2. Explain the terms past, present, and future.
 - a. past - refers to the time before now. Anything that happened before right now.
 - b. present - refers to what is happening now.
 - c. future - refers to what will happen (but it has not happened yet)
3. Offers some examples of things that occur in the past, present, and future. Then have students do the same using examples of their own.
4. Distribute copies of [Resource 1](#). Have students read the sentence strips then place each event into its proper category/column – past, present, or future.

5. This next activity builds off Resource 1. The goal of this activity is to come up with a good answer to the question – what is history? Distribute copies of [Resource 2](#) and ask students to read what appears on the Resource. Students will read about activities of a historian and use the information to infer what historians do and what history is about. Have them share their answers.
6. Turn and discuss have students turn to a partner and discuss the following:

Ashanta is a historian. You just read about what she does. Based on what Ashanta does as a historian, how would you explain what history is and what historians do?
7. Have them share some answers. Then, debrief by explaining that history is the study of the past. (Historians study the past.)
8. The final activity in this lesson focuses on the question – *why should students learn and do history?* Distribute copies of [Resource 3](#). Ask students to read the bulleted statements then explain why it might be valuable to study history.

Sample Responses for Resource 3

1. knowing what happened in the past can help prevent us from making mistakes that can hurt us and be avoided
 2. knowing what happened in the past can provide insights into how to do things better
 3. knowing about others' pasts can help us better understand why other people are like they are
 4. we can take ideas from past people and use them to improve our lives
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9. Personalize Learning: ask students to write down one thing that they would like to learn about their own past.
 10. Debrief: focus on the idea that we can learn a lot from what happened and what was done in the past such as what we should not do, what we should do, why people are the way they are, and why people think the way they do. We might also get a good idea of the effects that our actions might have.