

History Level 7

Chapter 5 — Skills: questions, chronology and sources

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Asking and using historical questions

Curriculum focus: this section owns VC2HH8S01 and develops elaborations .E01, .E02, .E04–.E06.

Following this book’s coverage decisions (TOC §2A), it teaches:

- .E01 — developing questions to judge sources that come from oral tradition
 - .E02 — developing a key question (this book uses ‘How did the Egyptians build the pyramids at Giza?’), knowing that there may not be one definitive answer, and working out the related questions that will guide the inquiry — here, ‘What evidence do we have?’ and ‘What theories have historians proposed?’
 - .E04 — developing a key question (this book uses ‘What happened to European society when the western Roman empire declined?’) and subsidiary questions to guide the inquiry — here, ‘What evidence is there?’, then ‘What readings do historians offer?’ — taught with the First Nations key-question example removed per TOC §2A-D.
 - .E05 — developing questions about historical significance (this book asks what the Black Death did to the communities it struck, and how many years it lasted)
 - .E06 — reviewing questions when the investigation turns up something unexpected or challenging (this book’s example: ‘How did world events reshape the way Japanese society was organised?’)
- .E03 is excluded entire per TOC §2A-C — its example question is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content, which this book does not teach (Rule 1). The id is retained as a linkage key only and is not taught or quoted here. The five elaborations above deliver the content description in full.

The past has left things behind — poems, pyramids, written records, bones and buildings — but none of them speaks first. Historians are the people who ask the questions, and the quality of an investigation is often settled before any source is opened: by the questions brought to it. This section is about those questions — how to develop them, how to sharpen them, and how to change them when the evidence pushes back.

A **historical question** is a question about the past that evidence can help to answer. Some questions are closed — “In what year did the Black Death reach England?” — and one fact settles them. The questions that drive investigations are open: there is no single agreed answer, and answering them means sorting evidence and weighing what historians have said.

You will work throughout with **sources**. A primary source was made at the time being studied, or by someone who was there; a secondary source was made later by someone drawing on primary sources.

The section teaches five question moves, each practised on real content from Chapters 1–4 and each leading into the one after it: testing an oral tradition, living with an open key question, breaking a key question into subsidiary questions, asking significance questions, and reviewing questions when the evidence surprises you.

About the key words. This section defines every key word at first use, and the first figure collects all twelve as cards. Two words need special care. **Subsidiary** means “supporting”: a **subsidiary question** is a smaller question that supports a key question by breaking it into parts you can investigate — it is a subject word for this section and is used throughout. And one pair of words is contested — *fall* and *transformation*, applied to the end of Rome’s western empire — so, where that happens, the argument is set out in a box with both sides given equal weight.

Teaching sequence

Part 1 — What makes a question historical

Not every question about the past is a historical question. A historical question has to pass three tests: it is about the past, it can be investigated through surviving evidence, and it is worth investigating — not settled by a single word, and not a question no evidence could ever touch. “What colour was Khufu’s favourite boat?” is about the past, but no source could ever settle it, so it fails the second test and is set aside.

Question words do different jobs. *When* and *who* questions usually close fast with one fact. *How*, *why*, *in what ways* and *whose* questions stay open — they need evidence sorted and arguments weighed, and they are the ones that power investigations.

The twelve words below are the toolkit for the whole section. Learn them here; every part that follows uses them.

Key words of this section

Subject terms for historical questions, defined at first use. Keep these meanings in mind as you read.

historical question

a question about the past that evidence can help to answer

key question

the big question an investigation sets out to answer

subsidiary question

a smaller question that breaks the key question into parts you can investigate (the curriculum also calls these related questions)

oral tradition

memories kept as stories and passed from teller to listener across many generations

evidence

information from the past that helps answer a question

theory

an explanation of what happened, built from evidence and open to being checked

interpretation

a historian's reasoned explanation of what the evidence shows

significance

why something matters: what difference it made, to whom, and for how long

primary source

a source made at the time being studied, or by someone who was there

secondary source

a source made later by someone using primary sources

investigation

a careful study that sets out to answer a historical question

review

to go back over your questions and change the ones the evidence no longer fits

Key questions, subsidiary questions and reviewing are the three moves this section builds.

Twelve definition cards for the key words of this section: historical question, key question, subsidiary question, oral tradition, evidence, theory, interpretation, significance, primary source, secondary source, investigation and review

Check: sort these three questions into **closed**, **open** and **not investigable**: (a) “When did the Black Death reach England?” (b) “What did the Black Death do to the communities it struck?” (c) “What colour was Khufu’s favourite boat?” Say why the third question fails the tests above.

Part 2 — The five moves of this section

Each move is a way of developing or using historical questions, and each is practised on real content you have already met in Chapters 1–4. The moves build: moves 2–4 all start from a key question, and what changes is what you do with it.

The five moves of this section

Every move is a way of developing or using historical questions. Each one is practised on real content from Chapters 1-4.

1. Put a source to the test

Questions that evaluate a source: who made it, when, for whom, and how reliable is it?

.E01

Practised on: oral tradition - Homer's Iliad and the Sundiata epic

2. Ask a key question - and live with no final answer

One big question with related questions: 'What evidence do we have?' and 'What theories have historians proposed?'

.E02

Practised on: 'How did the Egyptians build the pyramids at Giza?'

3. Break a key question into subsidiary questions

Smaller questions that sort the evidence and the interpretations the big question needs.

.E04

Practised on: 'What happened to European society when the western Roman empire declined?'

4. Ask significance questions

Questions about what difference something made, to whom, and for how long.

.E05

Practised on: 'What did the Black Death do to the communities it struck?' and 'How many years did it last?'

5. Review your questions

When an investigation finds something unexpected, go back and change the questions that no longer fit.

.E06

Practised on: the Black Death's later waves, and the boats in Merer's logbook

Moves 2-4 all start from a key question. What changes is what you do with it.

Five rows, one for each move of this section: put a source to the test (.E01), ask a key question and live with no final answer (.E02), break a key question into subsidiary questions (.E04), ask significance questions (.E05), and review your questions (.E06), each with the real content it is practised on

Check: without looking back, name the five moves and the real example each one is practised on in this section.

Part 3 — Move 1: put an oral tradition to the test (.E01)

Oral tradition is memory kept as stories and passed from teller to listener across generations. It is a source in its own right — but a story that travelled by mouth is not tested the way a written record is, so it needs its own test questions.

Two famous oral traditions anchor this move:

- **Homer's *Iliad*** is an ancient Greek epic poem about the Trojan War. It is credited to the poet Homer and was composed around 750–700 BCE — but it tells of events believed to have happened around 1200 BCE, roughly five hundred years earlier. For centuries it lived in speech, sung at feasts and festivals, before it was written down.
- **The Sundiata epic** tells of Sundiata Keita, who won power around 1235 CE and founded the Mali empire in West Africa. For about 800 years griots — trained people whose job is to keep the stories — carried it aloud from memory. It was spoken into a written book only in the 1960s, from the griot Djeli Mamoud Kouyate.

Two famous oral traditions

Both stories lived in speech long before anyone wrote them down. That is exactly why they need their own test questions.

Homer's Iliad

What it is

An ancient Greek epic poem about the Trojan War, told of warriors, ships and the city of Troy.

Who carried it

Generations of singers in ancient Greece, who spoke it aloud at feasts and festivals.

When

Composed around 750-700 BCE. It tells of events believed to have happened around 1200 BCE - roughly 500 years earlier.

When written

Written down in ancient Greece after centuries of being sung.

The Sundiata epic

What it is

The story of Sundiata Keita, founder of the Mali empire in West Africa.

Who carried it

Griots - trained people whose job is to keep the stories - who told it aloud from memory.

When

Sundiata won power around 1235 CE. Griots have told his story for about 800 years.

When written

Spoken into a written book in the 1960s, from the griot Djeli Mamoud Kouyate.

Oral tradition: memories kept as stories and passed from teller to listener across many generations - a source in its own right, with its own test questions.

Two source cards for famous oral traditions: Homer's Iliad, composed around 750-700 BCE about events around 1200 BCE and carried by generations of singers before being written down, and the Sundiata epic of Sundiata Keita and the Mali empire around 1235 CE, carried by griots for about 800 years and written down in the 1960s from the griot Djeli Mamoud Kouyate; with a band defining oral tradition

The six questions in the next figure are how you **evaluate** a source like these: they tell you what the source is good for and what it is not. Notice that none of the questions throws the story away — they work out its weight.

Six test questions for a source based on oral tradition

Ask these of any story that travelled by word of mouth before you lean on it as evidence.

1 Who carries the story?

and who taught them? A trained carrier is a better clue than a casual teller.

2 When was it first written down?

and how long after the events? A long gap lets details drift.

3 Whose voices can you hear?

and whose are missing? Stories often keep the voices of the powerful.

4 What did the teller want listeners to remember?

What does the story praise, and what does it warn about?

5 What other evidence backs the story up?

Objects, places and other accounts that point the same way.

6 What might shift each time it is told?

Names, numbers and places drift first; the heart of a story holds longer.

The last question matters most: it tells you what an oral source is good for and what it is not.

Six numbered test-question cards for evaluating a source based on oral tradition: who carries the story, when it was first written down, whose voices can be heard, what the teller wanted listeners to remember, what other evidence backs the story up, and what might shift each time it is told

Sources: Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Homer” and “Iliad” (composed c. 750–700 BCE; the events around 1200 BCE); D. T. Niane, Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali, told by the griot Djeli Mamoud Kouyate and written down in the 1960s; accessed 25 August 2026.

Check: use test question 2 (when was it first written down?) on the Sundiata epic: roughly how long is the gap between the events and the writing, and which details — from test question 6 — are most likely to drift across a gap like that?

Part 4 — Move 2: a key question with no definitive answer (.E02)

A **key question** is the big question an investigation is built around. The curriculum’s own example is one of the most famous open questions in history:

“How did the Egyptians build the pyramids at Giza?”

The Great Pyramid was built for King Khufu around 2550 BCE, from about 2.3 million stone blocks — the centrepiece of Chapter 2’s depth study of ancient Egypt. There may be no definitive answer to the question — and that is the point. A good key question stays open while the evidence grows; the investigation is where the understanding comes from. The way in is through related questions: **“What evidence do we have?”** and **“What theories have historians proposed?”**

The key question tree: no final answer, and that is fine

One big question at the top, three related questions below - each branch leads to evidence you can go and find.



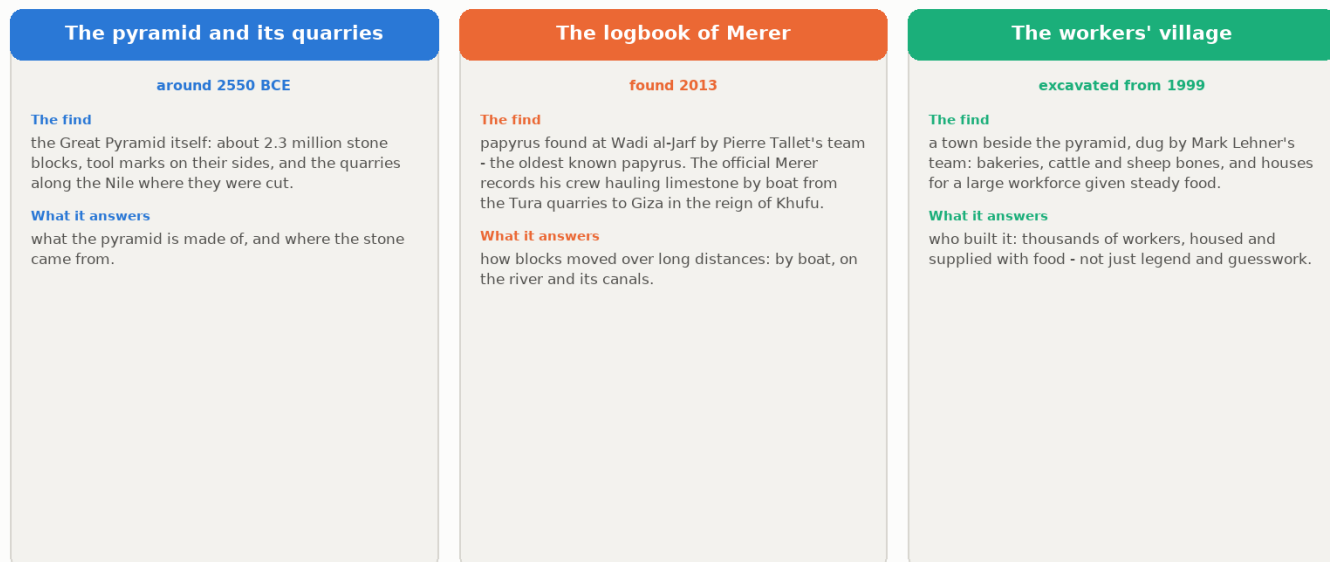
A good key question stays open: the evidence grows, the theories change, and understanding moves.

Key question tree for 'How did the Egyptians build the pyramids at Giza?', with a note that there may be no definitive answer, branching into three related questions: what evidence do we have, what theories have historians proposed, and what else do we need to find out

The first related question leads to three real finds:

What evidence is there? Three real finds

Each card is a piece of evidence about how the Great Pyramid was built - with who found it and when.



None of these finds tells the whole story - which is why the related questions still matter.

Three evidence cards about how the Great Pyramid was built: the pyramid and its quarries (around 2550 BCE, about 2.3 million blocks with tool marks), the logbook of Merer (found at Wadi al-Jarf in 2013 by Pierre Tallet's team — blocks hauled by boat from the Tura quarries in the reign of Khufu), and the workers' village (excavated from 1999 by Mark Lehner's team — bakeries, cattle and sheep bones, and houses for a large workforce)

The second related question leads to theories. Each theory fits part of the evidence and struggles with the rest — which is exactly why the key question stays open.

What theories have been developed?

Three ramps, three problems. A theory is only as good as the evidence it explains.

One long straight ramp

A huge earthen ramp straight up one side.

WHAT IT FITS

Ramp remains found at quarries of the same date, such as Hatnub, found in 2018.

WHAT IT STRUGGLES WITH

As the pyramid grew taller the ramp would need as much stone as the pyramid itself.

A ramp spiralling around the outside

A smaller ramp winding around the four faces.

WHAT IT FITS

Needs far less material than a straight ramp.

WHAT IT STRUGGLES WITH

The corners and keeping the edges true are very hard to manage.

An internal ramp

A ramp built inside the pyramid (Jean-Pierre Houdin, 2007).

WHAT IT FITS

Scans of the pyramid show strange shapes spiralling inside it.

WHAT IT STRUGGLES WITH

Nobody has seen the ramp directly, so it stays an open theory.

No single theory settles the question alone - so the key question stays open, and that is what historians live with.

Three ramp theories, each with what it fits and what it struggles with: one long straight ramp (ramp remains of the same date found at Hatnub in 2018), a ramp spiralling around the outside of the pyramid, and an internal ramp (Jean-Pierre Houdin, 2007), with a band noting that no single theory settles the question alone

Sources: Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Pyramids of Giza" (the Great Pyramid built for Khufu, c. 2550 BCE, about 2.3 million blocks); P. Tallet and M. Lehner, The Red Sea Scrolls (2019), on the logbooks found at Wadi al-Jarf in 2013; M. Lehner, excavations of the workers' village from 1999; University of Liverpool Egyptian Expedition, Hatnub ramp report, 2018; accessed 25 August 2026.

Check: which evidence card answers the question "How did the blocks travel long distances?" — and which question does the workers' village answer that the pyramid itself cannot?

Part 5 — Move 3: break a key question into subsidiary questions (. E04)

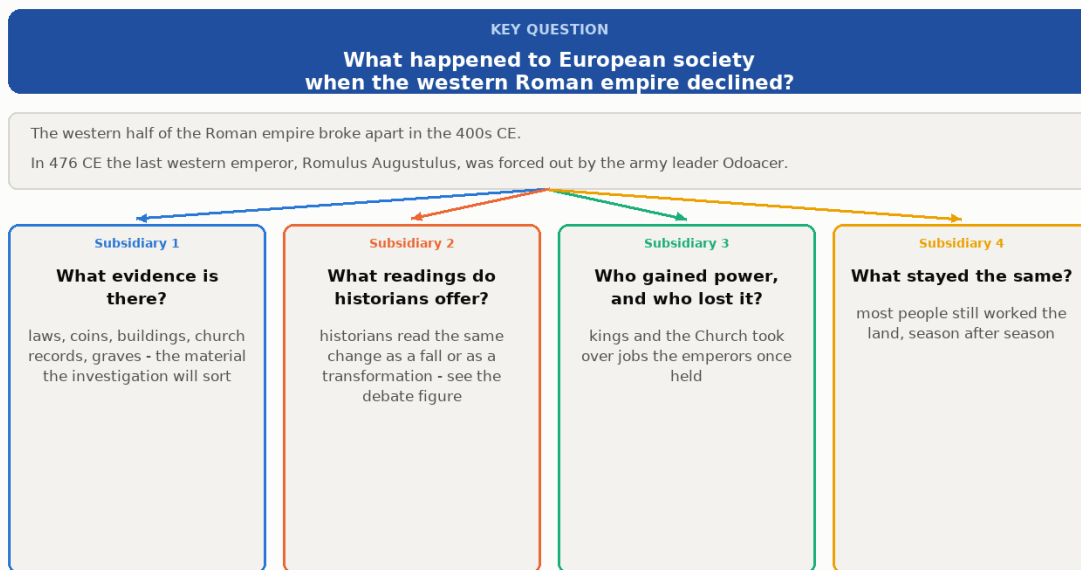
Some key questions are too large to answer whole. The move here is to break the key question into **subsidiary questions** — smaller supporting questions that sort the evidence and the interpretations the big question needs.

The anchor is the end of Rome's western empire, a story Chapter 2 follows in depth. The western half of the Roman empire broke apart in the 400s CE. In 476 CE the last western emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was forced out by the army leader Odoacer. The key question:

“What happened to European society when the western Roman empire declined?”

One key question, four subsidiary questions

The big question is too large to answer whole. The smaller questions break it into parts you can investigate.



One key question — what happened to European society when the western Roman empire declined — above a fact strip (the western empire broke apart in the 400s CE; in 476 CE the last western emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was forced out by Odoacer) and four subsidiary question boxes: what evidence is there, what readings do historians offer, who gained power and who lost it, and what stayed the same

Two subsidiary questions do the main work — “**What evidence is there?**” and “**What readings do historians offer?**” — and the second one matters, because historians do not agree about how to read this change. The contested pair is *fall* and *transformation*.

Historians’ debate: fall or transformation?

Both sides accept the same basic facts: by about 500 CE the western half of the Roman empire had broken apart, and kings and the Christian Church had taken over jobs the emperors once held. They disagree about what those facts mean.

It fell. Edward Gibbon, in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1789), set the classic reading, and Bryan Ward-Perkins defends a modern version in *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (2005). The end was violent, and life got poorer: goods, trade, building and reading shrank sharply. Dig at 400 and 600 CE and the difference is in your hands — fewer imports, plainer pots, smaller cattle.

It was transformed. Peter Brown, in *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971), reads the same centuries as a slow rebuilding, not a cliff. New kingdoms and the Church took over Roman lands, laws and letters and built a new order out of them — different, yes; collapsed, no.

The frame you choose already carries part of the answer — so name your frame before you argue, and be ready to test it against the other side.

Subsidiary 2 in action: the debate

Fall, or transformation? Both readings are presented in their strongest form - the frame you choose already carries part of the answer.

'It fell' - collapse

Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789); Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (2005).

The end was violent. Goods, trade, building and reading shrank sharply; in places life got poorer for centuries. Dig at 400 and 600 CE and the difference is in your hands: fewer imports, plainer pots, smaller cattle.

'It was transformed' - new order

Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971).

Not a cliff but a slow rebuilding. New kingdoms and the Christian Church took over Roman lands, laws and letters, and built a new order out of them - different, yes; collapsed, no.

Both sides agree that by about 500 CE western Europe was run in a very new way. They disagree about whether that was a collapse or a rebuilding - so name your frame before you argue, and test your claim against the other side.

Two steelmanned columns in the historians' debate over Rome's end: 'it fell' (Edward Gibbon 1776-1789; Bryan Ward-Perkins 2005) against 'it was transformed' (Peter Brown 1971), with a band noting what both sides agree on by about 500 CE

Sources: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Romulus Augustulus" and "Odoacer" (476 CE); E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789); P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971); B. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (2005); accessed 25 August 2026.

Check: explain how the same finds — fewer imports, plainer pots, smaller cattle — can be read as "collapse" by one historian and "rebuilding" by another. Which subsidiary question forces you to notice that disagreement?

Part 6 — Move 4: ask significance questions (.E05)

Significance asks what difference something made — to whom, and for how long. A significance question turns a fact into an investigation.

The anchor is the Black Death, which Chapter 3 studies in depth. It reached Europe in 1347 and England in 1348; the first wave eased around 1351. It killed perhaps a third of Europe's people — and it came back in later waves, such as 1361. The curriculum's own significance questions for it are: **"What did the Black Death do to the communities it struck?"** and **"How many years did it last?"**

Significance questions: the Black Death

Significance questions ask what difference something made, to whom, and for how long. They turn a fact into an investigation.

The Black Death reached Europe in 1347 and England in 1348; the first wave eased around 1351.
It killed perhaps a third of Europe's people - and it came back in later waves, such as 1361.

How were communities affected?

Families lost parents and children; work stopped; faith was shaken; prices and pay moved as workers grew scarce (Chapter 3 studies this in depth).

How long did it last?

The first wave lasted about 1347-1351 - but later waves returned for generations. The question only works when you pin down what 'it' means.

What difference did it make afterwards?

Scarce workers gave the lower classes more power; rulers tried to freeze pay (England's Statute of Labourers, 1351) - the long-term consequences studied in Chapter 3.

Whose story is hardest to hear?

The people who died left fewer words than the people who wrote. Church and manor records count the dead; few voices speak from the graves.

Each question begins from the same facts - and each sends the investigation somewhere different.

Significance questions applied to the Black Death: a fact strip (reached Europe 1347, England 1348, first wave eased around 1351, later waves such as 1361) and four question cards — how were communities affected, how long did it last, what difference did it make afterwards (England's Statute of Labourers, 1351), and whose story is hardest to hear

Notice two things about the four cards. First, they all start from the same facts — and each sends the investigation somewhere different. Second, “How many years did it last?” only works once you say what “it” means: the first wave, or the waves that kept returning for generations.

Sources: Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Black Death” (reached Europe 1347, England 1348, later waves including 1361); the Statute of Labourers, England, 1351; accessed 25 August 2026.

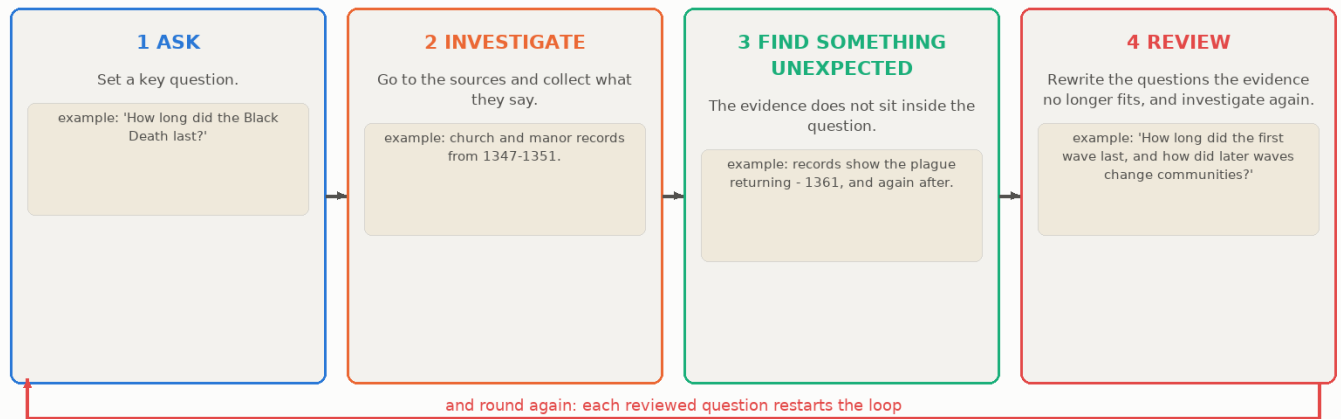
Check: which of the four questions in the figure turns a date into a debate about meaning? And why does the answer to “How many years did it last?” change depending on what you mean by “it”?

Part 7 — Move 5: review your questions (.E06)

Investigations rarely go in a straight line. When the evidence surprises you — when it does not sit inside the question you asked — the move is not to force the evidence. It is to go back and **review** the questions that no longer fit, then investigate again.

The reviewing loop

An investigation is a loop, not a straight line: when the evidence surprises you, your questions get reviewed too.



Reviewing is not failure - it is the sign the investigation is working.

The reviewing loop in four steps — ask, investigate, find something unexpected, review — each step with a worked example from the Black Death's later waves, and a red arrow looping back from review to ask

Work the loop once with the Black Death:

1. **Ask.** Key question: "How long did the Black Death last?"
2. **Investigate.** Church and manor records from 1347–1351.
3. **Find something unexpected.** The records keep going: the plague came back in 1361, and again after. The evidence will not sit inside a question about one event with one ending.
4. **Review.** Rewrite the question: "How long did the first wave last, and how did later waves change communities?" — then investigate again.

Work it a second time with Merer's logbook from Part 4. A student investigating "How were the blocks lifted as the pyramid grew?" opens the logbook expecting answers about lifting — and finds a record of boats and river trips instead. The surprise is a gift: the review produces new questions about how blocks travelled long distances, which the logbook can actually answer.

An example of a question that keeps demanding reviews: "How did world events reshape the way Japanese society was organised?" — the kind of question where every answer opens the next one.

Check: a student investigates "What theories have historians proposed about how the pyramids were built?" and then reads Merer's logbook for the first time. Name one thing that surprises them and one review of their questions that follows.

Part 8 — Putting questions to work

The five moves are the spine of this book's skills chapters. Section 5B uses them to sequence events and developments in time; sections 5C and 5D use them to work out what sources can and cannot do as evidence; sections 6A–6D use them to explain continuity and change, causes and consequences, significance, and to construct your own interpretations. Every investigation in Chapters 5 and 6 begins the way this section begins: by developing a question worth asking.

When you build your own investigation in sections 5D and 6D, you will choose a key question of your own, break it into subsidiary questions, and review it as the evidence pushes back. The practice questions below, and the inquiry on Merer's logbook, are the rehearsal.

Worked examples

Worked example 1 — with help: developing a question pair for Giza (.E02)

Task. Develop a historical question about the building of the Great Pyramid: state a key question and two related questions, then match each related question to one evidence card from the evidence figure in Part 4.

Scaffold. 1. Use the key question from the Giza tree figure — or develop your own about the building of the pyramid. 2. Choose two related questions from the tree’s branches (“What evidence do we have?”, “What theories have historians proposed?”, “What else do we need to find out?” — or one of your own). 3. For each related question, name one card from the evidence figure (the pyramid and its quarries; the logbook of Merer; the workers’ village) and say what that card can tell you.

Worked response. Key question: *How did the stone blocks of the Great Pyramid travel from the quarries to Giza?*
Related question 1: *What evidence do we have?* — the logbook of Merer answers it: an official named Merer recorded his crew hauling limestone by boat from the Tura quarries to the “Horizon of Khufu” in the reign of Khufu (about 2550 BCE). Related question 2: *What else do we need to find out?* — who organised and supplied the crews; the workers’ village answers part of this, because its bakeries and animal bones show a large workforce given steady food. The key question stays open at the lifting end: no card in the figure shows how the blocks rose as the pyramid grew, and saying so is part of a good response.

Worked example 2 — model response: reviewing a significance question (.E05, .E06)

Task. A student begins an investigation with the significance question “How long did the Black Death last?” They then read church records showing burials from a second wave in 1361. Write the reviewed question and explain the review.

Worked response. The original question assumed one event with one ending. The 1361 burial records are an unexpected development: they show the plague returning a decade after the first wave eased around 1351, so “How long did the Black Death last?” no longer fits — “it” did not end once. The reviewed question is: “How long did the first wave last, and how did later waves change communities?” This is a better question for two reasons. It separates the first wave (1347–1351) from the waves that followed, and it keeps the significance focus: not just when the waves came, but what difference each made. Reviewing the question did not waste the first investigation — the records already collected for the first wave now answer half of the new question.

Practice questions

Practice with help

Q1. (.E01) Copy and complete each sentence with one word from the bank. Word bank: *oral, generations, written, backs, voices*. (a) A story carried from teller to listener across many generations is an _____ tradition. (b) Griots have carried the Sundiata epic for about 800 years — across many _____. (c) Test question 2 asks when a story was first _____ down, and how long after the events. (d) Test question 5 asks what other evidence _____ up the story. (e) Test question 3 asks whose _____ can be heard, and whose are missing.

Q2. (.E02) (a) For which king was the Great Pyramid built, and roughly when? (b) List the three evidence cards in the evidence figure. (c) Which theory places the ramp inside the pyramid, who developed it, and when?

Q3. (.E04) Sort each question into **key question** or **subsidiary question**: (a) What happened to European society when the western Roman empire declined? (b) What evidence is there? (c) Who gained power, and who lost it? (d) What stayed the same? (e) What readings do historians offer?

Q4. (.E05) Mark each question **S** (significance question) or **F** (factual question): (a) In what year did the Black Death reach England? (b) What did the Black Death do to the communities it struck? (c) How long did the plague last? (d) How many people lived in England in 1348? (e) What difference did the plague make to work and pay afterwards?

Q5. (.E01) Apply the test questions to Homer’s *Iliad*. (a) Using the dates in the oral traditions figure, roughly how many years separate the events the poem tells of from the poem being composed? (b) Test question 5 asks what other evidence backs a story up. Name one kind of evidence that could back up what the *Iliad* tells about Troy.

Q6. (.E06) Put the four steps of an investigation in order: (a) find something unexpected; (b) set a key question; (c) review the questions the evidence no longer fits; (d) investigate the sources.

Practice on your own

Q7. (.E02) Develop your own key question about the pyramids at Giza — different from the one in this section — and two related questions. Say which evidence card you would go to first, and why.

Q8. (.E01) “The Sundiata epic is a useful source for the founding of the Mali empire.” Argue for or against this claim using three of the six test questions. Your reasoning is marked, not the side you take.

Q9. (.E04) Choose one subsidiary question about the western Roman empire’s decline. Say what evidence you would collect to answer it, and use the debate figure to explain why two historians might give it different answers.

Q10. (.E05, .E06) A student plans an investigation with the key question “What did the Black Death do to the communities it struck?” Write two significance questions they should add, and describe one unexpected development that could force a review — including the reviewed question.

Source-based inquiry

Q11. (.E02, .E04) Read the extract below, then answer the questions that follow.

“Day ...: the inspector Merer spends the day with his crew of forty, hauling stone from the quarries of Tura. Day ...: he sails downstream with the blocks towards the ‘Horizon of Khufu’ (the works of the great pyramid), in the reign of the king Khufu, in the season of the flood.”

Adapted from the logbook of Merer, the oldest known papyrus, found at the Red Sea harbour of Wadi al-Jarf in 2013 by Pierre Tallet’s team. Merer was an official of King Khufu (about 2550 BCE). The original is written in Egyptian script; this is a plain English retelling adapted from Tallet’s published edition.

Source card: the logbook of Merer

A primary source for your inquiry. It records real days, real blocks and real boats - and it is silent on most of what you might want to know.

THE LOGBOOK OF MERER

Day ...: the inspector Merer spends the day with his crew of forty, hauling stone from the quarries of Tura.
Day ...: he sails downstream with the blocks towards the ‘Horizon of Khufu’ (the works of the great pyramid)
In the reign of the king Khufu,
in the season of the flood.

The oldest known papyrus, found at Wadi al-Jarf in 2013 by Pierre Tallet’s team. Merer was an official of the king Khufu (about 2550 BCE). The original is written in Egyptian script; this is a plain English re-telling, adapted from Tallet’s published edition.

ORIGIN - who, when, where

A working log kept by Merer, an official of Khufu, in the reign of Khufu (about 2550 BCE), at the Red Sea harbour of Wadi al-Jarf. Found in 2013; published by Pierre Tallet.

CONTENT - what it says

Day-by-day records: Merer’s crew hauling limestone from Tura, sailing it by boat to the ‘Horizon of Khufu’ - the pyramid works - in the season of the flood.

QUESTIONS IT CAN HELP ANSWER

‘How did the blocks travel long distances?’ (by boat) and ‘Who ran the work?’ (officials with crews). These feed the key question: how were the pyramids built?

QUESTIONS IT CANNOT ANSWER

‘How were blocks lifted as the pyramid grew?’ and ‘What was life like for the workers?’ A log of trips says nothing about lifting or living.

In the inquiry below, you develop your own questions for this source - and name the ones it cannot answer.

Source card for the inquiry: on the left, the logbook of Merer shown as a papyrus page with an adapted quote and notes on where it came from; on the right, four analysis boxes — origin, content, questions it can help answer, and questions it cannot answer

- Origin.** Who kept this record, for whom, and when? (2 marks)
- Content.** According to the extract, what did Merer’s crew do, and how did the blocks travel? (2 marks)
- Develop questions.** Write one key question this logbook can help answer, and two subsidiary questions that lead into it. (3 marks)
- Limits.** Name one question this logbook cannot answer, and explain why the source is silent on it. (2 marks)

Answers

Q1. (a) oral (b) generations (c) written (d) backs (e) voices.

Q2. (a) King Khufu, around 2550 BCE. (b) The pyramid and its quarries; the logbook of Merer; the workers' village. (c) The internal ramp theory; Jean-Pierre Houdin; 2007.

Q3. (a) key question; (b) subsidiary; (c) subsidiary; (d) subsidiary; (e) subsidiary.

Q4. (a) F (b) S (c) S (d) F (e) S.

Q5. (a) About 500 years — events around 1200 BCE, composed around 750–700 BCE. (b) For example, the remains of Troy itself — a destroyed city layer of about the right date — or objects from the Greek world of that time.

Q6. (b) set a key question → (d) investigate the sources → (a) find something unexpected → (c) review the questions.

Q7. See model response — own key question with two related questions, and a first evidence card chosen with a reason.

Q8. See model response — three test questions applied, with reasoning on either side accepted.

Q9. See model response — one subsidiary question, the evidence to collect for it, and two readings from the debate figure.

Q10. See model response — two significance questions, plus one unexpected development and its reviewed question.

Q11. (a) Merer, an official of King Khufu, kept it during Khufu's reign (about 2550 BCE) — a working log of his own crew's days. (b) His crew of forty hauled stone from the quarries of Tura, and the blocks travelled by boat, sailed downstream towards the "Horizon of Khufu". (c) Any key question the logbook feeds — for example "How did the stone blocks of the Great Pyramid travel from the quarries to Giza?" — with supporting questions like "What evidence is there for transport by water?" and "Who organised the work crews?" (d) For example "How were the blocks lifted as the pyramid grew?": a log of trips records hauling and sailing, not lifting — that was never its job, so it is silent on it.

Model responses

Q7. Key question: *Who organised the workforce that built the Great Pyramid, and how were they supplied?* Related question 1: *What evidence is there?* — the workers' village is the first card to go to, because its bakeries, animal bones and houses were left by the workforce itself, so it can speak about numbers and steady food. Related question 2: *What else do we need to find out?* — whether the workers came willingly or were ordered there, which no card in the figure fully answers, so the question stays open. The village card comes first because the question is about people, and the village is the one piece of evidence the people themselves left behind.

Q8. The epic is useful, in ways the test questions can name — with limits they name too. Test question 1 (who carries the story?) counts for the claim: griots are trained people whose job is to keep the stories, not casual tellers, so the telling was disciplined, not loose. Test question 2 (when was it first written down?) works against it: Sundiata won power around 1235 CE, but the story was written down only in the 1960s — a gap of more than 700 years, long enough for names, numbers and places to drift. Test question 5 (what other evidence backs it up?) decides the weight: places, goods and other records from the Mali empire can confirm or correct what the griots tell. So the epic is a useful source for how the founding was remembered and why it mattered — and it needs other evidence beside it for dates and facts.

Q9. Take the subsidiary question "Who gained power, and who lost it?" The evidence to collect includes laws and land grants showing kings and bishops taking over jobs emperors once held, coins struck in new rulers' names, and church records of land and jobs given to new leaders. Two historians read the same material in different ways: Ward-Perkins reads the change as collapse — trade, building and reading shrank, and the finds (fewer imports, plainer pots, smaller cattle) show life getting poorer; Brown reads it as transformation — Roman lands, laws and letters carried into a new order under kings and the Church. The disagreement is not about the facts but about the frame: "fall" measures what was lost, "transformation" measures what carried over.

Q10. Two significance questions to add: “How long did the plague last, and did later waves hurt as much as the first?” and “What difference did the shortage of workers make to work and pay afterwards?” — England’s Statute of Labourers of 1351, which tried to freeze pay, is one piece of evidence Chapter 3 follows. One unexpected development: the student assumes one outbreak, then meets burial records from 1361 — the plague came back. The review splits the question into waves: “How did the first wave (1347–1351) and later waves such as 1361 affect communities in different ways?”

Q11. (*model for part d*) The logbook cannot answer “How were the blocks lifted as the pyramid grew?” It is a log of trips: it records hauling and sailing, days and crews, because that was Merer’s job — moving stone from the quarries of Tura to the works. Lifting happened at the pyramid itself, under other officials, and a transport log was never going to record it. Naming what a source cannot answer matters as much as naming what it can: it tells you where to look next — here, to the pyramid itself, its tool marks and the ramp theories — and it keeps you from asking one source to do two jobs.

VC2HH8S01

Taught with .E01, .E02, .E04, .E05 and .E06. .E04 is taught with its First Nations key-question example removed per TOC §2A-D; the Rome key question and its subsidiary questions are restated in this book’s own words. .E03 is excluded entire per TOC §2A-C — its example question is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content; the id is retained as a linkage key only and is not taught or quoted. Draws on: VC2HH8S01.E01, VC2HH8S01.E02, VC2HH8S01.E04, VC2HH8S01.E05, VC2HH8S01.E06 (taught) · VC2HH8S01.E03 (excluded entire per §2A-C — retained as linkage key only).

Putting the past in order: chronology and timelines

Section 5B · Strand: Historical Concepts and Skills · Sub-strand: Chronology **Owens:** VC2HH8S02 **Draws on:** .E01 – .E05 (all five taught; .E01 taught with the ‘Deep Time’ and ‘Everywhen’ terms removed, D3)

Teaching sequence

1. Words to define before we start .E01

Key terms, defined before use.

- **Chronology** — the order in which things happened. Putting events in order is called **sequencing**.
- **Timeline** — a line with events placed in date order.
- **Primary source** — a thing made by people at the time being studied: a carving, a coin, a letter, a building.
- **Secondary source** — a later account built from primary sources, such as a museum page or a documentary.
- **Pleistocene, Holocene, BC, AD, BCE, CE, BP, pre-history, history** — the nine “words of time” in Figure 1; each is defined on its card.

History is the story of **when**. To explain why something happened, or what changed, we first have to put events, people, ideas and developments in the right order. Figure 1 defines the nine words this section uses for times and date systems.

The words of time: nine terms to know

Subject terms for sequencing the past, defined at first use.

Pleistocene the long cold stretch of Earth's past, from about 2.58 million years ago to about 11,700 years ago; often called the ice age	Holocene the warm stretch of Earth's past we still live in, from about 11,700 years ago to today	BC Before Christ; years counted back from the traditional birth of Jesus
AD Anno Domini, Latin for in the year of our Lord; years counted forward from the same point	BCE Before Common Era; the same years as BC, with a label that does not name a religion	CE Common Era; the same years as AD, with a label that does not name a religion
BP Before Present; years counted back from 1950 CE, used by scientists who measure how old things are	pre-history the time before people invented writing, so no written records survive; known from things left behind	history the time since writing was invented, about 5,000 years ago, so there are written records

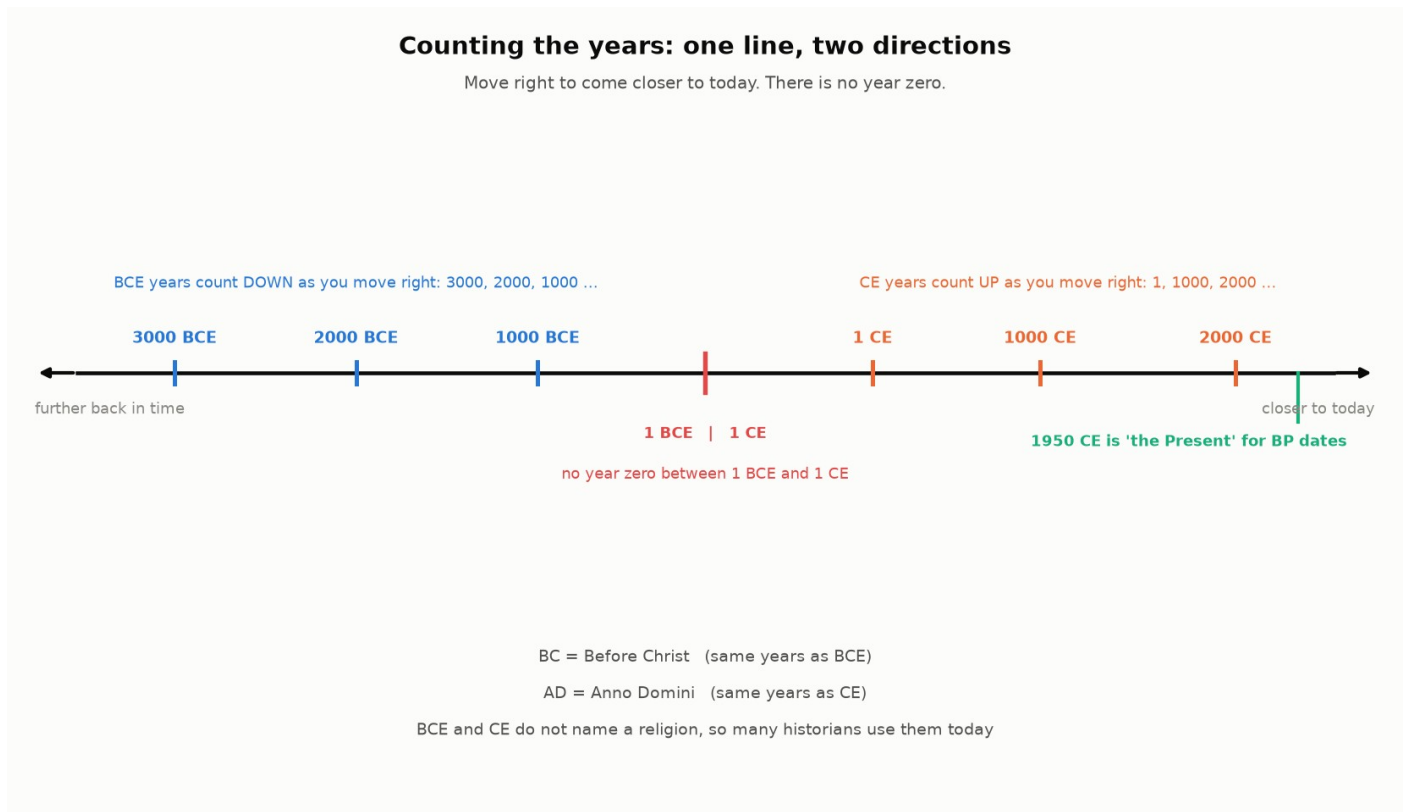
Chronology means putting things in the order they happened. A timeline is a line with events placed in date order.

Nine definition cards for the words of time: Pleistocene, Holocene, BC, AD, BCE, CE, pre-history, history and Before Present (BP), each with a one-line meaning

Figure 1. The words of time: nine terms to know.

2. Counting the years: two directions, no year zero .E01

Dates are numbers on a line, and the line runs in two directions (Figure 2).



Number line of years with BCE years counting down on the left and CE years counting up on the right, no year zero between 1 BCE and 1 CE, and 1950 CE marked as the Present for BP dates

Figure 2. Counting the years: one line, two directions.

Three rules to remember. **One:** BCE years count down as you move toward today, so a bigger BCE number is older — 3000 BCE is older than 500 BCE. **Two:** there is no year zero; the line jumps from 1 BCE straight to 1 CE. **Three:** scientists who measure how old things are often count years back from 1950 CE and call 1950 “the Present”, which is why some dates carry the label BP (Before Present).

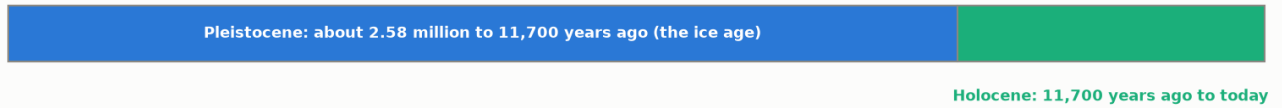
3. The long view: pre-history and history .E01

People have been on Earth for a very long time, but writing is a recent invention — only about 5,000 years old. That splits the human past into two spans (Figure 3).

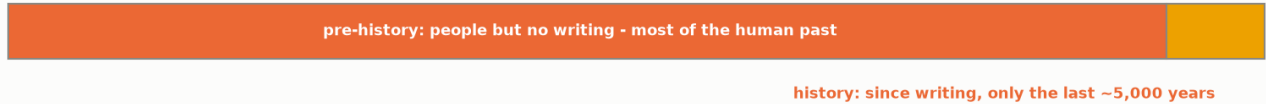
The long view: two big spans, and where writing fits

The bars are not drawn to scale - the Pleistocene is far longer.

Earth's time



The human past



Almost the whole human past is pre-history. Written history is only the last thin slice.

Bar diagram of the Pleistocene and Holocene spans and of pre-history and history, showing written history as a thin slice at the end

Figure 3. The long view: two big spans, and where writing fits.

Pre-history is the time before writing. No lists, no letters, no stories written down — nothing written survives, so we learn about it from things people left behind, like bones, stones and pottery. **History** is the time since writing, only the last ~5,000 years. Almost the whole human past is pre-history; written history is a thin slice at the end.

4. Why timelines have gaps .E02

Every timeline has gaps — stretches of time where we have little or no evidence. Gaps are not mistakes; they are normal (Figure 4).

Why timelines have gaps

A gap is a stretch of time where we have little or no evidence.



- soft things rot away: wood, cloth, skin and food rarely survive
- only hard things last: stone, metal, bone and pottery
- many people left no writing, or their records were lost
- fires, floods and wars destroyed records and buildings
- much is still buried and has not been dug up yet
- dates are often guesses, marked with c. for circa, meaning about

Gaps are normal. Historians fill them with the best evidence they have and say clearly where they are unsure.

Timeline bar with two hatched gaps and a list of six reasons why gaps occur, such as soft things rotting away and records being lost or buried

Figure 4. Why timelines have gaps.

The reasons are physical. Soft things rot away, hard things last, records burn or were never written, and much is still buried. Where the evidence is thin, historians say so, and they mark unsure dates with **c.** (for *circa*, meaning about).

5. Putting events and sources in order .E03

Sequencing is the same skill whether you are ordering events or ordering **primary sources**. Each source carries a date clue: a ruler's name, a style of art, a material. Order the clues and the sources line up; line them up and you can see what continued and what changed. Warm up with five real moments of ancient Egypt (Figure 5).

Put these five real moments of ancient Egypt in order

Remember: BCE years count down, so a bigger BCE number is older.

c. 1479 BCE Hatshepsut rules as pharaoh	c. 2600 BCE the Great Pyramid is built for Khufu	30 BCE Cleopatra VII dies; Rome takes Egypt	c. 2181 BCE the Old Kingdom breaks down	c. 2055 BCE Egypt is reunited under Mentuhotep II
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Tip: a bigger BCE number is older, so start with the biggest one.

Five shuffled event cards from ancient Egypt, each with a date: the Great Pyramid built for Khufu c. 2600 BCE, the Old Kingdom breaking down c. 2181 BCE, Egypt reunited under Mentuhotep II c. 2055 BCE, Hatshepsut ruling as pharaoh c. 1479 BCE, and Cleopatra VII dying in 30 BCE

Figure 5. Five real moments of ancient Egypt, shuffled — put them in order.

Remember the rule from Figure 2: a bigger BCE number is older. One real source sits at the very start of this story: the Narmer Palette (Figure 6).

Source card: the Narmer Palette

what it is	a flat carved stone slab showing King Narmer
when it was made	about 3100 BCE
what it shows	Narmer wearing the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, the two lands joined into one kingdom
kept at	the Egyptian Museum, Cairo
why it matters	it sits right at the start of ancient Egypt and close to the start of written history
why we question it	it is a royal object made to praise the king, so historians check it against other evidence

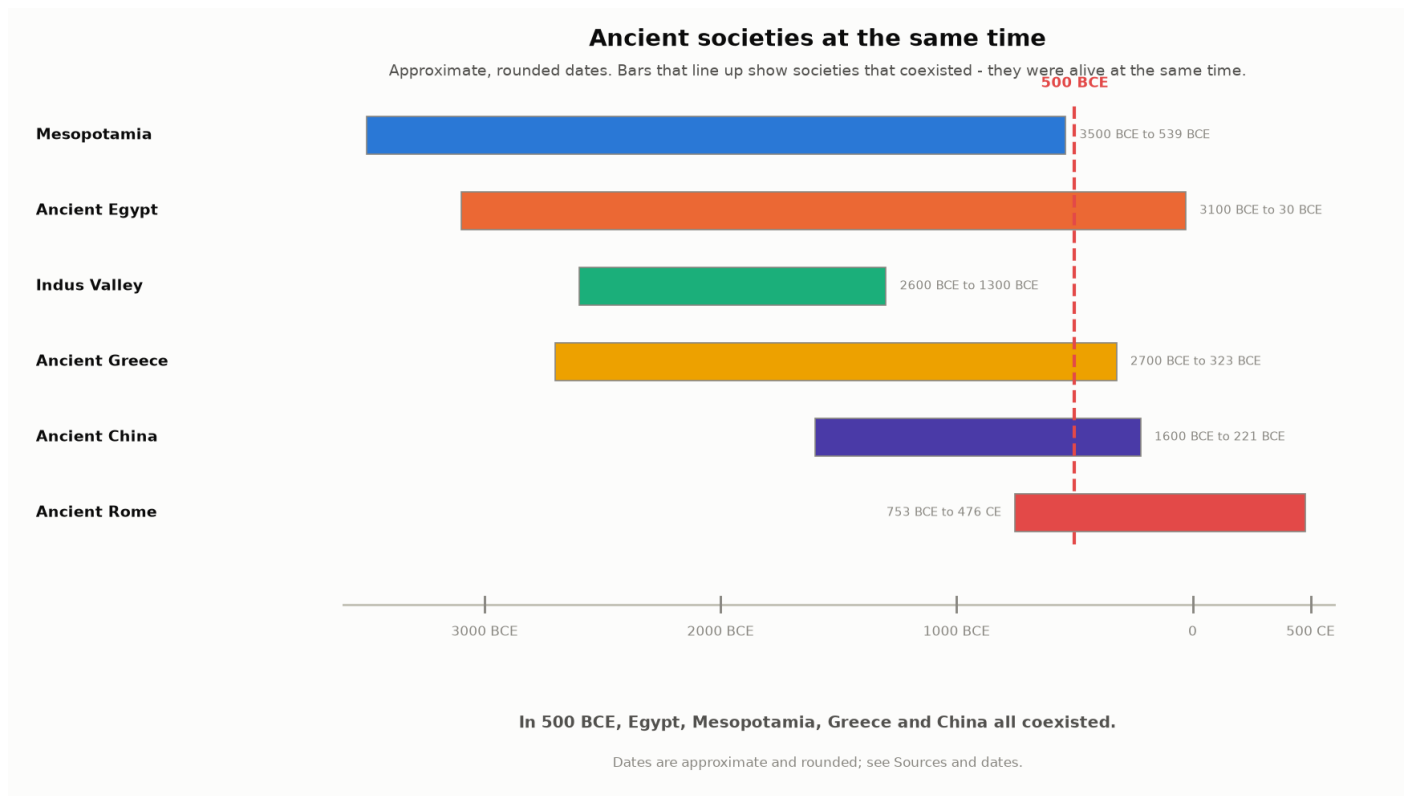
Source card table for the Narmer Palette: what it is, when it was made (about 3100 BCE), what it shows, where it is kept (the Egyptian Museum, Cairo), why it matters and why historians question it

Figure 6. Source card: the Narmer Palette.

The palette is a primary source made close to 3100 BCE, right at the start of ancient Egypt and close to the start of written history. It was made to praise the king, so historians check it against other evidence — that is what source work looks like. (Check your Figure 5 order against Q5’s answer at the end of the section.)

6. Ancient societies at the same time .E04

Ancient societies did not live one after another like chapters in a book; several were alive at the same time. Figure 7 shows the approximate life-span of six ancient societies. Where bars line up, the societies **coexisted** — they were alive at the same time.



Bar chart of six ancient societies with approximate start and end dates: Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, the Indus Valley, Ancient Greece, Ancient China and Ancient Rome, with a dashed line at 500 BCE crossing the societies alive in that year

Figure 7. Ancient societies at the same time.

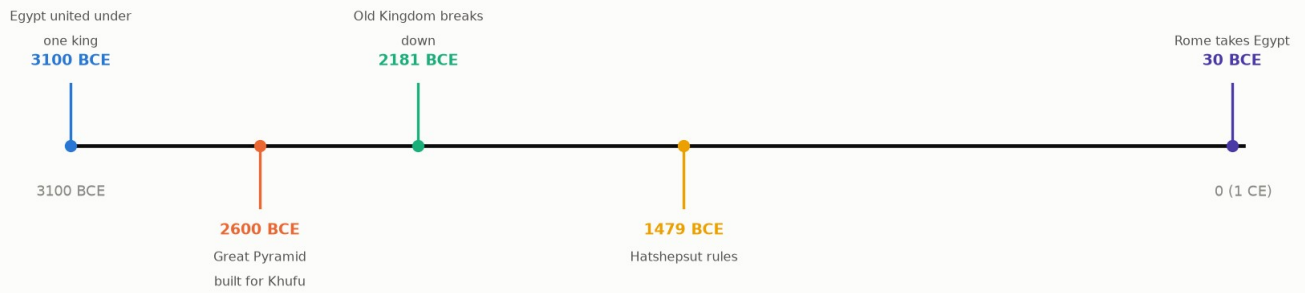
Follow the dashed line at 500 BCE: Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece and China were all alive in that one year. Yet Rome and the Indus Valley never met in time — the Indus cities had ended more than 500 years before Rome began.

7. Scaled timelines: distance shows time .E05

A plain timeline shows order but not how long between events. A **scaled timeline** fixes that: one centimetre stands for a fixed number of years, so distance on the page shows time passed (Figure 8).

A timeline drawn to scale: ancient Egypt

Here 1 cm stands for 500 years, so distance shows time passed.



The long space between the Pyramid (2600 BCE) and Hatshepsut (1479 BCE) shows that over 1,000 years passed between them.

Timeline of ancient Egypt drawn to scale with a scale bar reading 1 cm = 500 years, and five dated events placed by distance: 3100 BCE, 2600 BCE, 2181 BCE, 1479 BCE and 30 BCE

Figure 8. A timeline drawn to scale: ancient Egypt.

Look at the space between the Great Pyramid (2600 BCE) and Hatshepsut (1479 BCE). On a scaled line it is a long gap, because more than 1,000 years passed — longer than the whole span from the oldest buildings in your town to now. To build one yourself, follow the four steps in Figure 9. The scale work is the same ratio and scale work you meet in Year 7 mathematics.

How to build a scaled timeline

1. Choose your span: the first date and the last date.

2. Choose a scale that fits your page, for example 1 cm = 500 years.

3. For each event, work out its distance from the start: distance = (years after the start) divided by (years per cm).

4. Mark and label each event, then add a title and the scale bar.

Example: place 2000 BCE on a line running 3000 BCE to 0, with 1 cm = 100 years. Years after the start = $3000 - 2000 = 1000$. 1000 divided by 100 = 10, so mark it 10 cm from the start.

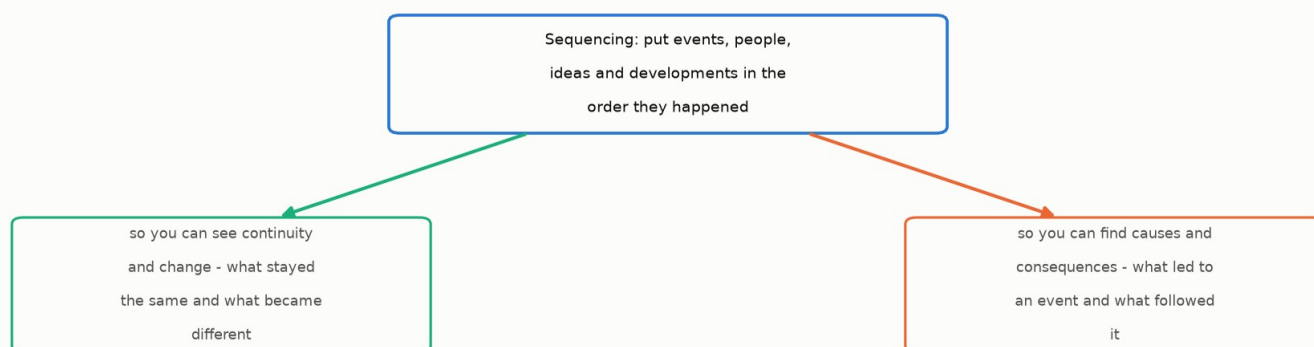
Four numbered steps for building a scaled timeline: choose the span, choose a scale, work out each event's distance from the start, then mark and label; with a worked placement of 2000 BCE on a line from 3000 BCE to 0 at 1 cm = 100 years

Figure 9. How to build a scaled timeline.

8. Putting it together: sequence first, then explain (CD)

Sequencing is not the end goal; it is the starting point. Once events, people, ideas and developments stand in order, you can see **continuity and change** — what stayed the same and what became different — and you can find **causes and consequences** — what led to an event and what followed it (Figure 10).

Putting it together: sequence first, then explain



What this section taught

E01 the words of time (terms and date systems)

E02 why timelines have gaps

E03 putting primary sources in order

E04 when ancient societies coexisted

E05 scaled timelines across thousands of years

Concept map with sequencing in the centre and arrows to continuity and change on the left and causes and consequences on the right, above a list of the five skills taught in this section, E01 to E05

Figure 10. Putting it together: sequence first, then explain.

Worked examples

Example 1 — with help .E03

Put these three real primary sources from ancient Egypt in chronological order (oldest first), then say what the order shows.

Working	Comment
(a) A carved stone slab, the Narmer Palette, showing King Narmer wearing the crowns of both lands of Egypt.	Made about 3100 BCE, at the start of ancient Egypt (Figure 6).
(b) Temple carvings showing Queen Hatshepsut's trading trip to the land of Punt.	Hatshepsut ruled from c. 1479 BCE — a smaller BCE number, so later.
(c) A silver coin struck with the face of Cleopatra VII, the last queen of Egypt.	Cleopatra died in 30 BCE — the smallest BCE number, so the newest.

∴ the order is (a) 3100 BCE → (b) c. 1479 BCE → (c) 30 BCE. Across about 3,000 years the three sources show one **continuity** — Egypt kept being ruled by one person — and one **change** — by the end, the last ruler was a queen in the shadow of Rome.

Example 2 — with help .E05

Place three events on a scaled timeline running from 3000 BCE to 0, using the scale 1 cm = 500 years.

Working	Comment
(a) 2500 BCE: years after the start = $3000 - 2500 = 500$; $500 \div 500 = 1$.	Mark it 1 cm from the start.
(b) 1500 BCE: years after the start = $3000 - 1500 = 1500$; $1500 \div 500 = 3$.	Mark it 3 cm from the start.
(c) 500 BCE: years after the start = $3000 - 500 = 2500$; $2500 \div 500 = 5$.	Mark it 5 cm from the start.
$\therefore$ the marks sit at 1 cm, 3 cm and 5 cm on a line 6 cm long ($3000 \div 500 = 6$). The spaces between the marks now show how much time passed, not just what came first.	

Practice tasks

Practice with help

Q1. (.E01) Using Figure 1, name the word for: (a) the cold stretch of Earth's past often called the ice age; (b) the warm stretch we still live in; (c) the time before writing.

Q2. (.E01) Using Figure 2: (a) which is older, 1500 BCE or 500 BCE? (b) what sits between 1 BCE and 1 CE? (c) BP dates count back from which year?

Q3. (.E01) Using Figure 3: (a) which span holds most of the human past? (b) about how many years of written history are there?

Q4. (.E02) Using Figure 4: (a) give two reasons why timelines have gaps; (b) what does **c.** mean on a date?

Q5. (.E03) Using Figure 5 and the BCE rule, write the five moments of ancient Egypt in order, oldest to newest, with their dates.

Q6. (.E04) Using Figure 7: (a) name four societies alive in 500 BCE; (b) which two societies never coexisted?

Practice on your own

Q7. (.E02) Explain why timelines have gaps. Use two reasons from Figure 4 and one reason of your own.

Q8. (.E04) Figure 7 shows six ancient societies. (a) Which society lasted the longest? (b) For roughly how many years did Egypt and Mesopotamia coexist? (c) Why should we say "roughly"?

Q9. (.E05) Build a scaled timeline of ancient Egypt from 3100 BCE to 30 BCE using the scale 1 cm = 500 years. (a) How long is the line, in cm? (b) Work out the cm mark for the Great Pyramid (2600 BCE) and for Hatshepsut (1479 BCE). (c) What does the space between those two marks show?

Q10. (CD) Using Figure 10 and one example from this section, explain why historians put things in order before they explain continuity and change, or causes and consequences.

Source-based inquiry task

Q11. (.E03) Study the source card in Figure 6 and answer the parts below.

- When was the Narmer Palette made?
- Is it a primary or a secondary source? Give one reason.
- What does it show about Egypt around 3100 BCE?
- The palette was made to praise the king. Give one reason why historians check it against other evidence.
- Place the palette against your Figure 5 order: does it come before or after the Great Pyramid, and by roughly how many years?

Answers

Q1. (a) Pleistocene. (b) Holocene. (c) Pre-history.

Q2. (a) 1500 BCE — the bigger BCE number is older. (b) Nothing: there is no year zero; the line jumps from 1 BCE straight to 1 CE. (c) 1950 CE.

Q3. (a) Pre-history. (b) About 5,000 years.

Q4. (a) Any two of: soft things rot away; only hard things last; many people left no writing or their records were lost; fires, floods and wars destroyed records; much is still buried and not dug up yet. (b) c. stands for circa, meaning about.

Q5. c. 2600 BCE the Great Pyramid is built for Khufu → c. 2181 BCE the Old Kingdom breaks down → c. 2055 BCE Egypt is reunited under Mentuhotep II → c. 1479 BCE Hatshepsut rules as pharaoh → 30 BCE Cleopatra VII dies and Rome takes Egypt.

Q6. (a) Any four of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and China. (b) The Indus Valley and Rome.

Q7–Q10 — see model answers below.

Q11. (a) About 3100 BCE. (b) Primary — it was made at the time, by people living in that Egypt. (c) One king, Narmer, wearing the crowns of both lands: the two lands joined into one kingdom. (d) It was made to praise the king, so it shows what the king wanted people to believe; historians check it against other evidence, such as digs and later records. (e) Before the Great Pyramid, by about 500 years (3100 BCE against 2600 BCE).

Model answers

Q7. Timelines have gaps because not everything survives. First, soft things like wood and cloth rot away, so only hard things like stone and pottery last (Figure 4). Second, many people left no writing, or their records were lost in fires, floods and wars. One reason of my own: some places have not been dug up yet, so the evidence is still in the ground. Because the evidence is patchy, some stretches of time stay empty.

Q8. (a) Egypt, at about 3,000 years (c. 3100 to 30 BCE). (b) They coexisted from c. 3100 BCE (Egypt's start) to 539 BCE (Mesopotamia's end) — roughly 2,500 years. (c) Because the dates are approximate and rounded; most carry c. (circa, about), and societies do not begin or end in a single year.

Q9. (a) The span is $3100 - 30 = 3070$ years; $3070 \div 500 \approx 6.1$ cm. (b) Great Pyramid: $3100 - 2600 = 500$ years after the start; $500 \div 500 = 1$ cm. Hatshepsut: $3100 - 1479 = 1621$ years after the start; $1621 \div 500 \approx 3.2$ cm. (c) The space shows that about 1,100 years passed between the Pyramid and Hatshepsut — the scaled line shows how long, not just what came first.

Q10. Historians put things in order first because order is what makes change and causes visible. For example, Figure 7 shows Rome beginning in 753 BCE, long after the Indus cities ended, so Rome's rise cannot be a cause of anything in the Indus Valley — the order rules it out. The same ordering shows continuity: Egypt kept one ruler for about 3,000 years, from Narmer (Figure 6) to Cleopatra. Sequencing is the tool that lets us say what stayed the same, what changed, what caused what, and what followed.

Sources and dates

All dates above are approximate and rounded for timeline work; **c.** means *circa* (about). Facts and dates checked against the references below (retrieved 25 August 2026):

- **The Narmer Palette** (c. 3100 BCE), Egyptian Museum, Cairo — object record for what it is, where it is kept and what it shows.
- **Ancient Egypt sequence** — the Great Pyramid built for Khufu c. 2600 BCE; the Old Kingdom ends c. 2181 BCE; Mentuhotep II reunites Egypt c. 2055 BCE; Hatshepsut rules c. 1479–1458 BCE, and the carvings of her trading trip to Punt stand at her temple at Deir el-Bahri; Cleopatra VII dies 30 BCE and Rome takes Egypt.

- **Cleopatra coinage** — silver coins struck with the face of Cleopatra VII, c. 50–30 BCE.
- **Pleistocene and Holocene** — International Commission on Stratigraphy: the Pleistocene runs 2.58 million to 11,700 years ago; the Holocene runs 11,700 years ago to today.
- **Writing and pre-history** — writing first appears about 5,000 years ago (c. 3300–3100 BCE) in Sumer and in Egypt.
- **Date systems** — AD counting was worked out by Dionysius Exiguus in 525 CE; there is no year zero between 1 BCE and 1 CE; BP (Before Present) counts back from 1950 CE.
- **Span dates of the ancient societies in Figure 7** — Mesopotamia c. 3500–539 BCE; Egypt c. 3100–30 BCE; the Indus Valley c. 2600–1300 BCE; Greece from the first Aegean civilisations c. 2700 BCE to 323 BCE; China from the Shang c. 1600 BCE to 221 BCE; Rome from its traditional founding in 753 BCE to the fall of the western empire in 476 CE.

Getting to know historical sources

Curriculum focus: this section owns VC2HH8S03 and draws on all six of its elaborations (none are excluded under this book's coverage decisions):

- .E01 — working with many kinds of sources: written materials (letters, speeches), oral tradition (stories passed on by word of mouth), visual sources (artworks), and artefacts (weapons, tools, buildings)
- .E02 — working with many kinds of interpretations: textbooks, books by historians, documentaries, films and novels
- .E03 — selecting and recording information from materials and from visual and written sources, and telling primary sources (made at the time being studied — the event, person or site) from secondary sources (made later, as interpretations)
- .E04 — explaining why translation and understanding across cultures is hard when questioning sources — for example Asoka's inscriptions and other edicts cut into stone or kept in religious writings, and the Vedas and the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics
- .E05 — judging the different methods for studying the ancient past — for example using layers (stratigraphy) to date finds, and DNA tests that identify diseases and particular people from what is left of them (Egyptian mummies, for example)
- .E06 — drawing a cross-section of an excavation site to see what evidence sits at each layer (stratigraphy) and what that shows about how things changed over time — for example, a charcoal layer holding human remains together with weapons can point to an ancient settlement being captured and destroyed (Troy is one case)

These skills are the intake side of inquiry: they are applied to the studies of Chapters 1–4 — Merer's diary (2G), the DNA studies of Egyptian mummies (1C), the Bayeux Tapestry (3B and 6D) — and to two cases studied here: Ashoka's edicts and the layers of Troy.

Chapters 1–4 gave you the past; this section gives you the toolkit for reading it. Every claim in those chapters leans on a **source** — a trace of the past that has survived and can tell us something. This section teaches you to ask three questions of any source: what is it like (its **features**), what does it say or show (its **content**), and what world was it made in (its **context**)? It then sorts sources into kinds — written, oral, visual and artefactual; primary and secondary — and turns to **interpretations**, the versions of the past made later from sources. Two hard cases follow: translation, where we try to read the words of an Indian king carved in stone about 2 300 years ago; and dating, where we ask how old a buried city is. The section ends at Troy — nine cities stacked in one mound — where you will read a model cross-section and learn to draw your own.

About the key words. Every key word is defined at first use, in bold. One word in this section is contested — experts argue about exactly what it means — and it gets its own box, with each side given equal weight (Part 5).

Teaching sequence

Part 1 — Three questions for every source (CD)

To read a source the way a historian does, ask three questions.

- **Features** — what the source is like: what it is made of, its size, whether it is written, stitched, carved or built, and its condition (whole, broken, worn).
- **Content** — what the source says or shows: its message or story, the people and events in it, and what it leaves out.

- **Context** — the world the source was made in: when and where, by whom, for whom, and what was happening at the time.

Three questions for every source

Features, content and context - this section's three ways of looking at a source.

Features

What the source is like.

- What is it made of?
- How big is it?
- Is it written, stitched, carved or built?
- What state is it in - whole, broken, worn?

Content

What the source says or shows.

- What is its message or story?
- Who and what appears in it?
- What does it leave out?

Context

The world the source was made in.

- When and where was it made?
- By whom, and for whom?
- What was happening at the time?

The three questions on Merer's diary (2G)

Features:	sheets of papyrus with writing in ink, now in pieces
Content:	a crew moving stone blocks by boat for the Great Pyramid
Context:	years 26 and 27 of King Khufu of Egypt, about 2560-2550 BCE

Worked example 1 uses these three questions step by step.

Three cards for the features, content and context questions, each with its test questions, and a worked strip applying all three to Merer's diary from section 2G

Features and content are *in* the source; context is the world *around* it. The same feature can mean different things depending on the context: a layer of ash in a cooking hearth is everyday life; a layer of ash over a whole city is destruction (Part 7).

Part 2 — Four kinds of sources (.E01)

Sources come in four kinds.

- **Written sources** put words down on a surface: letters, speeches, laws, lists, diaries and **logbooks** (day-by-day records of work, defined in 2G). Merer's diary is one (2G): sheets of **papyrus** — a writing material made from a river plant — with writing in ink, about 4 500 years old.
- **Oral sources** are spoken words kept in memory and passed on: stories, songs, speeches. Homer's *Iliad*, a long poem of the Trojan War, was sung for centuries before anyone wrote it down (Part 5).
- **Visual sources** are made to be seen: paintings, carvings, stitched pictures, statues. The Bayeux Tapestry is one (6D) — though it is not really a tapestry at all, as Part 3 explains.
- **Artefacts** are things people made or used: tools, weapons, pots, buildings. The bronze arrowheads from Troy's burnt layer are artefacts (Part 7), and so is a whole pyramid (2G).

Four kinds of historical sources

Every source in this section fits at least one of these four kinds.

Written

Words written down: letters, speeches, laws, lists, diaries.

Example

Merer's diary (2G) - a papyrus logbook, about 2560-2550 BCE

Oral

Spoken words kept in memory and passed on: stories, songs, speeches.

Example

Homer's Iliad - sung for centuries before it was written down

Visual

Pictures and things made to be seen: paintings, carvings, stitched cloth, statues.

Example

The Bayeux Tapestry (6D) - stitched cloth almost 70 metres long, about 1070s CE

Artefact

Things people made or used: tools, weapons, pots, buildings.

Example

Bronze arrowheads from Troy's burnt layer, about 1180 BCE

One source can fit two kinds: an edict carved in stone is written, and the stone itself is an artefact.

Four cards for the written, oral, visual and artefact kinds of sources, each with its definition and one dated example, and a note that one source can fit two kinds

The gallery below brings the four kinds together in five real sources. Each one returns in this section's worked examples and questions.

A gallery of five real sources

Each one returns later in this section. Each has a date, a place, and questions to ask.

Source	Kind	Made and found	What it holds
Merer's diary	Written	About 2560-2550 BCE - Wadi al-Jarf, Egypt	A work boss records his crew moving stone blocks by boat for the Great Pyramid.
The Iliad of Homer	Oral, later written	About the 700s BCE - Greece	A long poem of the Trojan War, kept in memory and sung before it was written down.
The Bayeux Tapestry	Visual	About the 1070s CE - Bayeux, France	About 70 stitched scenes of Harold, William and the battle of Hastings (1066).
Ashoka's edicts	Written, carved in stone	About 260 BCE - India and beyond	A king's orders and teachings, carved on pillars and rock faces.
Troy's arrowheads	Artefact	About 1180 BCE - Hisarlik, Turkey	Bronze arrowheads in a burnt layer: weapons left in the capture of a city.

These five sources are used in the worked examples and the questions that follow.

A gallery table of five real sources with their kind, their date and place, and one line of content: Merer's diary, Homer's Iliad, the Bayeux Tapestry, Ashoka's edicts and Troy's arrowheads

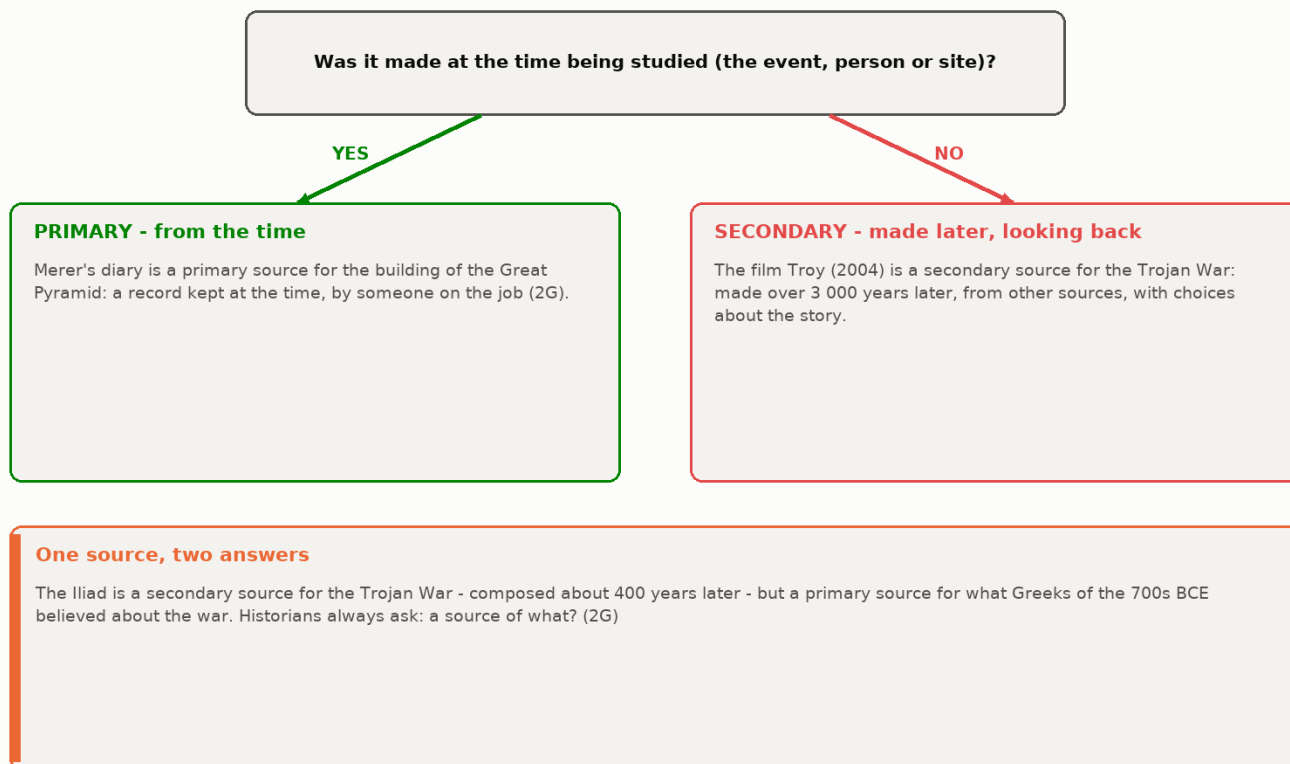
Source: Wikipedia, "Wadi al-Jarf papyri", "Iliad", "Bayeux Tapestry", "Edicts of Ashoka", "Troy" — retrieved 25 August 2026.

Part 3 — Primary and secondary sources (.E03)

The most important split in source work is about time. A **primary source** is from the time of the event, person or site being studied — made then, by someone who was there or close to it. A **secondary source** is made later, looking back: it represents a later interpretation, built from earlier sources. The test is one question: *when was it made, against the thing you are studying?*

Primary or secondary? One test

The test is about time: when was it made, against the thing you are studying?



The same test as section 2G. Here you use it on new sources.

A flow chart of the primary or secondary test with two dated examples, and an edge-case box explaining that one source can be primary for one question and secondary for another

Section 2G taught the careful edge: a source is always a source *of something*. The *Iliad* is a secondary source for the Trojan War — it was composed about 400 years after the war it sings about — but a primary source for what Greeks of the 700s BCE believed about the war. The habit to build is the same one 2G ended on: never ask “Is this a good source?”; ask “A source of what?”

When you select and record information from sources, note two things every time: the source’s kind (Part 2) and its date against your question. That habit keeps primary and secondary from blurring.

A word about the Bayeux Tapestry. It is not a woven tapestry but a strip of linen almost 70 metres long with pictures stitched in wool thread — a work of **embroidery** (pictures stitched onto cloth), made probably in the 1070s CE, about ten years after the battle of Hastings (6D). For the battle itself it counts as primary — made within living memory of the event — but it was made for the Norman side, the winners. Being from the time does not make a source neutral.

Part 4 — Interpretations: five forms (.E02)

An **interpretation** is a version of the past made later, from sources. Every interpretation carries choices: what to put in, what to leave out, whose voice to follow. Interpretations come in at least five forms — textbooks, books by historians, documentaries, films and novels.

Interpretations: five forms

An interpretation is a version of the past made later, from sources. It always carries choices: what to put in, what to leave out, whose voice to follow.

Form	A real example	What it does well	What to watch
Textbooks	This workbook	Checked and ordered for learning	Short space; cannot show every debate
Writings of historians	Books by the diggers of Troy	Deep study of evidence, with reasons given	Often about one slice; can be hard going
Documentaries	Films about Egyptian mummies (1C)	Show real things: sites, objects, tests	Must cut and choose to hold viewers
Films	Troy (2004)	Bring the past to life for millions	Made for cinemas; the story comes first
Fiction	The Iliad; the Ramayana	Carry feelings, values and memory across ages	Not written to be checked as fact

Forms can mix: the Iliad is both an oral source and a work of fiction.

A table of five forms of interpretation — textbooks, books by historians, documentaries, films and novels — each with a real example, what it does well and what to watch

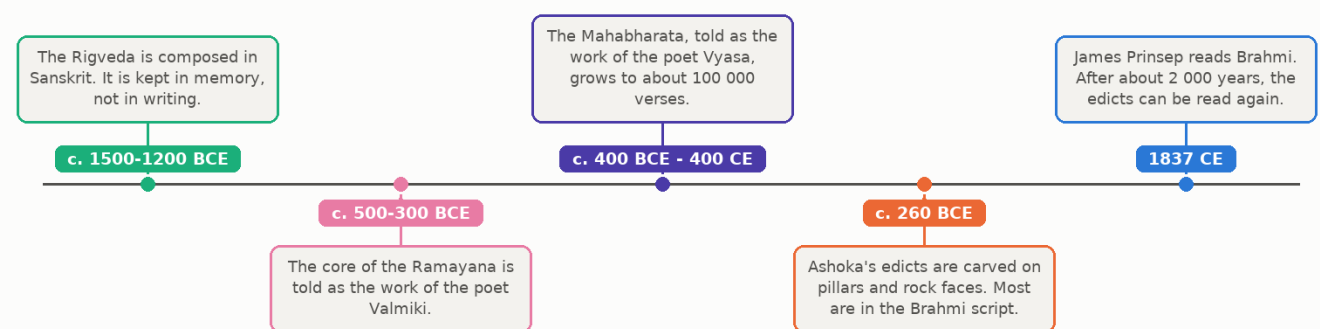
No form is simply wrong; each has what it does well and what to watch. The skill is not to reject interpretations but to ask what each form is good at, and what it must cut. You will take these questions further in 5D (the value of sources) and 5F (interpretations and debates).

Part 5 — The challenge of translation (.E04)

The hardest sources to interrogate — to question closely — are the ones separated from us by language *and* by world. The curriculum's examples are India's: the inscriptions of Ashoka (the curriculum spells him Asoka), the Vedas, and the epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

India's texts: from memory to stone to print

Made, kept, carved, lost, found again - the dates matter for translation.



Long gaps between 'made' and 'written down' make oral texts hard to date.

A timeline from c. 1500 BCE to 1837 CE placing the Rigveda, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, Ashoka's edicts carved in stone, and Prinsep's reading of the Brahmi script

Ashoka's edicts. Ashoka ruled the Mauryan empire in India from about 268 to 232 BCE. From about 260 BCE he had his orders and teachings carved on pillars and rock faces across his lands: **edicts** (a ruler's public orders, carved here so they could be read out to everyone), most of them in a script called **Brahmi**. Brahmi later fell out of use, and for

about 2 000 years no one alive could read the edicts. In 1837, James Prinsep worked out how to read Brahmi — **deciphered** it (worked out what a forgotten script says) — by matching its letters against scripts people still knew. The edicts could speak again. One of them, the Separate Rock Edict I, carved at Dhauli and Jaugada, says in modern words: “*All men are my children. What I wish for my own children — their welfare and happiness in this world and the next — I wish for all men.*” At Kandahar, in modern Afghanistan, one edict was carved twice over, in Greek and in Aramaic — the languages spoken there — a gift to translators, and proof that Ashoka spoke to different peoples in their own tongues.

The translation chain: from stone to your reading

Every step can change the message. Historians check each step.

Step

1 - Carved in stone, about 260 BCE

2 - The script falls out of use

3 - Deciphering: Prinsep, 1837

4 - Word by word into English

5 - Choices made for the reader

What can go wrong

Weather and time wear the stone; faces break off.

For about 2 000 years, no one alive could read Brahmi.

Matching letters can go wrong; early readings get corrected.

Some words have no English match - *dharma* is one.

Every word chosen pushes the reading one way.

Two translators of the same edict can give you two different Ashokas.

A five-step translation chain from carved stone to the reader, each step with what can go wrong: weathering, the script falling out of use, deciphering, word-for-word translation, and choices made for the reader

Contested term: *dharma*.

Dharma is the word Ashoka’s edicts lean on most, and translators argue about how to carry it into English. It is a word of its own culture — a key idea in India’s holy texts — and no single English word covers it. The contest is about which face of the word to show.

- **One side** translates it as *law* or *duty*: Ashoka was a king giving orders to his officials and his people, and in the edicts *dharma* reads as what people owe one another — no cruelty, respect for elders, good treatment of servants.
- **The other side** translates it as *the right way to live*, or as *religion*: the edicts also teach inner change — gentleness, calm control of self, respect for all beliefs — which reads less like law and more like a guide to living.

Both sides agree that the word mattered to Ashoka more than any other, and that every translation picks one face of it and pushes the reader one way. Careful translators therefore keep the word *dharma* and explain it. Do the same in your writing.

The Vedas and the epics. The **Vedas** are India’s oldest holy texts. The oldest of them, the *Rigveda* — songs to the gods — was composed in **Sanskrit** (the old language of India’s holy texts) around 1500–1200 BCE, and was kept for centuries in memory, not in writing: passed from teacher to student, word by word. The two great epics grew the same way: the *Ramayana*, told as the work of the poet Valmiki (its core story from about the 400s–300s BCE), and the *Mahabharata*, told as the work of the poet Vyasa and growing to about 100 000 verses between about 400 BCE and 400 CE.

Two challenges follow for anyone interrogating these sources.

- **Translation.** A text kept in memory for centuries before it was written down exists in many versions; a translator must choose which version to follow, and then find modern words for ideas the first hearers simply knew.
- **Intercultural understanding.** Even the right words can mislead if we read them with our own world in mind. Dharma is not just “law”; a king’s duty in the edicts is not just a job. Reading these sources means learning enough of their world to notice where ours gets in the way.

Source: Wikipedia, “Edicts of Ashoka”, “Separate Rock Edicts”, “James Prinsep”, “Dharma”, “Rigveda”, “Mahabharata”, “Ramayana” — retrieved 25 August 2026.

Part 6 — How we date and read the ancient past (.E05)

How old is it? For the ancient past, two methods carry most of the load; you met both in 1C.

Stratigraphy — the study of layers — puts finds in order. At a dig, deeper layers were laid down earlier, so they are usually older; a layer of charcoal and ash marks a fire, and charcoal can be dated in a lab, which gives the layer an age in years (1C). Stratigraphy’s strength is *order*; its limit is that without a dated find, it gives order, not numbers.

DNA testing reads the body’s code from bones and teeth (1C). Two results from Egyptian mummies: in 2010, a team led by Zahi Hawass and Albert Zink showed from DNA that the mummy in tomb KV55 was Tutankhamun’s father and the mummy known as the “Younger Lady” was his mother — and found signs of malaria in several mummies, Tutankhamun among them. In 2017, a team led by Johannes Krause and Verena Schuenemann showed that the people buried at Abusir el-Meleq stayed closely related to one another across about 1 300 years.

Investigating the ancient past: match the method to the question

Every method answers some questions - and cannot answer others.

Question	Method	What it cannot tell you
Which layer is the oldest?	Stratigraphy: the study of layers - deeper is usually older	Ages in years. It gives order, not dates.
When did this city burn?	The burnt layer itself, with its charcoal dated in a lab	Who set the fire, or why.
Were these two people family? Did one carry a disease?	DNA testing of bones and teeth (1C)	What people believed, or how they felt.
What did people make, eat or trade?	Artefacts, seeds, animal bones, buildings	Names - unless writing also survives.
What did the king order his people?	Reading inscriptions, once the script is deciphered	Whether people obeyed.

Sections 1C and 2G showed these methods at work on Egypt. Here we weigh what each can and cannot answer.

A matching table of five historian’s questions with the method that answers each — stratigraphy, lab dating of charcoal, DNA testing, artefacts, reading inscriptions — and what each method cannot tell you

To **evaluate** a method is to ask both questions at once: what *can* it answer, and what can it *never* answer? Stratigraphy cannot tell you what people believed; DNA cannot tell you how they felt about their king. Good investigations pair methods — layers, bones, artefacts, and writing when it survives.

Source: Hawass, Zink and others, *JAMA*, vol. 303 (2010); Schuenemann, Krause and others, *Nature Communications*, vol. 8 (2017) — retrieved 25 August 2026.

Part 7 — Reading and drawing cross-sections: the layers of Troy (.E06)

Here the skills join: stratigraphy (Part 6) and the three questions of Part 1 meet at one site — Troy. Homer’s poems kept the name alive, and the lost city was found again at the mound of **Hisarlik**, in modern Turkey. Digs began under Heinrich Schliemann from the 1870s — his great trench cut straight through the layers, and with them through some of the very evidence he wanted — continued under Carl Blegen in the 1930s, and from 1988 Manfred Korfmann’s team dug with modern care, recording every layer.

Nine cities, one mound: a model cross-section of Hisarlik (Troy)

People lived here for about 4 000 years. Each city was built on the last.

surface today

Troy IX c. 85 BCE - 500 CE a Roman city
Troy VIIb-VIII c. 1180-85 BCE new peoples settle; then a Greek town
Troy VIIa c. 1250-1180 BCE DESTRUCTION LAYER - charcoal, ash, arrowheads and bodies left unburied. The city was captured and burnt about 1180 BCE. 
Troy VI c. 1700-1250 BCE strong walls; ended by an earthquake
Troy III-V c. 2300-1700 BCE rebuilds after troubles
Troy II c. 2500-2300 BCE a richer city with big walls
Troy I c. 3000-2500 BCE a small first settlement

Reading one layer

Charcoal, ash, weapons and bodies in one layer. Read together, they say: this city was captured and destroyed.

Who dug Hisarlik?

Dug by Schliemann from the 1870s - his great trench cut straight through the layers - by Blegen in the 1930s, and by Korfmann from 1988 with modern care.

Model section drawn for this workbook, after the real digs at Hisarlik. Depths and finds simplified.

A model cross-section of the Hisarlik mound with seven labelled layer groups from Troy I at the bottom to Troy IX at the top, the Troy VIIa destruction layer picked out with charcoal, ash, arrowheads and bodies, a reading box and a note on the diggers

The mound holds nine main cities stacked one on another, from Troy I (deepest, oldest) to Troy IX (top, youngest). Each layer is a **stratum**; together they are the **strata** of the site, read by stratigraphy. The layer most people come for is **Troy VIIa** (about 1250–1180 BCE): it holds charcoal and ash, bronze arrowheads, and bodies left unburied. Read together, these are the marks of capture and destruction — exactly the kind of layer .E06 describes: a charcoal layer holding human remains together with weapons can point to an ancient settlement being captured and destroyed (Troy is one case). It is also the layer many historians connect with the Trojan War of Greek legend — a connection to test, not a fact to assume.

Draw your own cross-section, like an archaeologist

You will use these steps in the practice questions and in class.

1 Pick one face of the trench and draw its outline to scale.

2 Add a depth ruler in metres. The surface is 0 m.

3 Draw the layers from the bottom up. The bottom layer was laid down first, so it is the oldest.

4 Mark the finds inside their layers: walls, pots, bones, charcoal, arrowheads.

5 Label each layer: what it is, and what it holds.

6 Write a caption: what does your section show about change over time? If it is practice, say it is a model, not a real dig.

Bottom-up keeps the order of time: deeper means older - usually. Watch for pits cut down from above (1C).

A six-step how-to for drawing a cross-section: choose a trench face, add a depth ruler, draw layers bottom-up, mark finds, label layers, write a caption

An archaeologist records strata with a **cross-section**: a drawing of the face of a trench, with a depth ruler in metres, the layers and their finds marked, and a caption. In the practice questions you will read the model section above, and then draw a section of your own. When a drawing is for practice — as ours is — say so in the caption. A model teaches the method, and honesty about models is part of the method.

Source: Wikipedia, “Troy”, “Hisarlik”, “Heinrich Schliemann”, “Carl Blegen”, “Manfred Korfmann” — retrieved 25 August 2026.

Worked examples

Worked example 1 — with help: features, content and context of Merer’s diary (CD, .E01, .E03)

Apply the three questions of Part 1 to Merer’s diary (2G), then classify it. Work through parts (a)–(d).

Working	Comment
(a) Features: sheets of papyrus with writing in ink, in columns; torn and worn, now in pieces; about 4 500 years old.	Features are what the source <i>is like</i> : material, size, writing, condition.
(b) Content: a logbook of years 26 and 27 of King Khufu’s rule. Merer’s crew moved about 30 limestone blocks of 2 to 3 tonnes per boat trip from Tura to Akhet-Khufu — the Great Pyramid site — a round trip of about ten days, with food brought from Heliopolis.	Content is what the source <i>says or shows</i> . Note what is missing: the diary records work, not feelings — it never describes the king, or says how the crew felt about the work.
(c) Context: Egypt about 2560–2550 BCE, in the middle of pyramid building — a state that could feed, house and direct work crews. Found in 2013 at Wadi al-Jarf by a French–Egyptian team led by Pierre Tallet and Gregory Marouard.	Context is the world <i>around</i> the source: when, where, by whom, and what was happening at the time.
(d) Primary source for the moving of the stone: a record made at the time, by someone on the job.	The test of Part 3: when was it made, against the thing you are studying? For the building of the pyramid, Merer’s diary is from the time itself.

Worked example 2 — with help: reading the destruction layer of Troy (.E06, .E05)

Use the model cross-section of Hisarlik in Part 7. Work through parts (a)–(d).

Working	Comment
(a) Troy I is the oldest city: it is the deepest layer with human traces.	The rule of stratigraphy (Part 6, 1C): deeper layers were laid down earlier, so they are usually older.
(b) Troy VIIa holds charcoal, ash, bronze arrowheads and bodies left unburied. Read together: a fire, fighting, and death with no time for burial — the city was captured and burnt about 1180 BCE.	One layer, four pieces of evidence. No single one proves capture; together they match .E06's example — a charcoal layer with human remains and weapons indicating the capture and destruction of a settlement.
(c) The caption says “model section drawn for this workbook”. It is not a real section: real sections are messier, and are drawn at the trench face during a dig.	Honesty about models is part of the method (Part 7). The model teaches how to read layers; a real dig records what is actually there.
(d) Change: small first settlement, then walled cities, then a Roman city; weapons and walls changed with each rebuild. Continuity: people kept living on the same mound, building on top of the past, for about 4 000 years.	A cross-section shows change over time — the point of .E06 — and continuity beside it. Notice how one drawing carries both.

Practice questions

Practice with help

Q1. Four kinds of sources (.E01). From the gallery in Part 2, give one example of (a) a written source, (b) an oral source, (c) a visual source and (d) an artefact. For each, name the source and say when it was made.

Q2. Primary or secondary (.E03)? Classify each source *for the question given*, and say why: (a) Merer's diary, for the question “How did stone get to the Great Pyramid?”; (b) the film *Troy* (2004), for the Trojan War; (c) the Bayeux Tapestry, stitched in the 1070s CE, for the battle of Hastings on 14 October 1066; (d) this workbook, for the destruction of Troy.

Q3. Three questions on one source (CD). Apply features, content and context to the Bayeux Tapestry, using the facts of 6D's source card: a strip of linen almost 70 metres long with pictures stitched in wool thread; probably made in the 1070s CE; kept at Bayeux in France; made for the Norman side. Give one point for each question.

Q4. The translation chain (.E04). Put these steps in the correct order (see the chain in Part 5): **A** a translator chooses English words for *dharma*; **B** the edicts are carved in stone; **C** James Prinsep matches Brahmi's letters against scripts still known and reads the edicts; **D** the script falls out of use and no one alive can read it; **E** weather and time wear the stone.

Q5. Match the method (.E05). Match each question to the best method — *stratigraphy*; *dating charcoal in a lab*; *DNA testing*; *reading inscriptions*: (a) Which city at Hisarlik is the oldest? (b) Did the mummy of a young king carry malaria? (c) When did Troy VIIa burn? (d) What did Ashoka order his people?

Q6. Definitions (CD). In your own words, define: (a) features; (b) content; (c) context; (d) primary source; (e) secondary source; (f) stratigraphy. Start each with the word itself, e.g. “Features are ...”.

Practice on your own

Q7. One source, two answers (.E03). The film *Troy* (2004) is a secondary source for the Trojan War. Could it ever be a primary source? If so, of what? Explain using the habit of 2G: a source is always a source *of* something.

Q8. A word that will not sit still (.E04). Why can a translator not carry *dharma* into English with one word? Give at least two ideas the word carries, and say what a reader loses if the translator picks only one of them (see the contested-term box in Part 5).

Q9. Correct the claim (.E05). “Stratigraphy tells you exactly how old everything is.” Correct this claim in two or three sentences: say what stratigraphy *can* tell you, and what it needs in order to give ages in years.

Q10. Five forms, one choice (.E02). Choose one form of interpretation from Part 4 — textbook, the writings of historians, documentary, film or fiction. Give one strength and one limit of that form as a way of knowing the ancient past, with a named example from this section.

Source-based inquiry

Q11. Study the sources and answer (a)–(c).

Source A — Ashoka's Separate Rock Edict I, retold in modern words (a translation made for this workbook; the edict is carved at Dhauli and Jaugada, about 260 BCE): *"All men are my children. What I wish for my own children — their welfare and happiness in this world and the next — I wish for all men."*

Source B — facts about the reading of the edicts: *Most of Ashoka's edicts are carved in Brahmi, a script that later fell out of use. For about 2 000 years no one alive could read it. In 1837, James Prinsep matched Brahmi's letters against scripts still known, and read the edicts. After about 2 000 years, Ashoka's own words could be heard again.*

Source C — model source written for this workbook, a translator at work on one word: *"The hardest word in the edicts is dharma. I can write 'law', but Ashoka means more than law. I can write 'duty', but he means more than duty. Whatever word I choose, I push the reader one way. So I keep the word dharma, and I explain it."*

- (a) What does Source A want Ashoka's people to believe about how he will rule them? Use words from the source in your answer.
 - (b) Using Source B and the translation chain of Part 5, explain two reasons why Ashoka's words in English are not the same as Ashoka's words in Brahmi. Name two steps of the chain in your answer.
 - (c) Using all three sources and what you know from this section: can we be sure we know what Ashoka meant by *dharma*? Give one argument each side, then your own view with reasons.
-

Answers

Q1. Any correct pairing from the gallery, e.g.: (a) written — Merer’s diary, about 2560–2550 BCE (or Ashoka’s edicts, about 260 BCE); (b) oral — Homer’s *Iliad*, about the 700s BCE, later written down; (c) visual — the Bayeux Tapestry, about the 1070s CE; (d) artefact — the bronze arrowheads from Troy’s burnt layer, about 1180 BCE.

Q2. (a) Primary — a record made at the time, by someone on the job. (b) Secondary — made over 3 000 years later, from other sources, with choices about the story. (c) Primary — made in the 1070s CE, within living memory of 1066; but made for the winners, so not neutral. (d) Secondary — written long after the event, from earlier sources.

Q3. Features: a strip of linen almost 70 m long, pictures stitched in wool thread (embroidery, not weaving). Content: about 70 scenes of Harold, William and the battle of Hastings — the oath, the ships, the fight, William’s victory. Context: made probably in the 1070s CE for the Norman side — the winners — so it tells the conquest the way the winners wanted it told.

Q4. B, E, D, C, A.

Q5. (a) Stratigraphy. (b) DNA testing. (c) Dating charcoal in a lab. (d) Reading inscriptions.

Q6. (a) Features are what a source is like — its material, size, writing or pictures, and condition. (b) Content is what a source says or shows — its message, story and people. (c) Context is the world a source was made in — when, where, by whom, for whom. (d) A primary source is made at the time being studied (the event, person or site). (e) A secondary source is made later, looking back, built from earlier sources. (f) Stratigraphy is the study of the layers of a dig; deeper layers were laid down earlier, so they are usually older.

Q7. Answers vary; see the model below for the shape of a full answer.

Q8. Answers vary; must give at least two ideas carried by *dharma* and one thing the reader loses if only one is chosen. See the model below.

Q9. Answers vary; must say stratigraphy gives order (older/younger), not numbers, and needs something datable — e.g. charcoal dated in a lab, or a find of known date — to give years.

Q10. Answers vary; must name one form, give one strength and one limit, and use a named example (e.g. film: *Troy*, 2004 — brings the past to life for millions, but the story comes first and facts can bend).

Q11. (a) That he rules like a father: he calls all people “my children” and wishes for everyone what he wishes for his own children — welfare and happiness “in this world and the next”. (b) Any two named steps, e.g.: the stone wore with weather, so some words are lost or uncertain; the script fell out of use, so we read Ashoka through Prinsep’s matching of letters, which can go wrong; English has no match for *dharma*, so the translator’s choice pushes the reading. (c) See the model below.

Model responses

Model for Q8 (on your own). *Dharma* carries at least three ideas at once: what people owe one another (law or duty — no cruelty, respect for elders, good treatment of servants), and the right way to live as a person (gentleness, calm control of self, respect for all beliefs). If a translator always writes “law”, the reader meets a king handing down rules and misses the inner change the edicts also teach; if the translator always writes “religion”, the reader misses that Ashoka was also ordering real officials about real behaviour. Something is lost either way, because no one English word covers the whole field of the original. That is why careful translators — like the translator in Source C — keep the word *dharma* and explain it, and that is the right move in your writing too.

Model for Q11(c). Source A gives Ashoka’s own claim: he rules like a father, wishing all people the welfare and happiness he wishes his children. Source B reminds us how that claim reaches us: through a lost script read again only in 1837, after about 2 000 years of silence. Source C names the problem at the heart of the question: the edicts’ key word, *dharma*, has no single English match, and every choice of words pushes the reader one way. The strongest case for being sure: the edicts are Ashoka’s own words, carved by his order, in many places and in more than one language, and Prinsep’s reading can be checked against those other versions — so the message is as close to the king as the ancient past gets. The strongest case against: the stone is worn, the reading is a reconstruction, and the central word is

contested — as the contested-term box shows, experts still argue between law, duty and the right way to live. My view: we can be sure of the shape of what Ashoka meant — rule with care, as a father to his people — but not of the exact edges of *dharma*, because the word itself does the work of several English words at once. The honest answer is the translator's: keep the word, explain it, and say what is uncertain.

Sources for this section

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Judging sources as evidence

Section 5D · Strand: Historical Concepts and Skills · Sub-strand: Using historical sources **Owens:** VC2HH8S04

Draws on: .E01–.E06 (all six taught in this section)

Teaching sequence

1. Words to define before we start

Key terms, defined before use. The Victorian Curriculum uses several of the words below but does not define them, so this section defines every one at first use.

- **Source** — a trace of the past that historians can use: something written, made, built, said or drawn that has survived (taught in 5C).
- **Primary source** — a source made at the time, by people who were there (taught in 5C).
- **Secondary source** — a source made later, looking back (taught in 5C).
- **Value** — how useful a source is for the question you are asking. A source is never just “good” or “useless”; its value depends on the question.
- **Fact (claim)** — a claim that can be tested against evidence. It may still turn out wrong — that is what testing is for.
- **Opinion (claim)** — a claim that says what someone thinks, feels or values. Evidence alone cannot settle it.
- **Validity** — how far a source stands up to checking: who made it, what it gives, whether it is fact or opinion, and what other sources support or challenge it. A source with weak validity for one question can still have value for another.
- **Power structure** — how power is shared in a society: who gives orders, who obeys, and who must answer.
- **Criterion / criteria** — one test or measure is a *criterion*; several are *criteria*. Section 2F built six criteria for significance: **power, change, reach, time, evidence, memory**.
- **Interpretation** — a historian’s reading of what happened and why. Two historians can read the same sources and reach different interpretations.

Earlier chapters taught you to **describe** sources and their value. This section takes the next step: you will **analyse** value — that is, take it apart and show your reasons. Every source in this section is one you have already met in Chapters 1–4, so the content is familiar and the skill is new.

2. Value depends on the question (CD)

A source is a trace of the past; a primary source was made at the time, a secondary source later (5C). The first habit of analysis is this: **never ask “is this a good source?” — always ask “what is this source good for?”** The same source changes value as the question changes. Figure 1 runs one famous source past three questions.

One source, three questions: value depends on the question

The diary of Merer, about 2560-2550 BCE (section 2G)

What the diary records

In years 26 and 27 of King Khufu, an inspector named Merer kept a log of his crew. They moved about 30 limestone blocks of 2 to 3 tonnes each by boat from Tura to Giza, a round trip of about ten days. Food for the crew came from Heliopolis.

The question you ask

The diary's value

How did stone get to the pyramid site?

high value

High - it records exactly this, kept by someone on the job.

What food did the crew eat?

some value

Some - it says food came from Heliopolis, but not what the food was.

What did King Khufu look like?

no value

None - the diary never describes the king.

Do not ask 'Is this a good source?' Ask 'What is this source good for?'

Table showing that the value of Merer's diary, about 2560–2550 BCE, changes with the question asked: high value for how stone reached the pyramid site, some value for the crew's food, and no value for what King Khufu looked like

Figure 1. One source, three questions: value depends on the question.

Merer's diary (2G) is a primary source kept by or for an inspector whose crew moved limestone by boat to Giza in years 26 and 27 of Khufu, about 2560–2550 BCE. For the question “how did stone get to the pyramid site?” its value is high — it records exactly that, kept by someone on the job. For “what food did the crew eat?” its value is only some — it says food came from Heliopolis, but not what the food was. For “what did King Khufu look like?” its value is none. The source did not change; the question did.

3. Different forms of evidence, different values (.E02)

Evidence comes in different forms, and each form shows some things best while carrying its own points to watch. Figure 2 lines up five forms, each with a named example you have already met.

Four forms of evidence, from four chapters of this book

Each form shows some things best. Each has points to watch.

Form	A named example	What it shows best	What to watch
■ Written	Merer's diary, about 2560-2550 BCE (2G)	names, dates, counts, what people did	who wrote it, and what did they gain by writing it?
■ Visual	Nebamun's tomb-chapel paintings, about 1350 BCE (2B)	scenes of daily life: work, dress, hunting	tomb art shows rich lives, and things as the owner wished them seen
■ Objects (artefacts)	Deir el-Medina ostraca - written limestone scraps, about 1170 BCE (2B)	the everyday voice of ordinary workers	objects survive by chance; most lives leave no trace at all
■ Buildings and sites	Warwick Castle, from 1068 CE (3A)	power and defence: thick walls, towers, a gatehouse	buildings change over time; not every part is the same age
■ Spoken, then written down	The Secret History of the Mongols, written about 1240 CE (4A)	how a people told their own story	a story can shift as it moves by word of mouth

Table of five forms of evidence, each with a named example from this book — written (Merer's diary), visual (Nebamun's tomb-chapel paintings), objects or artefacts (the Deir el-Medina ostraca), buildings and sites (Warwick Castle), and spoken then written down (the Secret History of the Mongols) — showing what each form shows best and what to watch

Figure 2. Four forms of evidence, from four chapters of this book.

Written sources give names, dates and counts, so you must ask who wrote them and what the writer gained. Visual sources show daily life in a way writing rarely does, but tomb art shows things as the owner wished them seen. Objects give a voice to ordinary people who never wrote, yet objects survive by chance. Buildings show power you can measure in stone, but they change over time. And a story told aloud and written down later, like the Secret History of the Mongols (4A), shows how a people told their own story — and how a story can shift as it moves by word of mouth. The form is never neutral: it decides what a source *can* show.

4. Little evidence can still show power (.E01)

In the ancient and medieval worlds, most writing was done by and for the powerful — scribes, priests, rulers. Workers, women and owned people left little writing of their own. That limit is real, but limited evidence can still give a clear picture of the **power structure** — who gave orders, who obeyed, and who must answer. Figure 3 reads one small scrap from Deir el-Medina (2B), the village of the royal tomb-workers.

Little evidence, big picture: reading power from the ostraca

Deir el-Medina, the village of the royal tomb-workers (section 2B)

The source: an ostrakon, about 1170 BCE

On a scrap of limestone, a tomb-worker records that the grain pay is late: 'eighteen days have passed this month'. The workers say 'we are hungry' and sit down outside the temples until they are paid.

What this small scrap shows about power

The state paid its workers in grain: power carried duties, not just orders.

The workers could complain out loud: they had rights someone had to hear.

The vizier had to come and put things right: the top answered for the bottom.

A power structure is how power is shared in a society: who gives orders, who obeys, and who must answer. Little evidence can still show it.

Diagram pairing one Deir el-Medina ostrakon of about 1170 BCE, recording that the grain pay is late and that hungry workers sat down outside the temples, with three things the scrap shows about the power structure: the state paid its workers in grain, the workers could complain out loud, and the vizier had to come and put things right

Figure 3. Little evidence, big picture: reading power from the ostraca.

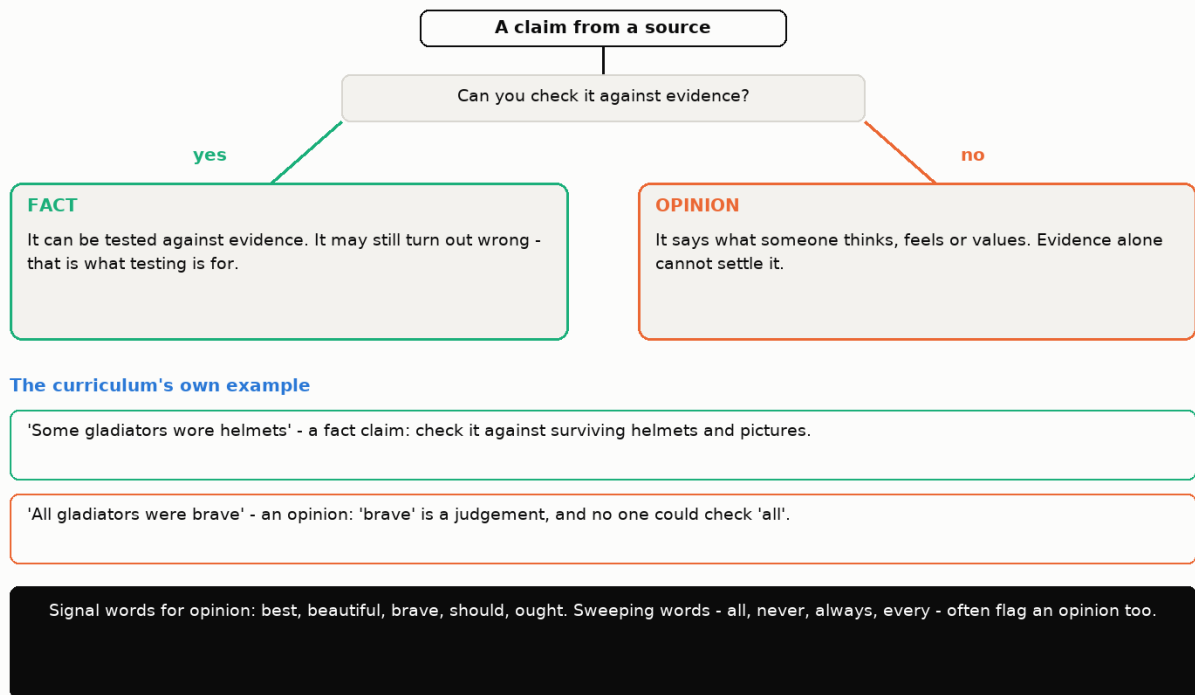
Three readings of one scrap. The state paid its workers in grain, so power carried duties, not just orders. The workers could complain out loud — “we are hungry” — which means they had rights someone had to hear. And the vizier, the top official, had to come and put things right, so the top answered for the bottom. None of this is spelled out in the ostrakon; each reading is evidence plus reasoning, and saying so is part of the skill. A group that left little evidence is not a group about which evidence is silent.

5. Fact or opinion? (.E03)

The curriculum’s own test pair is the cleanest way in: ‘Some gladiators wore helmets’ is a fact claim — you can check it against surviving helmets and pictures. ‘All gladiators were brave’ is an opinion — ‘brave’ is a judgement, and no one could check ‘all’. The split is not about true or false; it is about **can you check it against evidence?** (Figure 4.)

Fact or opinion? A method for sorting claims

A claim is something a source says. Test it this way.



Decision flow for sorting a claim into fact or opinion — can you check it against evidence? — with the curriculum's own gladiator examples and a strip of opinion signal words such as best, beautiful, brave, should and ought

Figure 4. Fact or opinion? A method for sorting claims.

Two habits make the method work. First, a fact claim can be wrong and still be a fact claim — “the crew moved 300 blocks a day” would be a fact claim, and testing is exactly what it is for. Second, an opinion is not a mistake: it tells you about the person who holds it. Signal words help you sort quickly: *best, beautiful, brave, should, ought* — and broad words like *all, never, always, every* often mark an opinion too.

6. Picking useful evidence (.E04)

Once you can sort fact from opinion, the next skill is selecting only the information in a source that bears on your question, then saying how it supports your interpretation — and what the source cannot show. Figure 5 gives five steps and walks them on the Wilbour Papyrus (2B), a land survey of about 1145 BCE.

Five steps to pick useful evidence

1. Name your question clearly.

2. Study the source: read it, look at it, or listen to it.

3. Pick out only the information that bears on your question.

4. Say how that information supports your interpretation.

5. Say honestly what the source cannot show.

Example

Question: could women in ancient Egypt own land?

The Wilbour Papyrus, a land survey of about 1145 BCE (2B), lists women as 11.1% of the holders of farm plots and says a son or a daughter could take over a plot. Pick those two facts. Say they show women could hold land and pass it on. Then note the limit: one region, one time.

Five numbered steps to pick useful evidence — name the question, study the source, pick only what bears on the question, say how it supports your interpretation, say what the source cannot show — beside a worked example using the Wilbour Papyrus of about 1145 BCE for the question of whether women in ancient Egypt could own land

Figure 5. Five steps to pick useful evidence.

Notice what the example does at steps 4 and 5. It says the two picked facts **support** the interpretation that women could hold land and hand it on — and it says honestly that one survey from one region at one time cannot show whether that was true everywhere in Egypt. Naming the limit is not weakness; it is what makes the claim trustworthy.

7. Judging significance with sources (.E05)

Section 2F gave you six criteria for significance — **power, change, reach, time, evidence, memory** — the checklist for a “big, lasting mark”. Significance is not a feeling: it is a judgement you build from criteria *and* sources, and two historians can weigh the same criteria in different ways and both be defensible. Figure 6 applies all six to the grain strike of about 1170 BCE (2B).

Judging significance: the grain strike, about 1170 BCE

The six criteria of section 2F, applied to one event, with sources

power

Low - the workers were not rulers; but acting together, they made the state listen.

change

Small at the time - the workers won their grain; the structure did not change.

reach

Small - one village, one pay dispute.

time

The event lasted days; but the written record has lasted more than 3,000 years.

evidence

Strong - the workers' own words survive on the ostraca.

memory

High - it is remembered as the first recorded strike.

Two historians, two judgements

Judgement A: a small dispute, significant mainly for what it shows about power.

Judgement B: a landmark event - the first recorded strike - so its memory matters most.

Both judgements point to the criteria. They differ in the weight they give each one. State your weights, and your judgement can be tested.

The six significance criteria of section 2F — power, change, reach, time, evidence, memory — each applied to the Deir el-Medina grain strike of about 1170 BCE, followed by two historians' judgements that differ in the weight given to each criterion, and a note to state your weights so your judgement can be tested

Figure 6. Judging significance: the grain strike, about 1170 BCE.

Judgement A weighs power and change highest and calls the strike a small dispute that matters for what it shows about power. Judgement B weighs memory and evidence highest and calls it a landmark — the first recorded strike. Both point to the criteria; both rest on the ostraca. State your weights, and your judgement can be tested — which is the difference between analysing significance and simply feeling it.

8. The four validity questions (.E06)

The last tool is a set of four questions to run on any source before you lean on it. They are worth learning closely — you will use them again and again (Figure 7).

Four questions that test a source's validity

Run every source through them before you lean on it.

1 Who made it, and where did it come from?

When was it made? Is it primary (from the time) or secondary (made later)?

2 What does it tell us?

List the facts it gives. Can each one be checked?

3 Is it fact, or opinion?

Split the two. An opinion tells you about the person who holds it.

4 What other sources would help us test it?

What is missing? What could back this source up, or test it?

A source that fails a test can still have value - for a different question. Herodotus is weak on how the pyramids were built (he wrote about 2,000 years later), but good on what Greeks of his own time believed about Egypt.

Card listing the four validity questions for any source — who made it and where did it come from, what does it tell us, is it fact or opinion, and what other sources would help us test it — with a hint under each question and a closing note that a source failing one test can still have value for a different question, as with Herodotus on the pyramids

Figure 7. Four questions that test a source's validity.

Validity is not a single score. Herodotus, a Greek writer of about 484–about 425 BCE, visited Egypt about 2,000 years after the pyramids were built and wrote down what people told him. For “how were the pyramids built?” his validity is weak — secondary, late, and hearsay. For “what did Greeks of his own time believe about Egypt?” the very same pages are a strong primary source. A source that fails a test can still have value — for a different question.

Worked examples

Example 1 — with help

Run Merer's diary (2G) through the four validity questions, then pick evidence for the question “**how did stone reach Giza?**”

Validity question	Working
1. Who made it, and where did it come from?	Found at Wadi al-Jarf, a Red Sea harbour; kept in years 26–27 of Khufu (about 2560–2550 BCE) by or for an inspector whose crew moved stone → a primary source from the work itself.
2. What does it tell us?	A named crew; boats; about 30 limestone blocks of 2–3 tonnes each; a round trip of about ten days from Tura to Giza; food brought from Heliopolis. Each is a checkable fact claim.
3. Is it fact, or opinion?	The diary is a work log: nearly every line is a fact claim (counts, places, names). There is almost no opinion in it — which itself supports it for this question.
4. What other sources would help us test it?	The workers' cemetery at Giza (found 1990, Zahi

Hawass) and the workers' town (2B) to support it; nothing in this section challenges it.

Picking evidence (Figure 5 steps 3–5): the boats-and-blocks line **supports** the interpretation that stone reached Giza by boat in organised crews; the limit is that one diary covers one crew, not the whole site. Figure 8 writes that judgement up as one paragraph, with each sentence labelled.

Model: judging a source's value in one paragraph

point

Merer's diary is of high value for the question of how stone reached Giza.

evidence

It was kept in years 26 and 27 of Khufu, by or for an inspector whose crew moved stone there.

explain

Because it is a primary source from the building work itself, it supports claims about the boats, the blocks and the route.

validity

Its value has limits: it covers one crew, not the whole site. Historians pair it with the workers' graves and the workers' town.

point

evidence

explain

validity check

Model paragraph judging the value of Merer's diary for the question of how stone reached Giza, with each sentence labelled: point, evidence, explain, validity check

Figure 8. Model: judging a source's value in one paragraph.

Example 2 — with help

Judge the significance of the grain strike (about 1170 BCE) using the six criteria of 2F. The table weighs each criterion; two historians then state their judgements.

Criterion	What the ostraca show	Weight chosen here
Power	Workers acting together made the state listen; the vizier came.	High
Change	The workers won their grain; the structure did not change.	Low
Reach	One village, one pay dispute.	Low
Time	The event lasted days; the record has lasted over 3,000 years.	Medium
Evidence	The workers' own words survive on the ostraca.	High
Memory	Remembered as the first recorded strike.	High

Judgement A (a historian who weighs power and change): a small dispute, significant mainly for what it shows about power. **Judgement B** (a historian who weighs evidence and memory): a landmark event — the first recorded strike —

so its memory matters most. Both rest on the ostraca; both name their weights; both are defensible. That is what evaluating significance with criteria and sources looks like.

Practice tasks

Practice with help

Q1. (CD) Figure 1 used Merer’s diary. Do the same with Nebamun’s tomb-chapel paintings, about 1350 BCE (2B): give two questions for which the paintings have high value, and one question for which they have little value. Say why in each case.

Q2. (.E02) Copy the table in Figure 2. For **two** of the five forms, add one more named example from Chapters 1–4 (not one already in the figure) and say what it shows best.

Q3. (.E03) Sort each claim below into **fact claim** or **opinion**, using the test “can you check it against evidence?”. For each opinion, circle the signal word that gave it away.

- (a) ‘Some gladiators wore helmets.’
- (b) ‘All gladiators were brave.’
- (c) The workers of Deir el-Medina were given their pay in grain.
- (d) The strike of 1170 BCE was the bravest protest in history.
- (e) The Wilbour Papyrus lists women as 11.1% of the holders of farm plots.
- (f) Warwick Castle is the most beautiful castle in England.
- (g) The Secret History of the Mongols was written down about 1240 CE.
- (h) Genghis Khan was the greatest leader of all time.

Q4. (.E01) Copy the table and complete it using Figure 3: for each thing the ostrakon shows about power, write the line of the source that supports it.

What the scrap shows about power	The line of the source that supports it
Power carried duties, not just orders.	
Workers had rights someone had to hear.	
The top answered for the bottom.	

Q5. (.E04) Use the five steps of Figure 5 on the Wilbour Papyrus for the question “could women in ancient Egypt own land?”. Write out step 3 (the two facts you pick) and step 5 (the honest limit).

Q6. (.E06) Section 3A used parish church records — counts of burials, such as the sharp rise in 1349 — to study the Black Death. (a) Answer the validity questions ‘*Who made it, and where did it come from?*’ and ‘*What other sources would help us test it?*’ for those records. (b) Say one thing the records are still valuable for.

Practice on your own

Q7. (CD, .E01) “A source with limits has no value.” How far do you agree? Use **two** named sources from this section to support your answer.

- Q8.** (.E03, .E04) Find **one** source from Chapters 2–4 that contains both a fact claim and an opinion. Quote (or describe) one of each, and show your test for sorting them.
- Q9.** (.E05) Judge the significance of **one** named event from Chapters 2–4 using at least **three** of the six criteria of 2F. Name the source or sources you rest your judgement on, and state your weights.
- Q10.** (.E01) Rulers and scribes left far more evidence than workers or women. Explain two reasons why, and give two ways historians work around the gap, each with a named source from this book.

Source-based inquiry task

- Q11.** (.E06, .E04, .E05) Study the three sources in Figure 9, then answer (a)–(c).

Three sources, one question: who built the pyramids?

Apply the four validity questions, then decide which source is most valuable.

Source A - Herodotus, Greek writer (about 484-about 425 BCE)

100,000 forced workers, in three-month shifts, over 20 years. He visited Egypt about 2,000 years after the pyramids were built and wrote what people told him.

Source B - the workers' cemetery at Giza (found 1990, Zahi Hawass)

Builders buried with care beside the king - people given proper burial, not thrown away.

Source C - Merer's diary, about 2560-2550 BCE

An organised crew moving stone by boat, with food brought by the state, led by an inspector who kept the log.

Question: how did the Egyptians build the pyramids at Giza? Which source is most valuable for this question - and which sources support or challenge Source A?

Three source cards on the question of who built the pyramids — Source A, Herodotus, a Greek writer of about 484–about 425 BCE, claiming 100,000 forced workers in three-month shifts over 20 years; Source B, the workers' cemetery at Giza found by Zahi Hawass in 1990, showing builders buried with care; Source C, Merer's diary of about 2560–2550 BCE, showing an organised crew moving stone by boat — with the inquiry question: which source is most valuable, and which sources support or challenge Source A?

Figure 9. Three sources, one question: who built the pyramids?

- Run all four validity questions on Source A and answer each in one or two sentences.
- Which of the three sources give checkable facts for this question? Give one checkable fact from each source you name.
- Which source is the **most valuable** for the question “how did the Egyptians build the pyramids at Giza?” Say how Sources B and C support or challenge Source A's claim of 100,000 forced workers.

Answers

Q1. Any three with reasons tied to the form. Example: high value for “what did a rich Egyptian wear, eat and do at a feast?” (the paintings show exactly this); high value for “what did hunting and farm work look like?” (scenes of daily life); little value for “how many ordinary people went hungry in a bad year?” (tomb art shows the owner’s world as he wished it seen, not the hard years).

Q2. Any two valid additions. Example: written — the strike ostraca of Deir el-Medina (2B), showing the workers’ own complaints and pay records; buildings and sites — Notre Dame Cathedral (3A), showing the wealth and labour the Church could command.

Q3. Fact claims: (a), (c), (e), (g) — each can be checked against surviving things or records. Opinions: (b) ‘all’ + ‘brave’; (d) ‘bravest’; (f) ‘most beautiful’; (h) ‘greatest’.

Q4. Row 1: the grain pay is late, and the state owed it — pay was a duty of power. Row 2: “we are hungry”, said out loud, and the workers sat down outside the temples — a complaint someone had to hear. Row 3: the vizier had to come and put things right — the top answered for the bottom.

Q5. Step 3: the Papyrus lists women as 11.1% of plot-holders, and says a son or a daughter could take over a plot. Step 5: it is one survey from one region at one time (about 1145 BCE), so it cannot show whether women everywhere in Egypt could own land.

Q6. (a) *Who made it, and where did it come from?* Parish priests wrote the records, counting burials in their own parish — primary for the deaths, but kept by one institution, for its own area. *What other sources would help us test it?* Other parishes’ records, and physical traces such as the East Smithfield burial ground (3A), to support or challenge the counts. (b) They are still valuable for tracking **when** deaths rose and fell, parish by parish — no other source gives that week-by-week picture.

Q7–Q10 — see model answers below.

Q11. (a) 1. It comes from Herodotus, a Greek writer (about 484–about 425 BCE) who visited Egypt about 2,000 years after the pyramids were built — secondary for the building. 2. It provides numbers (100,000 workers, three-month shifts, 20 years) that he was told, not saw. 3. It is reported as fact but rests on hearsay, so for the building it is uncheckable opinion-shaped report. 4. Other sources needed: the workers’ cemetery and Merer’s diary (B and C). (b) B and C. B: real burials of builders, found and studied in 1990 — the bodies and their care can be checked. C: a log kept at the time, with crew, boats and blocks — checkable against the site. (c) — see model answer.

Model answers

Q7. I disagree. A limit is not a zero. Merer’s diary covers one crew in two years, yet for “how did stone reach Giza?” its value is high, because it is a primary record from the work itself. The Deir el-Medina ostraca cover one village, yet they show the whole power structure: the state paid, workers complained, the vizier answered. The right move is not to drop a limited source but to name its limit (step 5) and match it to the question it *can* serve. So: limits cut a source’s value for some questions, never for all.

Q8. Papyrus Lansing (2B) works well. Fact claim: it describes the jobs and pay of scribes and soldiers — checkable against other records such as the ostraca, which show soldiers and workers receiving grain. Opinion: “the soldier is the lowest of the low in rank” — one scribe’s ranking, written to praise his own job; the signal is the sweeping “lowest of the low”. The test sorts them: the job details can be checked against evidence; the ranking says what the writer values, and evidence alone cannot settle it.

Q9. Example: the uniting of the Mongols in 1206 CE (4A). **Power** (high weight): many tribes came under one ruler for the first time. **Change** (high): loyalty moved from tribe to khan, and the decimal order remade daily rule. **Memory** (medium): the event was written up in the Secret History of the Mongols (about 1240 CE), our primary source for it. Weighing power and change highest, the 1206 gathering is highly significant — a big, lasting mark, resting on a named source.

Q10. Reasons: writing skill and materials sat with the state and the Church, so most records show the powerful's point of view; and workers and women appear in those records only when the powerful counted them (for tax, pay or law). Workarounds: (1) read the powerful's records for traces of the others — the Wilbour Papyrus, a tax survey, lists women as 11.1% of plot-holders, giving women's land-holding by accident of the state's own bookkeeping; (2) use non-written forms — the workers' cemetery at Giza (found 1990) and the Deir el-Medina ostraca give workers' lives from bodies and scraps, not from a scribe's desk.

Q11(c). The most valuable source is C, Merer's diary. It is primary — kept in years 26–27 of Khufu by or for an inspector moving stone — and its facts (boats, blocks, a named crew) bear directly on the question, so its value is high. Source B supports C's picture of cared-for, organised workers: builders buried with care beside the king are not people thrown away. B and C together **challenge** Source A's claim of 100,000 forced workers: A wrote about 2,000 years after the event, from what people told him, and his number cannot be checked against anything he saw. Yet A keeps value for a different question — what Greeks of his time believed about Egypt — which is exactly the validity habit this section teaches: value is always value *for a question*.

Sources

All sources below were retrieved on 25 August 2026.

- **Diary of Merer (Wadi al-Jarf papyri)**, years 26–27 of Khufu, about 2560–2550 BCE — via the Wikipedia article “Wadi al-Jarf papyri”.
- **Ostraca of Deir el-Medina**, including the strike records of the reign of Ramesses III, about 1170 BCE — via the Wikipedia article “Deir el-Medina”.
- **Wilbour Papyrus** (Brooklyn Museum, New York), year 4 of Ramesses V, about 1145 BCE — via the Wikipedia article “Wilbour Papyrus”.
- **Tomb-chapel paintings of Nebamun** (British Museum, London), Thebes, about 1350 BCE — via the Wikipedia article “Nebamun”.
- **Papyrus Lansing** (British Museum EA 9994), Thebes, New Kingdom — via the Wikipedia article “Papyrus Lansing”.
- **Workers' cemetery at Giza**, found 1990 by Zahi Hawass, and the workers' town (Giza Plateau Mapping Project) — via the Wikipedia article “Great Pyramid of Giza”.
- **Herodotus, *Histories*** (Greek writer, about 484–about 425 BCE; visited Egypt about 450 BCE) — via the Wikipedia article “Herodotus”.
- **Warwick Castle**, England, from 1068 CE — via the Wikipedia article “Warwick Castle”.
- **Notre Dame Cathedral**, Paris, work begun 1163 CE — via the Wikipedia article “Notre-Dame de Paris”.
- **Parish church records of medieval England** (burial counts, e.g. 1349) and the East Smithfield plague burial ground — via the Wikipedia article “Black Death”.
- **The Secret History of the Mongols**, written about 1240 CE — via the Wikipedia article “Secret History of the Mongols”.
- **The six significance criteria (power, change, reach, time, evidence, memory)** as taught in section 2F of this book.

Perspectives in sources: beliefs, values and attitudes

Section 5E · Strand: Historical Concepts and Skills · Sub-strand: Using historical sources **Owens:** VC2HH8S05

Draws on: .E02–.E06 (.E01 excluded entire per TOC §2A — id retained as linkage key only)

Teaching sequence

1. Words to define before we start

Key terms, defined before use. The Victorian Curriculum uses several of the words below but does not define them, so this section defines every one at first use.

- **Perspective** — the way a person or group sees something, shaped by who they are and where they stand.
- **Belief** — what a person or group holds to be true.
- **Value** — what a person or group holds to be important or worth caring about. (In 5D, *value* meant how useful a source is for a question. In 5E it means what people care about. Same word, two different skills — keep the two senses separate.)
- **Attitude** — a settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, shown in how a person speaks and acts.
- **Audience** — the people a source was made for (taught in 5C).
- **Purpose** — the reason a source was made (taught in 5C).
- **Context** — the time, place and conditions in which a source was made (taught in 5C).
- **Representative** — an account is representative of a society when it matches what most other sources of the same kind show about that society.
- **Interpretation** — a historian's reading of what happened and why (taught in 5D).
- **Voice** — the record a person or group has left behind. A voice is audible when we can meet that person's own words or point of view.
- **Primary source / secondary source** — made at the time, by people who were there / made later, looking back (taught in 5C).

Earlier chapters taught you to **describe** sources: their features, content and context (5C), and their value for a question (5D). This section takes the next step: you will **explain** perspectives — that is, say whose view a source gives, and what beliefs, values and attitudes sit behind it. Every source in this section is one you have already met in Chapters 1–4, so the content is familiar and the skill is new.

Key words for this section - every one defined at first use

The Victorian Curriculum uses these words but does not define them; this section gives each one its working sense.

perspective the way a person or group sees something, shaped by who they are and where they stand	belief what a person or group holds to be true	value what a person or group holds to be important or worth caring about	attitude a settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, shown in how a person speaks and acts
audience the people a source was made for	purpose the reason a source was made	context the time, place and conditions in which a source was made (taught in 5C)	representative an account is representative of a society when it matches what most other sources of the same kind show about that society
interpretation a historian's reading of what happened and why (taught in 5D)	voice the record a person or group has left behind; a voice is audible when we can meet that person's own words or point of view	primary source made at the time, by people who were there (taught in 5C)	secondary source made later, looking back (taught in 5C)

Twelve key-term cards for this section — *perspective, belief, value, attitude, audience, purpose, context, representative, interpretation, voice, primary source and secondary source* — each with its working sense, because the Victorian Curriculum uses these words but does not define them

Figure 1. Key words for this section — every one defined at first use.

2. Identifying a perspective in a source (.E02)

The curriculum's own example is a saying kept in the Analects, a book of sayings of Confucius, a Chinese teacher and thinker of about 551–479 BCE. Figure 2 sets out the source and where it comes from.

Source: a saying kept in the Analects

Confucius, a Chinese teacher and thinker, about 551-479 BCE

'Women and servants are the most difficult people to deal with.'

- A saying of Confucius, kept in the Analects, Book 17.
- Written down by his followers after his death, in the Warring States period (475–221 BCE).
- The Analects is a book of sayings and questions, gathered by his students.

Historians do not repeat this saying to agree with it. They read it to find out what kind of society produced it.

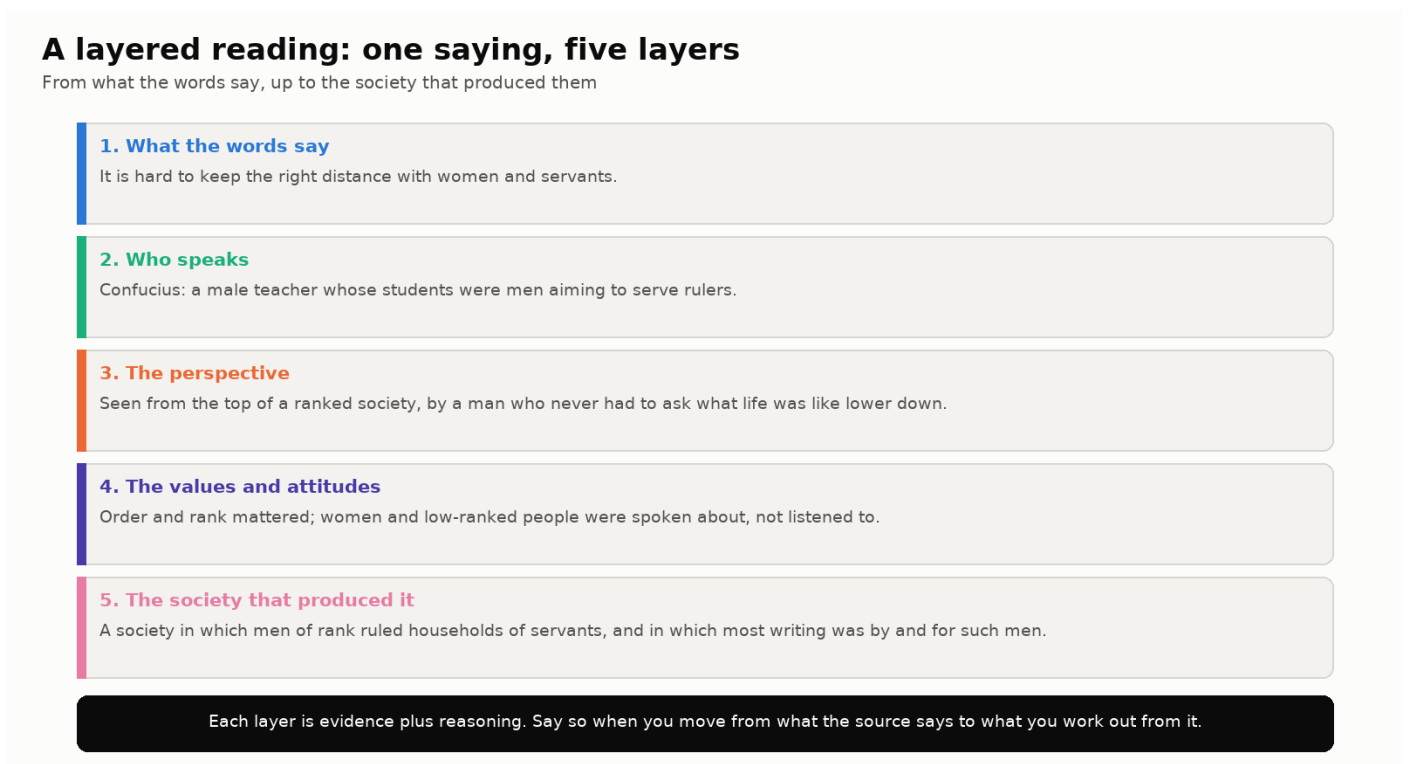
Source card for the saying kept in the Analects — 'Women and servants are the most difficult people to deal with.' — with three notes on where it comes from (a saying of Confucius, kept in the Analects, Book 17; written down by his followers after his death, in the Warring States period, 475–221 BCE; the Analects is a book of sayings and questions, gathered by his students) and a note that historians do not repeat this saying to agree with it — they read it to find out what kind of society produced it

Figure 2. The curriculum's own example: a saying kept in the Analects.

Identifying the perspective means asking **who speaks, and where do they stand?** Confucius was a man of rank in a ranked society — a teacher whose students were men aiming to serve rulers. The saying is his view of women and of

servants, seen from above. It is not a view *of* those people; it is a view *over* them. That gap — who speaks, about whom — is the perspective.

Figure 3 builds the reading up in five layers, from what the words say to the society that produced them.



Five-layer reading of the Confucius saying — layer 1, what the words say (it is hard to keep the right distance with women and servants); layer 2, who speaks (a male teacher whose students were men aiming to serve rulers); layer 3, the perspective (seen from the top of a ranked society, by a man who never had to ask what life was like lower down); layer 4, the values and attitudes (order and rank mattered; women and low-ranked people were spoken about, not listened to); layer 5, the society that produced it (men of rank ruled households of servants, and most writing was by and for such men) — with a note that each layer is evidence plus reasoning

Figure 3. A layered reading: one saying, five layers.

Notice the move at each layer: the words are evidence; each step out from them is reasoning. The values and attitudes are not printed on the page — order and rank mattering, women and servants being spoken about rather than listened to. We **explain** them by pointing to the evidence and saying how it supports the reading. And notice the last layer: the society that produced the source. A saying like this was kept and copied in a society where men of rank did the writing.

3. Limited evidence and power structures (.E03)

Most people in the past left little or no writing of their own. Women, enslaved people, ethnic groups and peoples newly conquered by others rarely speak in the records that survive — the records were kept by the powerful, for the powerful. But limited evidence is not no evidence, and even a small trace can show the **power structure** of a society: who gave orders, who obeyed, and who must answer (5D). Figure 4 reads four groups through four named sources you have met before.

Little evidence, clear power: four groups, four sources

Even limited evidence can show how power worked (E03)

Group	A named source	What little survives	What it shows about power
Women in ancient Egypt	Wilbour Papyrus, about 1145 BCE (2B, 5D)	A tax survey listing women as 11.1% of the holders of farm plots	Land could pass through women's hands; the state's own records kept women's names when counting wealth.
Enslaved people in medieval England	Domesday Book, 1086 (1E)	28,000 enslaved people listed out of about 269,000 households	The conquerors counted enslaved people as they counted property, to measure their own wealth.
Ethnic groups in Yuan China	Records of the four-class system, 1271-1368 CE (4C)	Laws and records naming the Mongol, Semu, Hanren and Nanren classes - a ranking historians still debate	The rulers sorted subjects by origin; class shaped posts, law and tax.
Peoples newly conquered by the Mongols	Marco Polo's Travels, about 1300 (4C)	A visitor's account of China under Mongol rule	Open roads, paper money and trade served the khan's empire - and impressed outsiders.
None of these groups wrote these records. That is exactly what makes the records show power: the powerful decided who was counted, and how.			

Table of four groups with limited evidence — women in ancient Egypt (Wilbour Papyrus, about 1145 BCE), enslaved people in medieval England (Domesday Book, 1086), ethnic groups in Yuan China (records of the four-class system, 1271–1368 CE), and peoples newly conquered by the Mongols (Marco Polo's Travels, about 1300) — each row giving what little survives and what it shows about power, with a closing note that none of these groups wrote these records, and that this is exactly what makes the records show power: the powerful decided who was counted, and how

Figure 4. Little evidence, clear power: four groups, four sources.

Read one row closely. The Wilbour Papyrus (2B, 5D) is a tax survey: the state counting wealth. It lists women as 11.1% of the holders of farm plots. The state did not keep those names to honour women — it kept them because land and tax passed through their hands. That single number shows that women could hold land, and that the state's own record-keeping had to count them. The point is about power: even when a group leaves almost no writing of its own, the powerful's records can show where that group stood. The same move works for Domesday's count of enslaved people (1E), the Yuan class records (4C) and Polo's outsider view of conquered China (4C).

4. One account against others: representative or contrast? (.E04)

A single account tells you what one person felt or valued. To say how far that view stood for the society, you need **additional sources** — and then you run the three checks in Figure 5.

Two accounts of one event: representative, or a contrast?

The Black Death reaches Florence in 1348 (3C)

Giovanni Boccaccio - the Decameron, written 1348-1353

A hundred tales told by ten young people who leave plague-stricken Florence. His opening describes the horror of the plague - and the tales that follow reach for laughter and love in dark times.

Matteo Villani - a chronicle of Florence, kept year by year through and after 1348

A public record of events, kept by a historian who stayed, and who died in a later wave of plague in 1363.

Three checks

1. Same event, time and place?
2. Do the accounts agree about what happened?
3. Do they show the same values and attitudes?

The reading of this pair

If two or more sources of different kinds agree, the view is mainly representative of the society. If they pull apart, at least one of them is a contrast - and the difference itself is worth explaining. Boccaccio and Villani agree on the fact of the plague. Their tones pull apart: one turns to tales, the other to record. So Boccaccio's account is a partial contrast - true to the event, but not the only attitude of the city.

One voice tells you what a person felt. Two or more voices, of different kinds, let you say how far that feeling stood for the society.

Two source cards on the Black Death reaching Florence in 1348 — Giovanni Boccaccio's Decameron, written 1348–1353 (a hundred tales told by ten young people who leave plague-stricken Florence; his opening describes the horror of the plague, and the tales that follow reach for laughter and love in dark times) and Matteo Villani's chronicle of Florence, kept year by year through and after 1348 (a public record of events, kept by a historian who stayed, and who died in a later wave of plague in 1363) — with three checks (same event, time and place? do the accounts agree about what happened? do they show the same values and attitudes?) and a reading of the pair: they agree on the fact of the plague, but their tones pull apart, so Boccaccio's account is a partial contrast — true to the event, but not the only attitude of the city

Figure 5. Two accounts of one event: representative, or a contrast?

Boccaccio and Villani give the same event, time and place, and agree that the plague was a horror. Their values and attitudes pull apart: one answers horror with tales of laughter and love; the other with a steady year-by-year record. So neither account is *the* view of Florence in 1348. Boccaccio's is a partial contrast — true to the event, but not the only attitude of the city. Where accounts of different kinds **agree** (as the four sources in Figure 4 agree that the powerful counted and ranked the less powerful), the shared view is mainly representative of the society. Where they pull apart, the difference itself is worth explaining.

5. Why historians differ (.E05)

Two careful historians can read the same source and reach different interpretations. That is not a sign that one of them is wrong. Three big reasons explain most differences (Figure 6).

Why historians reach different interpretations

Identify the perspective in a source; then ask why readers differ (E05)

1 Access to source material

Not every historian can see the same sources. Merer's diary was found in 2013 (2G). Before that year no historian could use it; after it, the story of who built the pyramid changed. New sources change readings.

2 Personal views

Historians are people. What they care about shapes what they see. One reader of the Confucius saying looks at what it says about women; another looks at the rule of households. Same words, different interests, different readings.

3 The time the historian works in

Every age asks its own questions. A chronicler writing in 1350 explained the plague with the beliefs of his own day; a historian today brings different knowledge and asks different questions. The context of the writer shapes the reading.

Different interpretations do not mean 'anything goes'. Each reading must still point to evidence and name its limits.

Three cards on why historians reach different interpretations — access to source material (Merer's diary was found in 2013; before that year no historian could use it, and after it the story of who built the pyramid changed); personal views (one reader of the Confucius saying looks at what it says about women, another at the rule of households — same words, different interests, different readings); and the time the historian works in (a chronicler writing in 1350 explained the plague with the beliefs of his own day, while a historian today brings different knowledge and asks different questions) — with a note that different interpretations do not mean 'anything goes', because each reading must still point to evidence and name its limits

Figure 6. Three reasons historians reach different interpretations.

Access is the easiest to see: a historian cannot use a source nobody has found. Merer's diary was found in 2013 (2G); before then, every account of the pyramids was written without it. Personal views shape what each historian notices — the same Confucius saying reads in a different way to a historian interested in women's lives and to one interested in households and rule. And every historian works in a time of their own: a writer in 1350 explained the plague with the beliefs of that day, while a historian today asks different questions with different knowledge. None of this makes 'anything goes' true. A reading is only as strong as the evidence it points to — which is why every interpretation in this section names its sources and its limits.

6. Whose voices are less audible? (.E06)

Some voices from the past reach us loudly; some almost never reach us at all. The voices of women and children are often **less audible** — harder to hear in what survives. Figure 7 sorts the voices you have met in this book onto a volume scale.

Whose voices reach us? A volume scale of the past

The voices of women and children are often less audible - harder to hear in what survives (E06)



Volume scale of voices from the past — loud: rulers and law-givers (Ashoka's edicts — official orders — about 260 BCE; the Code of Ur-Nammu, about 2100–2050 BCE, carved or pressed into clay to last) and priests, officials and named writers (Confucius's sayings; Villani's chronicle, kept and copied by students); medium: merchants and visitors (Marco Polo's Travels, about 1300, written down from one man's telling); quiet: workers (the Deir el-Medina ostraca, about 1170 BCE — scraps, but in the workers' own words); quietest: women and children (named in tax lists such as the Wilbour Papyrus and counted in surveys such as Domesday, mainly as others recorded them) — with a note that less audible does not mean silent: historians read records made by others, and turn to objects, bones and buildings, to hear quiet voices

Figure 7. Whose voices reach us? A volume scale of the past.

The pattern is the point: the louder the voice, the more power behind it. Rulers carved their edicts — their official orders — into rock and clay to last; workers' words survive on scraps by chance; women and children mainly appear in records **others** made of them. Less audible does not mean silent — historians read the powerful's records against the grain, and turn to objects, bones and buildings, to hear quiet voices (5D). Explaining perspectives ends in this habit: ask of every source who is speaking, who is being spoken about, and who cannot be heard at all.

Worked examples

Example 1 — with help

Build a paragraph **explaining** the perspective, beliefs, values and attitudes in the Confucius saying (.E02). Fill the table from Figure 3, then read the model paragraph in Figure 8.

Step	Working
Point — whose view?	A man of rank in a ranked society: a male teacher, seen from the top.
Evidence — what does the source say?	It says women and servants are 'the most difficult people to deal with'.
Explain — what does that show?	The words treat women and servants as people to be managed, not listened to — an attitude of control.
Society — what produced it?	A society that gave writing to few, ranked households by duty and respect, and let men of rank speak for those below them.
Limit — what can we not say?	One saying by one teacher is not the voice of a whole

society; other sources are needed before we say what most people thought.

Figure 8 writes the five steps up as one paragraph, with each sentence labelled.

Model: explaining perspectives, beliefs, values and attitudes in one paragraph

The Confucius saying, written up

POINT

The saying kept in the Analects shows the perspective of a man of rank in a ranked society.

EVIDENCE

It says women and servants are 'the most difficult people to deal with'.

EXPLAIN

The words treat women and servants as people to be managed, not listened to - an attitude of control.

SOCIETY

The society that produced it gave writing to few, ranked households by duty and respect, and let men of rank speak for those below them.

LIMIT

One saying by one teacher is not the voice of the whole society; other sources are needed before we say what most people thought.

Point, evidence, explain, society, limit - keep the order, change the words.

Model paragraph explaining what the Confucius saying shows — its perspectives, beliefs, values and attitudes — with each sentence labelled — point (the saying shows the perspective of a man of rank in a ranked society); evidence (it says women and servants are 'the most difficult people to deal with'); explain (the words treat women and servants as people to be managed, not listened to — an attitude of control); society (the society that produced it gave writing to few, ranked households by duty and respect, and let men of rank speak for those below them); limit (one saying by one teacher is not the voice of the whole society) — with the rule: keep the order, change the words

Figure 8. Model: explaining perspectives, beliefs, values and attitudes in one paragraph.

Example 2 — with help

Use the three checks of Figure 5 on Boccaccio and Villani (.E04): is Boccaccio's account representative of Florence in 1348, or a contrast?

Check	Working
1. Same event, time and place?	Yes: the Black Death reaching Florence in 1348.
2. Do the accounts agree about what happened?	Mainly: both record the horror and the dead.
3. Do they show the same values and attitudes?	No: Boccaccio turns to tales of laughter and love; Villani keeps a steady public record.

Reading: the two accounts agree on the event and pull apart in attitude, so Boccaccio's account is a **partial contrast** — true to the event, but not the only attitude of the city. To call it representative we would need more sources of different kinds pulling the same way; the checks show us exactly what is missing.

Practice tasks

Practice with help

Q1. (.E02) Figure 2 says the Analects was written down by followers after Confucius's death. (a) As a record of Confucius's own spoken words, is the Analects a primary or a secondary source? Give one reason, using the 5C definitions. (b) Identify the perspective in the saying using the words *who speaks* and *where they stand*.

Q2. (.E03) Match each source to the group it gives limited evidence for in Figure 4, then say what the evidence shows about power: (a) Domesday Book, 1086; (b) the Wilbour Papyrus; (c) Marco Polo's Travels; (d) the Yuan four-class records.

Q3. (.E04) Section 3C also used Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), whose parents died in the plague in Tunis in 1348–1350 and who later wrote a history of those years. Run the three checks of Figure 5 on Boccaccio against Ibn Khaldun, then say: is Boccaccio's account representative or a contrast against this second account?

Q4. (.E05) Match each difference between writers or historians to the reason in Figure 6 that best explains it — *access, personal views, or the time the historian works in*:

- (a) A history of the pyramids written in 1990 could not use Merer's diary; one written in 2020 can.
- (b) One historian of the Confucius saying studies women's lives; another studies how households were ruled.
- (c) A chronicler of 1350 wrote that the plague was a punishment sent by God; a historian today writes about germs, trade and bad harvests.

Q5. (.E06) Sort these five voices onto the volume scale of Figure 7 (loud / medium / quiet / quietest), and give one reason for each: (a) Ashoka's edicts; (b) the Deir el-Medina ostraca; (c) women named in the Wilbour Papyrus; (d) Marco Polo's Travels; (e) Villani's chronicle.

Q6. (CD, .E02) Read the strike ostrakon from Deir el-Medina (2B, 5D): the workers say the grain pay is late and 'we are hungry', and they sit down outside the temples. (a) Identify the perspective: who speaks, and where do they stand? (b) Say one value or attitude the ostrakon shows in the workers. (c) Say one thing the ostrakon shows about the society that produced it.

Practice on your own

Q7. (.E02, .E03) 'The Wilbour Papyrus was made by the state, for the state, so it cannot tell us about women's lives.' How far do you agree? Use the idea of a power structure in your answer.

Q8. (.E04) Polo's Travels describes with wonder the roads, paper money and trade of the khan's empire (4C). Use at least one additional source from Chapter 4 to say whether Polo's view is mainly representative of how Yuan China was seen, or a contrast.

Q9. (.E05) Two historians read Polo's Travels. One calls it proof of a well-run empire; the other calls it the praise of a guest who was shown only the best. Give one reason from Figure 6 that could explain each difference, and say which reading you find stronger, with evidence.

Q10. (.E06) Name two groups whose voices are less audible in Chapters 1–4. For each: (a) say why so little of their own writing survives; (b) name one source from this book that still lets us hear something of them, and what it shows.

Source-based inquiry task

Q11. (.E02, .E03, .E06) Study the three sources in Figure 9, then answer (a)–(c).

Inquiry: three views of Mongol rule - whose perspective speaks?

Read the three sources, then answer (a)–(c)

Source A

The Secret History of the Mongols, about 1240 CE (4A)

'Then the leaders of the Mongol tribes gathered together, and they gave Temujin the title Genghis Khan, and made him ruler over all the Mongols.' The Mongols telling their own story.

Source B

Marco Polo's Travels, about 1300 (4C)

Polo, a Venetian merchant who says he served Kublai Khan for about 17 years, calls him the greatest ruler he had met, and describes with wonder the roads, paper money and trade of the empire.

Source C

Records of the Yuan four-class system, 1271–1368 (4C)

The rulers sorted subjects into four ranked classes: Mongol, Semu, Hanren, Nanren - the conquered Chinese last in rank, first in number.

(a) Identify the perspective in each source: who speaks, and where do they stand? (b) State one value or attitude each source reveals. (c) Across the three sources, whose voices are less audible? Name one kind of source that could help you hear them.

Three source cards on whose perspective speaks in Mongol rule — Source A, the Secret History of the Mongols, about 1240 CE ('Then the leaders of the Mongol tribes gathered together, and they gave Temujin the title Genghis Khan, and made him ruler over all the Mongols' — the Mongols telling their own story); Source B, Marco Polo's Travels, about 1300 (Polo, a Venetian merchant who says he served Kublai Khan for about 17 years, calls him the greatest ruler he had met, and describes with wonder the roads, paper money and trade of the empire); Source C, records of the Yuan four-class system, 1271–1368 CE (the rulers sorted subjects into four ranked classes — Mongol, Semu, Hanren, Nanren — the conquered Chinese last in rank, first in number) — with the task questions: identify the perspective in each source; state one value or attitude each source reveals; and say whose voices are less audible across the three, naming one kind of source that could help you hear them

Figure 9. Three views of Mongol rule: whose perspective speaks?

- Identify the perspective in each source: who speaks, and where do they stand?
- State one value or attitude each source reveals.
- Across the three sources, whose voices are less audible? Name one kind of source that could help you hear them.

Answers

Q1. (a) Secondary: it was written down after his death, looking back — a record made later of words spoken earlier, not a record made at the time of the speaking. (b) Any answer that names the speaker and his standing. Example: a man of rank and learning speaks, standing above the people he describes; the saying sees women and underlings from the top of a ranked society.

Q2. (a) Domesday → enslaved people in medieval England; the conquerors counted them as they counted property, which shows enslaved people stood outside the community of free holders. (b) Wilbour → women in ancient Egypt; women held farm plots and land passed through their hands, yet only the state's tax lens records them. (c) Polo → peoples newly conquered by the Mongols; an outsider's wonder at the roads and trade shows an empire serving its rulers and impressing visitors — not the conquered speaking. (d) Yuan records → ethnic groups; the rulers sorted subjects by origin, so posts, law and tax followed rank.

Q3. Checks: same kind of event (the plague years of 1348–1350, in different cities — Florence and Tunis); they agree about the damage the plague did; their attitudes pull apart — Ibn Khaldun reflects on how the plague shook whole societies, while Boccaccio turns to tales. So against Ibn Khaldun, Boccaccio again reads as a partial contrast: one attitude of the plague years, not the only one.

Q4. (a) Access to source material. (b) Personal views. (c) The time the historian works in.

Q5. Loud: (a) Ashoka's edicts — a ruler's words carved into rock to last; (e) Villani's chronicle — a named writer's record, kept and copied. Medium: (d) Polo's Travels — a visitor's telling, written down from one man's account. Quiet: (b) the ostraca — workers' own words, but on scraps that survive by chance. Quietest: (c) women in the Wilbour Papyrus — named by the state's counters, not speaking for themselves.

Q6. (a) The workers speak, standing inside the state's system — paid by it and answerable to it, but able to complain to it out loud. (b) Any one. Example: the workers saw their agreed pay as a right — 'we are hungry' is a claim about what they were owed, not a request for kindness. (c) Any one. Example: the society owed its workers a living and had to answer when it failed — power carried duties; or: the complaint survived because a scribe wrote it down, so even the workers' protest reached us through the state's record-keeping.

Q7–Q10 — see model answers below.

Q11. (a) A: the Mongols themselves, speaking from inside the ruling group — their own story of their own ruler. B: a foreign visitor and guest of the khan, standing outside the empire's classes and owing his welcome to the ruler. C: the rulers' own record-keeping, standing above all four classes and sorting them. (b) A: loyalty to one ruler over the tribes — the value of united rule. B: wonder at order, money and trade — the values of a merchant guest. C: rank by origin — the attitude that some peoples stand above others by birth.

Q11(c) — see model answers below.

Model answers

Q7. I agree that the Papyrus was made by the state, for the state — and I disagree that it therefore cannot tell us about women's lives. A source's purpose limits what it was *trying* to say, not what it can *show* (5D). The state was counting wealth, and it counted women as 11.1% of plot-holders: that shows women could hold land and pass it on, and it shows the power structure — the state's reach ran through women's hands. What the Papyrus cannot give us is women's own voices: their side, their values, their words. So: a state record is strong evidence about where women stood in the power structure, and weak evidence about what women thought. The limit is real; it is not a silence.

Q8. Polo's view is an outsider's welcome, and the additional sources mark it as a contrast with the view from below. The four-class records (4C) sorted the conquered Chinese last in rank: the people whose roads and trade Polo admired were ruled as fourth-ranked subjects, and their records give no wonder, only ranking. The Secret History (4A) gives a third view again — the rulers' own pride. So Polo's wonder is representative of one kind of voice, the welcomed visitor, and a contrast with the conquered, who are less audible in all three sources. The checks of Figure 5 name the gap: we have no account of Yuan China in the words of the Nanren.

Q9. Example: the first historian's difference is best explained by personal views — an interest in trade and order makes the roads and paper money the story. The second's is best explained by the time the historian works in — a historian today asks who paid for the order, and reads a guest's praise with care. (Access could also play a part: Polo's book travelled widely in Europe, while records of the conquered Chinese reached western readers much later.) I find the second reading stronger: Source C shows the empire sorting subjects by origin, so a guest's praise of the order leaves out who the order ranked lowest. Both readings must still point to evidence — Polo's own words for the first, the class records for the second.

Q10. Example pair. (1) Enslaved people in medieval England: little of their own writing survives because they were counted as property, and writing sat with the Church and the state; Domesday (1E) still lets us hear something of them — 28,000 of them, counted by the conquerors, which shows how the conquerors ranked them. (2) Women in ancient Egypt: few women were taught to write, and records sat with scribes; the Wilbour Papyrus (2B) still shows women holding 11.1% of farm plots, so land passed through women's hands. In both cases the voices reach us through the powerful's record-keeping — less audible, not silent.

Q11(c). The less audible voices are the conquered Chinese (Hanren and Nanren) and the women and workers of the empire — and ordinary Mongols too, outside the ruling group. All three sources were made by or for the powerful: the Mongol ruling house telling its own story, a welcomed guest praising his host, and the rulers' own class records. One kind of source that could help: farm and tax records kept in Chinese by local scribes, graves and everyday objects from Yuan towns, or later local accounts of the conquest — traces made by or near the conquered, not by the rulers. Used with care (5D), such sources turn the quiet voices up a little.

Sources

All sources below were retrieved on 25 August 2026.

- **The Analects** (sayings of Confucius, about 551–479 BCE, compiled by his followers in the Warring States period, 475–221 BCE; the saying in this section is kept in Book 17) — via the Wikipedia articles “Confucius” and “Analects”.
- **Wilbour Papyrus** (Brooklyn Museum, New York), year 4 of Ramesses V, about 1145 BCE — via the Wikipedia article “Wilbour Papyrus”.
- **Domesday Book**, the survey of England's land and people ordered by King William I and finished in 1086 — via the Wikipedia article “Domesday Book”.
- **Ostraca of Deir el-Medina**, including the strike records of the reign of Ramesses III, about 1170 BCE — via the Wikipedia article “Deir el-Medina”.
- **Edicts of Ashoka**, about 260 BCE — via the Wikipedia article “Edicts of Ashoka”.
- **Code of Ur-Nammu**, about 2100–2050 BCE, the oldest law code known to survive — as taught in section 1B, via the Encyclopædia Britannica article “Code of Ur-Nammu”.
- **Marco Polo, Travels** (Polo about 1254–1324; written down in a Genoa prison in 1298 with Rustichello of Pisa; the book as used here, about 1300) — as taught in section 4C, via the Wikipedia article “Travels of Marco Polo”.
- **Records of the Yuan four-class system** (Mongol, Semu, Hanren, Nanren), 1271–1368 CE — as taught in section 4C, via the Wikipedia article “Yuan dynasty”.
- **The Secret History of the Mongols**, written about 1240 CE — as taught in section 4A, via the Wikipedia article “Secret History of the Mongols”.
- **Giovanni Boccaccio, Decameron** (written 1348–1353) and **Matteo Villani, chronicle of Florence** (kept year by year through and after 1348; Villani died in a later wave of plague in 1363) — as taught in section 3C, via the Wikipedia articles “Decameron” and “Matteo Villani”.
- **Ibn Khaldun** (1332–1406; his parents died in the plague in Tunis, 1348–1350; his history of those years written later) — as taught in section 3C, via the Wikipedia article “Ibn Khaldun”.
- **Diary of Merer** (Wadi al-Jarf papyri), years 26–27 of Khufu, about 2560–2550 BCE, found 2013 — as taught in section 2G, via the Wikipedia article “Wadi al-Jarf papyri”.

When historians disagree: interpretations and debates

Section 5F · Strand: Historical Concepts and Skills · Sub-strand: Using historical sources **Owens:** VC2HH8S06

Draws on: .E02–.E06 (all five taught in this section; .E01 excluded entire per TOC §2A-C — id retained as linkage key only, recorded in the footer)

Teaching sequence

Sections 5A–5E taught you to question, sequence, describe, test and read sources. This section puts those skills together on the hardest task of all: **interpretations** — what historians say the past means, and what to do when they disagree. Every case here comes from Chapters 1–4, so the content is familiar and the skill is the work.

1. Words to define before we start

Contested terms, defined before use. Several of these words are themselves argued about by historians, so this section defines each one before using it.

- **Interpretation** — a historian’s reasoned account of the past, built from evidence. Not a guess, and not “the one right answer”: a reading that can be argued for (defined in 3E, used all through this section).
- **Debate** — when historians give different readings of the same question and argue for them on evidence. A historical debate is won by evidence and reasoning, not by volume.
- **Achievement** — something made or done that people judge to be of great value. The judging is itself a matter of debate: one age’s achievement can be another’s crime.
- **Conquest** — the taking of one people’s lands by another, by force. Spain’s conquest of the Americas is the case studied here; for the peoples conquered it was an invasion and a disaster, and this section keeps both views in sight (Rule: steelman — set out each side at its strongest before judging).
- **Renaissance** — from a French word meaning “rebirth”: the flowering of art and learning in Italy from about 1350 to about 1550 CE. Historians debate even the name — part 6 shows why.
- **Decline** — when a society loses the power, wealth or order it once had. Whether a society “declined” or slowly changed into something new is one of the debates in part 5.

The words on the cards below do the work in this section. Each is defined again where it first matters.

Words that do the work in this section

interpretation

a historian’s reasoned account of the past, built from evidence

debate

when historians give different readings of the same question and argue for them on evidence

evidence

what survives from the past that historians can ask questions of

source

anything we can learn about the past from: a text, a coin, a bone, a building

primary source

made at, or very near, the time being studied

secondary source

made later by someone studying that time

perspective

the point of view of a person or group, shaped by who they are and when they lived

context

the time, place and setting around a source or event

archaeology

the study of the past through the things digging uncovers

achievement

something made or done that people judge to be of great value - itself a matter of debate

Ten word cards, each with a key word and a short definition: interpretation, debate, evidence, source, primary source, secondary source, perspective, context, archaeology and achievement

Figure 1. Words that do the work in this section.

2. Why do historians differ? .E02

Five sections ago you learned that evidence never speaks for itself — someone has to ask it questions. That is why two careful historians can read the same past and reach different readings. Figure 2 gives the four common reasons.

Why do historians differ?

The same past, read in different ways. Four common reasons:

1. New evidence turns up

Digging, DNA tests and long-buried texts keep appearing. Old readings must then face the new finds.

2. They ask different questions

The same record gives different answers to different questions. A tax list says one thing about money and another about who could own land.

3. They weigh the same records in different ways

One historian trusts a source that another doubts, or reads more into it.

4. They write from different times

The age a historian lives in shapes what they think matters - and which questions are worth asking.

Different is not careless. An interpretation is judged by how well it fits the evidence, not by how much we like it.

Four reason cards for why historians reach different readings of the same past: new evidence turns up; they ask different questions; they weigh the same records in different ways; they write from different times — with a note that different does not mean careless

Figure 2. Why do historians differ? Four common reasons.

Hold on to the note at the bottom of Figure 2: different is not careless. An interpretation is judged by how well it fits the evidence — not by how much we like it, and not by how new or old it is. The rest of this section is six cases where you will watch that rule at work.

3. Case 1 — Did women share in the Renaissance? .E02

The curriculum names “the status of women” as one kind of event whose interpretations differ. Here is the classic case, from the Renaissance of Chapter 3’s depth study.

Did women share in the Renaissance? Two readings

The same period, two historians, 117 years apart.

Reading A - Jacob Burckhardt (1860)

- Women 'stood on a footing of perfect equality with men'
- upper-class women had much the same schooling as men
- built from writings about court life and learning

Reading B - Joan Kelly (1977)

- women did not share in the gains of the Renaissance
- women's share of power and public life fell, not rose
- built from records of law, property and power

Ground both readings share

Both agree some upper-class women were highly schooled. They differ on what schooling meant when power stayed in men's hands.

Accounting for the difference

Why they differ: Burckhardt looked at manners and schooling; Kelly asked about law and power. Different questions, different readings.

Two columns setting out two readings of women in the Renaissance side by side — Jacob Burckhardt (1860) writing that women stood on equal footing with men in schooling and manners, and Joan Kelly (1977) writing that women's share of power fell — with the ground both agree on and the reason they differ

Figure 3. Did women share in the Renaissance? Two readings, 117 years apart.

In 1860 the historian Jacob Burckhardt published *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Reading writings about court life, he said women “stood on a footing of perfect equality with men” and that upper-class women had much the same schooling as men. In 1977 the American historian Joan Kelly asked one sharp question — “Did women have a Renaissance?” — and answered no: looking at law, property and power instead of manners, she judged that women's share of public life fell during the same years.

Account for the difference using Figure 2: both read real records of the same period; they asked different questions of them. Schooling answered one way; power answered another. Both readings still stand in the debate today, and essays about the Renaissance must still face Kelly's question.

The second half of 2020 is the influence of **scientific ideas** on interpretations. When a new scientific method arrives, old readings must face it:

- In 2020 you met the Black Death. For centuries, writers explained it as bad air or as punishment. In 2011 scientists tested the teeth of plague victims buried in London about 1349 and identified the plague germ. Readings of the plague as a disease carried by fleas along ship and trade routes then became the stronger reading.
- In 2020, tests on DNA — the tiny set of instructions inside every living thing — changed the story of how our species spread: they showed meetings with older human groups that no fossil had shown, and interpretations had to shift to fit.

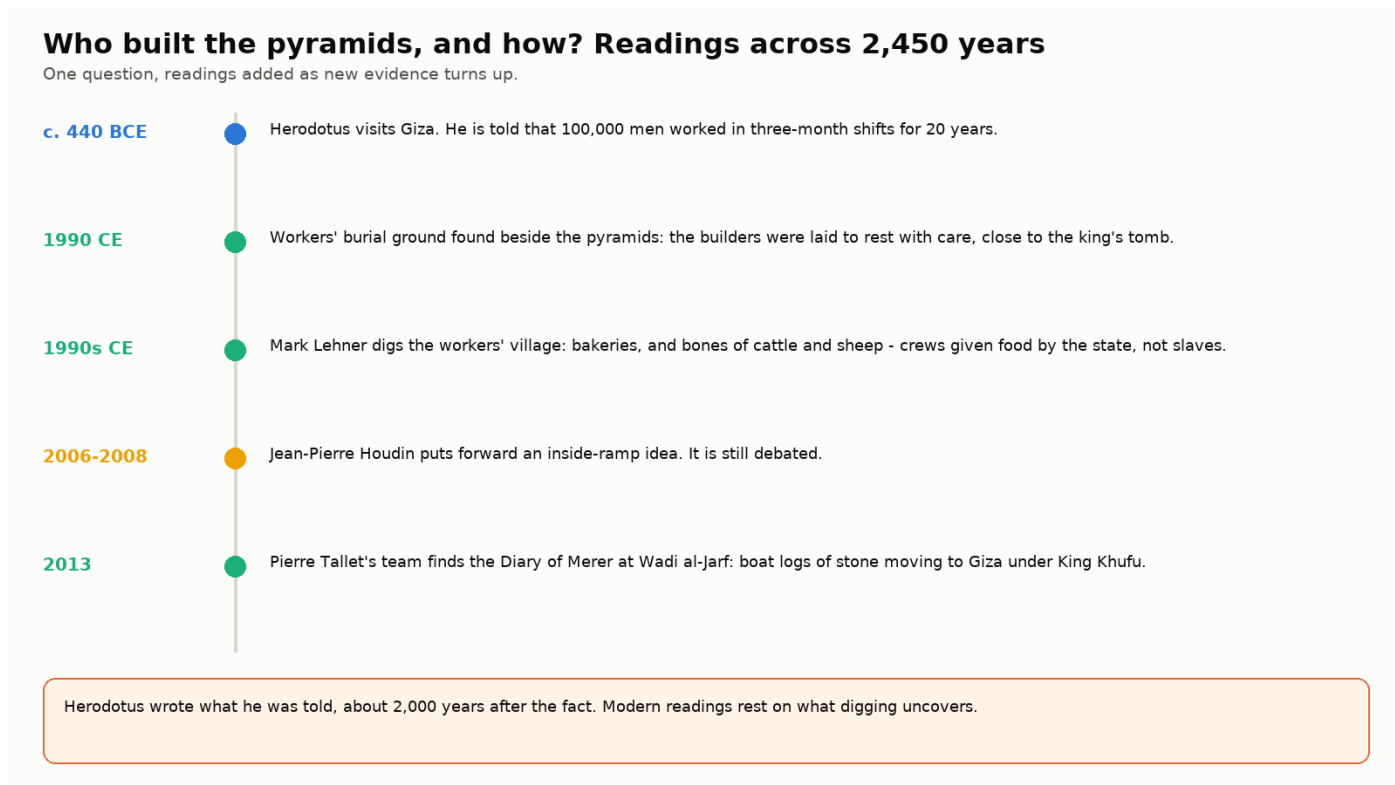
Science does not end debates — it moves them onto firmer ground.

Sources: Burckhardt's “perfect equality” passage, Middlemore translation, Part 5 “Society and Festivals”: en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Civilization_of_the_Renaissance_in_Italy/Part_5; Joan Kelly's essay “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” (1977): en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joan_Kelly; accessed 25 August 2026.

4. Case 2 — How were the pyramids built? .E03

5A posed the key question; 5D tested the sources. Now analyse the interpretations. The oldest reading comes from Herodotus, a Greek writer (about 484–about 425 BCE) who visited Egypt about 440 BCE — about 2,100 years after the Great Pyramid was built for King Khufu. He wrote down what he was told: gangs of 100,000 men working in three-month shifts, twenty years of building, and stones raised by machines of short wooden beams.

Figure 4 sets Herodotus's reading beside the modern ones that followed each new find.



A vertical timeline of readings of how the pyramids were built, from Herodotus visiting Giza about 440 BCE, through the workers' burial ground found in 1990, Mark Lehner's workers' village in the 1990s, Jean-Pierre Houdin's inside-ramp idea of 2006 to 2008, and Pierre Tallet's find of the Diary of Merer in 2013

Figure 4. One question, readings added as new evidence turns up — reason 1 of Figure 2 in action.

Figure 5 does the real work of this case: it tests Herodotus claim by claim against what the evidence now shows.

Testing Herodotus, claim by claim		
WHAT HERODOTUS WROTE	WHAT THE EVIDENCE NOW SHOWS	VERDICT
100,000 men at a time	recent estimates sit near 13,000 on a normal day, up to 40,000 at the peak	looks too big
20 years on the pyramid	a 20-year span is still judged workable	could be right
built by slaves (as Greek tales said)	tombs and village show paid, honoured crews with good food	not supported
stones raised by machines	no cranes or wheels of that time have been found; ramps and sledges are the best guess	unsettled
fine white stone brought from far away	Merer's diary (found 2013) logs boats carrying white limestone from Tura to Giza	supported
A claim that is 2,450 years old is not wrong by default - it is tested claim by claim.		

A three-column table testing five of Herodotus's claims about pyramid-building against modern evidence, each with a verdict: workforce size looks too big, the twenty-year span could be right, slave labour is not supported, the machines are unsettled, and the long-distance boat transport of fine white stone is supported by Merer's diary

Figure 5. Testing Herodotus, claim by claim.

Read down the verdict column and two lessons appear. First, a claim that is 2,450 years old is not wrong by default — one claim is supported, one could be right. Second, the reading that survived longest in schoolbooks — that slaves built the pyramids — is the one the digging most clearly overturns: the workers' burial ground found in 1990 shows builders laid to rest with care beside the king's tomb, and Mark Lehner's digging of the workers' village in the 1990s found bakeries and the bones of cattle and sheep — crews given food by the state. The debate that remains is the *how*: ramps, sledges, levers — and Houdin's inside-ramp idea, still unproven.

Sources: Herodotus's claims, the 1990 cemetery, Lehner's workforce estimates (about 13,000 on a normal day, up to 40,000 at the peak) and Houdin's idea: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Pyramid_of_Giza; the Diary of Merer, found 2013 by Pierre Tallet's team at Wadi al-Jarf: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wadi_al-Jarf_papyri; accessed 25 August 2026.

5. Case 3 — Why did the western Roman Empire fall? .E03

.E03 also asks for theories about the decline of ancient societies. This book's case is the fall of the western Roman Empire (1D told the story; 5A framed the key question). Rome's last western emperor was removed in 476 CE — the event is fixed; the *why* is one of history's oldest debates. Figure 6 sets out three strong readings.

Why did the western Roman Empire fall? Three readings

Edward Gibbon (1776-1789)

- Christianity taught patience and turned money and men away from the army's needs
- built from Roman writings

Bryan Ward-Perkins (2005)

- wars, unrest and falling state income: a real breakdown, not a gentle change
- built from broken pots, lost roof tiles, simpler goods

Kyle Harper (2017)

- a colder climate and waves of sickness struck an empire joined by trade roads
- built from ice cores, tree rings and DNA

One more reading

Peter Brown (1971) reads the same centuries as a slow change into a new age, not a fall at all. Ask of each reading: what evidence is it built from?

Three cards setting out three readings of why the western Roman Empire fell — Edward Gibbon (1776 to 1789) blaming Christianity's turn away from the army's needs, Bryan Ward-Perkins (2005) arguing for a real breakdown shown by everyday goods, and Kyle Harper (2017) pointing to a colder climate and waves of sickness — with a fourth reading by Peter Brown (1971) that the same centuries were a slow change, not a fall

Figure 6. One fall, three readings — and a fourth that questions the word “fall”.

Steelman each reading before judging: Gibbon (1776–1789) read Roman writers of the time and found them blaming their age's loss of energy; Ward-Perkins (2005) did not trust words alone and turned to broken pots, lost roof tiles and simpler goods — the archaeology of ordinary life getting poorer; Harper (2017) brought in ice cores, tree rings and DNA to show climate and disease striking an empire joined by its own trade roads. Peter Brown's note in Figure 6 is the deepest challenge: maybe nothing “fell” — maybe the same centuries were a slow change into a new age.

Ask of each reading the question that ends Figure 6: *what evidence is it built from?* That question, not your favourite, decides how far each reading goes.

Sources: Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1789):

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_History_of_the_Decline_and_Fall_of_the_Roman_Empire; Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (2005): en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fall_of_Rome_and_the_End_of_Civilization; Harper, *The Fate of Rome* (2017): en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fate_of_Rome; Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971): en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_World_of_Late_Antiquity; accessed 25 August 2026.

6. Case 4 — Renaissance Italy: sudden leap or long climb? .E04

.E04 asks you to explain what Renaissance Italy achieved, using several interpretations (the curriculum's other option is the Ottoman Empire; this book chose Italy). But first, the debate about the word itself — Figure 7.

The Renaissance: sudden leap or long climb?

Two readings of the same 'rebirth' of learning and art in Italy.

Jacob Burckhardt (1860)

- a new spirit: people began to see themselves as individuals
- Italy led a leap toward the modern world
- its achievements in art, buildings and learning mark a sharp break with the middle ages

Charles Homer Haskins (1927)

- a flowering had already happened in the 1100s
- towns, universities, Roman law, and lost Greek and Arabic learning came back then
- the 1400s were not the first rebirth - so the 'break' looks smaller

Evidence both readings must face

Evidence both must face: the great dome of Florence's cathedral, finished in 1436 and built by Filippo Brunelleschi - one age's achievement, read two ways.

If the rebirth was a long climb, the 1400s look less like a break and more like a high point of something older. If it was a leap, the dome is proof that something new had begun.

Two readings of the Renaissance set side by side — Jacob Burckhardt (1860) seeing a sharp break and a leap toward the modern world, and Charles Homer Haskins (1927) pointing to an earlier flowering in the 1100s of towns, universities and recovered learning — with the dome of Florence's cathedral, finished 1436, as evidence both readings must face

Figure 7. The Renaissance: sudden leap or long climb?

Burckhardt (1860) read the Renaissance as a sharp break: a new spirit in which people began to see themselves as individuals, leading Italy toward the modern world. Haskins (1927) answered with the 1100s: towns, universities, Roman law, and lost Greek and Arabic learning had already come back then — so the 1400s were not the first rebirth, and the “break” looks smaller.

Now put an achievement between them: the great dome of Florence's cathedral, built by Filippo Brunelleschi and finished in 1436 — the largest brick dome ever built at the time, raised without the wooden frame builders of the time were thought to need. For Burckhardt's reading, the dome is proof that something new had begun; for Haskins's, it is a high point of a climb that started centuries earlier. The achievement is the same; the interpretation decides what it counts as evidence for.

Sources: Burckhardt (1860): en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Civilization_of_the_Renaissance_in_Italy; Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (1927): en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Renaissance_of_the_12th_century; Brunelleschi's dome: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence_Cathedral; accessed 25 August 2026.

7. Case 5 — The Spanish conquest: counting consequences .E05

This is the heaviest case in the section, and the steelman rule matters most here. In 1550–1551, the Spanish crown called a formal debate in Valladolid: how should Spain treat the peoples of the Americas? Two scholars argued it — Figure 8 sets each side out at its strongest before any judgement.

The Valladolid debate, 1550-1551

How should Spain treat the peoples of the Americas? Two readings, each shown at its strongest.

Bartolome de las Casas

lived in the colonies; wrote *A Short Account* (1542, printed 1552)

- the peoples of the Americas are rational and free
- they must not be wronged; faith should be offered, not forced
- he reported the cruel treatment he had seen

Juan Gines de Sepulveda

a scholar who had never crossed the sea

- some groups were not fit to rule themselves
- practices like human sacrifice justified war and rule
- Spain's rule could bring faith and order

The judges' verdict

The judges gave no clear verdict. Both sides claimed victory.

The steelman rule: each side is set out at its strongest before any judgement. Your task is to weigh the evidence, not to pick a team.

A later age can still ask: whose voices are missing from this debate about them? The peoples of the Americas were the subject of the debate - but not its speakers.

The Valladolid debate of 1550 to 1551 set out as two columns — Bartolome de las Casas arguing that the peoples of the Americas were rational and free and reported the cruel treatment he had seen, and Juan Gines de Sepulveda arguing that some groups were not fit to rule themselves and that Spain's rule could bring faith and order — with the judges giving no clear verdict, a note on the steelman rule, and a question about whose voices are missing

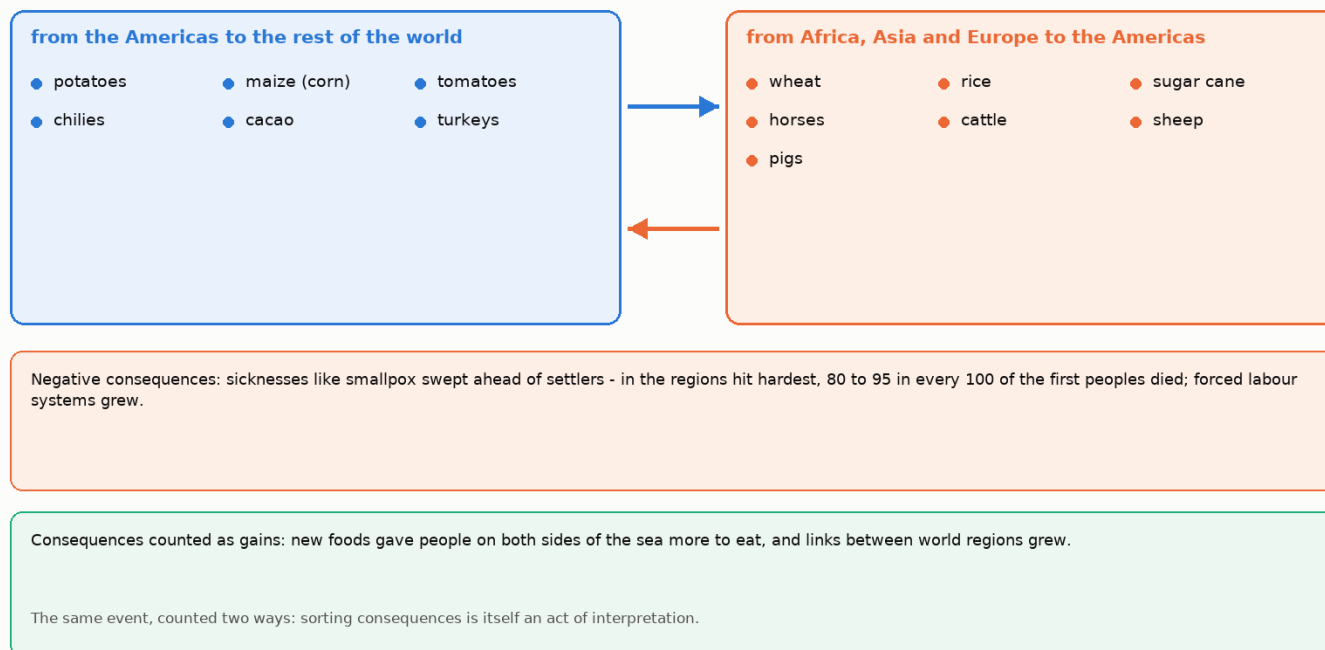
Figure 8. The Valladolid debate: each side at its strongest, before judgement.

Two things to notice. The judges gave no clear verdict — both sides claimed victory — and the peoples being debated had no voice in the debate about them. Las Casas had lived in the colonies and seen what was done; his book *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (written 1542, printed 1552) helped push the Spanish crown to pass the New Laws of 1542, which limited the forced labour of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas.

.E05 then asks what good and what harm the conquest did. Historian Alfred Crosby gave the biggest of them a name in 1972: the **Columbian exchange** — the movement of foods, animals, people and diseases between the Americas and the wider world after 1492 (named for Columbus). Figure 9 sorts what moved each way.

The Columbian exchange: what moved each way after 1492

The term comes from historian Alfred Crosby (1972).



The Columbian exchange set out as two columns of foods and animals moving each way after 1492 — potatoes, maize, tomatoes, chilies, cacao and turkeys from the Americas, wheat, rice, sugar cane, horses, cattle, sheep and pigs the other way — with a band for negative consequences, sickness killing 80 to 95 in every 100 people in the regions hit hardest and forced labour systems growing, and a band for consequences counted as gains, new foods and growing links between world regions

Figure 9. The Columbian exchange: what moved each way after 1492.

Sorting consequences is itself an act of interpretation. The foods that crossed each way became food for millions; the same ships carried smallpox, which killed 80 to 95 in every 100 people in the regions hit hardest, and forced labour systems grew to work the new plantations. Historians give different weight to the same facts — and the people doing the weighing are not the same as the people who paid. In your answers, name which consequences you count as positive and which as negative, and give the reason for each.

Sources: the Valladolid debate: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valladolid_debate; las Casas's Short Account and the New Laws of 1542: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Short_Account_of_the_Destruction_of_the_Indies; Crosby's Columbian exchange (1972) and the 80 to 95 per cent figure: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbian_exchange; accessed 25 August 2026.

8. Case 6 — Museum, film, game: interpretations you can watch and play .E06

Interpretations do not live only in books. A museum exhibition chooses what to show and what to leave out; a film chooses what to dramatise; a documentary chooses which witnesses and which footage to trust; a game chooses what the player does. Each is a reading of the past with a maker, a time and a purpose — so each can be analysed with the same six questions (Figure 10). The three examples below are a museum exhibition, a film and a video game; the same six questions work on any documentary you watch.

Reading a museum, film or game as an interpretation

Six questions for any interpretation you can watch, walk through or play.

1. Who made it, when - and why?

2. What is included, and what is left out?

3. Whose voices do you hear, and whose are silent?

4. What is changed for drama, display or fun?

5. What evidence lies behind it?

6. What does it say about the time that made it, as well as the time it shows?

MUSEUM EXHIBITION

Treasures of Tutankhamun - museum exhibition, British Museum, 1972; 1,694,117 visitors, the most successful show in British museum history to that time

FILM

Kingdom of Heaven - film, director Ridley Scott, 2005, about the fight over Jerusalem in the 1180s

VIDEO GAME

Assassin's Creed II - video game, Ubisoft, 2009, set in Renaissance Italy (Florence, Venice) from 1476 to 1499, with real figures such as Leonardo da Vinci

Six questions for reading any museum exhibition, film or video game as an interpretation — who made it and why, what is included and left out, whose voices are heard, what is changed for drama or fun, what evidence lies behind it, and what it says about the time that made it — with three named examples: the Treasures of Tutankhamun exhibition at the British Museum in 1972, the film Kingdom of Heaven (2005), and the video game Assassin's Creed II (2009)

Figure 10. Six questions for any interpretation you can watch, walk through or play.

Three named, dated examples to practise on:

- **Museum exhibition — *Treasures of Tutankhamun*, British Museum, 1972.** Objects from the tomb of the Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun (Chapter 2) drew 1,694,117 visitors — the most successful show in British museum history to that time. Question 2 applies sharply: the show chose the gold and the beauty, and left most of the story of how the tomb was found under British control in 1922 outside the display case.
- **Film — *Kingdom of Heaven*, director Ridley Scott, 2005.** A story set in the 1180s fight over Jerusalem between the crusader Balian of Ibelin and the sultan Saladin. Historians split over it — some called it careless with the past, others said it shows responsibly what the time looked and felt like. Question 4 is the one to ask: what was changed for drama?
- **Video game — *Assassin's Creed II*, Ubisoft, 2009.** The player moves through Renaissance Italy from 1476 to 1499 — Florence, Venice and other towns — meeting real figures such as Leonardo da Vinci. Question 6 is the sharpest here: a game made in 2009 says as much about what our time finds exciting in the Renaissance as it does about the 1400s.

Sources: Treasures of Tutankhamun at the British Museum, 1972, and its visitor count:

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treasures_of_Tutankhamun; Kingdom of Heaven and historians' split readings of it:

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Heaven_(2005_film); Assassin's Creed II's setting and figures:

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassin%27s_Creed_II; accessed 25 August 2026.

9. How to analyse any interpretation

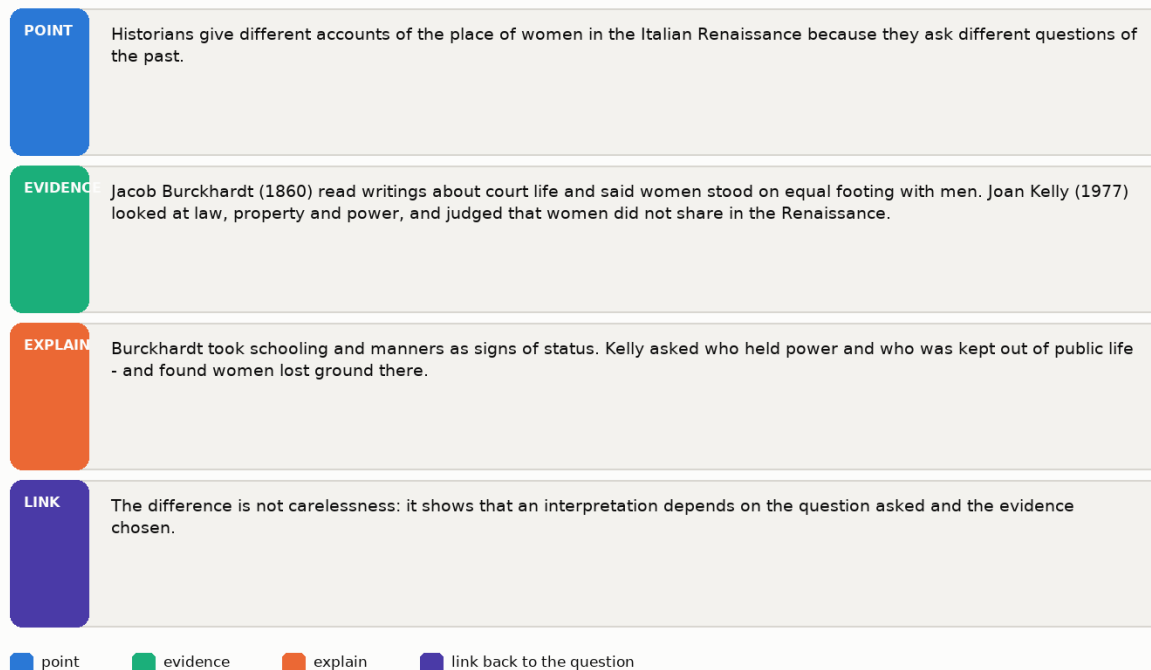
Five steps, in order:

1. **Say what it claims.** One sentence, in your own words.
2. **Say who made it, when, and why.** A reading has a maker and a moment (reason 4 of Figure 2).
3. **Test it against the evidence.** Claim by claim, as Figure 5 did to Herodotus: supported, not supported, or unsettled.

4. **Ask what it leaves out.** What is not said, and whose voices are silent, can matter more than what is said.
5. **Weigh, then judge.** Which reading fits the evidence best — and why. Judge the reasoning, not the team.

When you write your analysis, use the shape of Figure 11: point, evidence, explain, link.

Model paragraph: explaining why historians differ



A model paragraph about why historians differ on women in the Renaissance, colour-coded into its four parts: the point, the evidence from Burckhardt and Kelly, the explanation of the questions each asked, and the link back to the question

Figure 11. Model paragraph: explaining why historians differ.

Worked examples

Example 1 — with help: accounting for two readings of women in the Renaissance (.E02)

Use Figure 3 and part 3 to complete the table.

Working	Comment
(a) What does each historian claim? Burckhardt (1860): women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men in schooling and manners. Kelly (1977): women did not share in the Renaissance; their share of power and public life fell.	Two clear, opposite claims about the same period and place.
(b) What records does each lean on? Burckhardt: writings about court life and learning. Kelly: records of law, property and power.	The same period keeps both kinds of record. Neither historian made the evidence up — they chose different parts of it.
(c) Why do they differ? They asked different questions: schooling and manners, or law and power. Different questions give different answers (reason 2 of Figure 2).	This is the accounting step .E02 asks for: the difference is explained, not just described.

∴ both readings are reasoned; the difference comes from the questions asked and the records chosen. Accounting for differences means explaining *why* they differ — not saying one side is careless.

Example 2 — with help: testing Herodotus claim by claim (.E03)

Use Figure 5 to test three of Herodotus's claims about how the pyramids were built.

Working	Comment
Claim 1: 100,000 men worked at a time. Modern estimates sit near 13,000 on a normal day, up to 40,000 at the peak — so the number looks too big.	A late account can exaggerate. The claim is tested against the village and cemetery evidence, then judged.
Claim 2: the builders were slaves (as Greek tales said). The burial ground (1990) shows builders laid to rest with care near the king's tomb; the village shows paid crews with good food — not supported.	The longest-lived claim is the one the digging most clearly overturns.
Claim 3: fine white stone came from far away. Merer's diary (found 2013) logs boats carrying white limestone from Tura to Giza — supported.	A claim 2,450 years old can still be right where the evidence fits.

∴ an old interpretation is not wrong by default. It is tested claim by claim, and each claim gets its own verdict.

Practice tasks

Practice with help

Q1. (.E02) Copy the four reasons from Figure 2. Match each reason to one case from this section where you can see it at work. The first row is done for you.

Reason	Case in this section
1. New evidence turns up	The pyramids: the 1990 burial ground, the village dig of the 1990s and Merer's diary (2013) each changed the reading of how they were built
2. They ask different questions	
3. They weigh the same records in different ways	
4. They write from different times	

Q2. (.E02) Use Figure 3. Complete the table.

	Burckhardt (1860)	Kelly (1977)
Claim		women did not share in the Renaissance
Records used	writings about court life and learning	
One question each asked		who held power, and who was kept out of public life?

Q3. (.E03) Use Figure 4. (a) Put these five readings in date order: Houdin's inside-ramp idea; Herodotus's account; Tallet's find of Merer's diary; the workers' burial ground; Lehner's workers' village. (b) Which of the five is nearest to being a primary source for the way the pyramids were built, and why? (c) Which reason from Figure 2 best explains this whole timeline?

Q4. (.E03) Use Figure 5. Give one claim of Herodotus that later evidence supports, one that later evidence works against, and one that is still unsettled.

Q5. (.E04) Use Figure 7. (a) Give one point Burckhardt's reading leans on. (b) Give one point Haskins's reading leans on. (c) The dome of Florence's cathedral was finished in 1436. Why can both readings claim it as evidence?

Q6. (.E05) Use Figure 9. Sort these consequences of the Columbian exchange into positive and negative, and give one reason for each sorting: new foods people on both sides of the sea could eat; smallpox killing 80 to 95 in every 100 in the regions hit hardest; growing links between world regions; forced labour systems growing on plantations.

Practice on your own

Q7. (.E02) Explain why historians differ about the place of women in the Renaissance. Use both historians from Figure 3 and at least two reasons from Figure 2.

Q8. (.E03) “A claim that is 2,450 years old is not wrong by default.” Explain this statement using the testing of Herodotus in Figure 5. Use at least three claims and their verdicts.

Q9. (.E05) Identify the good and the harmful consequences of Spain’s conquest of the Americas. Use las Casas’s and Sepúlveda’s readings from Figure 8 and the exchange in Figure 9, and say clearly how you weighed each consequence.

Q10. (.E06) Choose one of the three examples in Figure 10. Analyse it as a historical interpretation using at least four of the six questions.

Source-based inquiry task

Q11. (.E03; links to the source skills of 5C–5D) Read the adapted source and answer the parts below.

“The pyramid was built by gangs of 100,000 men, who worked in three-month shifts. The building took twenty years. The stones were raised by machines made of short wooden beams.” — Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 2; a Greek writer of about 484–about 425 BCE, writing about events roughly 2,100 years before his own time (adapted)

- (a) Give two claims Herodotus makes in this passage.
 - (b) Is this a primary or a secondary source for the question “how were the pyramids built?” Give one reason.
 - (c) Using Figure 5, give one claim in the passage that later evidence supports or could support, and one that later evidence works against.
 - (d) Herodotus wrote down what he was told by guides in Egypt. Whose voices are still missing from this account?
-

Answers

Q1. Any correct matchings; examples — 2: Burckhardt asked about schooling and manners while Kelly asked about law and power, and they reached opposite readings of women in the Renaissance. 3: Gibbon, Ward-Perkins and Harper each weigh different kinds of evidence (writings; pots and tiles; ice cores and DNA) and reach different readings of Rome's fall. 4: Burckhardt wrote in 1860, when his age wanted to find the birth of the modern world; Kelly wrote in 1977, when her age asked who was left out of the story.

Q2. Burckhardt's claim: women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men. Kelly's records: law, property and power.

Q3. (a) Herodotus (about 440 BCE) → workers' burial ground (1990) → Lechner's workers' village (1990s) → Houdin's inside-ramp idea (2006–2008) → Merer's diary (2013). (b) Merer's diary — it was written at the time of the building itself, under King Khufu; every other reading looks back from much later. (c) Reason 1: new evidence turns up.

Q4. Supported: fine white stone brought from far away (Merer's diary logs boats carrying white limestone from Tura to Giza). Works against: slave labour (the cemetery and village show paid crews with good food). Unsettled: stones raised by machines (no cranes of the time have been found; ramps and sledges are the best guess). The workforce of 100,000 "looks too big" and the 20-year span "could be right" are also acceptable with their verdicts.

Q5. (a) Any of: a new spirit in which people saw themselves as individuals; Italy leading a leap toward the modern world; achievements in art and buildings marking a sharp break with the middle ages. (b) Any of: a flowering had already happened in the 1100s; towns, universities, Roman law and lost Greek and Arabic learning came back then. (c) The dome is real and dated, and both readings agree it is an achievement — they differ only on what it is evidence for: a new beginning (Burckhardt) or the high point of a longer climb (Haskins).

Q6. Positive (with reasons): new foods gave people on both sides of the sea more to eat — foods like potatoes and maize became staples far from the Americas; growing links between world regions — trade and travel joined regions that had never been in contact. Negative (with reasons): smallpox killed 80 to 95 in every 100 people in the regions hit hardest — the largest loss of life in the record; forced labour systems grew on plantations — conquest was followed by unfree work. A full answer notes that the same voyages carried both the foods and the sicknesses.

Q7–Q10 — see the model responses below.

Q11. (a) Any two of: 100,000 men worked at a time; they worked in three-month shifts; the building took twenty years; stones were raised by machines of short wooden beams. (b) Secondary for this question: Herodotus wrote about 440 BCE about a building raised about 2,100 years earlier, from what he was told, not from records of the building itself. A full answer adds that he is a valued primary source for what Greeks of his own time believed about Egypt. (c) Supports or could support: the twenty-year span is still judged workable; the far-travelled stone matches Merer's diary. Works against: 100,000 men at a time looks too big next to estimates of about 13,000 to 40,000; slave labour is not supported by the cemetery and village. (d) The builders themselves. No writings survive from the crews; the nearest we have is Merer's diary — a work log, not the workers' own words.

Model responses

Q7. Historians differ about the place of women in the Renaissance for two reasons set out in Figure 2. First, they ask different questions. Jacob Burckhardt (1860) read writings about court life and schooling and concluded that women "stood on a footing of perfect equality with men"; Joan Kelly (1977) asked who held power and who was kept out of public life, reading law, property and records of power, and concluded that women did not share in the Renaissance at all. Second, they write from different times. Burckhardt wrote in 1860, when historians mainly studied great art and learning; Kelly wrote in 1977, when historians had begun to ask whose lives were left out of older stories. The same period keeps records of both schooling and law, so both readings rest on real evidence — the difference lies in the questions and the records chosen, not in carelessness. That is why the debate is still live: each reading answers the question it asked.

Q8. Herodotus wrote about 440 BCE, about 2,100 years after the Great Pyramid was built, and much of what he said was long dismissed as mere old tale. Testing his claim by claim, as Figure 5 does, shows why that dismissal is too

quick. One claim is supported: he said fine white stone came from far away, and Merer's diary, found in 2013, logs boats carrying white limestone from Tura to Giza. One could be right: the twenty-year span he gave is still judged workable. Two fail the test: 100,000 workers at a time looks too big beside modern estimates of about 13,000 on a normal day and up to 40,000 at the peak, and slave labour is not supported, since the 1990 cemetery and the workers' village show paid crews with good food, honoured with burial near the king. One claim — the machines — is still unsettled. The age of a claim is not the test; the fit with evidence is. An old claim survives where the evidence fits it and falls where it does not — claim by claim.

Q9. The conquest of the Americas had consequences that can be sorted into positive and negative — and the sorting itself is debated. Negative consequences weigh heaviest. Smallpox and other sicknesses crossed with the settlers and, in the regions hit hardest, killed 80 to 95 in every 100 of the first peoples; forced labour systems grew to work the new plantations. These fit the reading of Bartolomé de las Casas, who lived in the colonies and reported the cruel treatment he had seen; his *Short Account* (1542, printed 1552) helped push the Spanish crown to pass the New Laws of 1542 limiting forced labour. Sepúlveda's reading — that Spain's rule could bring faith and order — points to the consequences counted as positive: new foods moved each way and gave people on both sides of the sea more to eat, and links between world regions grew. Weighing them: the foods and links were real gains, but they were shared across later centuries and across peoples who chose the exchange, while the deaths and the forced labour fell at once on peoples who never chose it. On that weighing, the negative consequences carry more weight — and a full answer also notes that the peoples of the Americas had no seat at the Valladolid debate that argued over them.

Q10. *Assassin's Creed II* (Ubisoft, 2009) can be read as a historical interpretation of Renaissance Italy using four of the six questions. Who made it, when and why? A game company in 2009, to sell an adventure — the purpose is fun first, and that shapes everything. What is included and left out? The game rebuilds Florence, Venice and other towns of 1476–1499 in careful detail and puts real figures such as Leonardo da Vinci on the streets; but it leaves out most ordinary life — the player lives among palaces and plots, not among the workshops and fields where most people of the time lived. What is changed for drama or fun? The hero climbs every building, fights in every street and meets every famous name in one lifetime — real Renaissance life was slower, poorer and less crowded with great names. What does it say about the time that made it? A game from 2009 treats the Renaissance as a playground of famous men and beautiful cities — which says as much about what our time finds exciting in the period as about the 1400s themselves. The game is not useless as an interpretation: it is a carefully researched one, worth analysing like any other reading — maker, choices, silences and all.

Q11 (extended model). Herodotus claims in this passage that 100,000 men built the pyramid in three-month shifts over twenty years, with stones raised by wooden machines. For the question “how were the pyramids built?” the passage is a secondary source: it was written about 440 BCE, about 2,100 years after the building, from what guides told the writer, not from records of the work itself. Its value is that it is the oldest full reading we have, and parts of it stand up: the twenty-year span is still judged workable, and the far-travelled stone fits Merer's diary of 2013, which logs boats moving white limestone from Tura to Giza. Its limits are just as clear: 100,000 workers at a time looks too big beside estimates of 13,000 to 40,000, and the slave-labour story attached to it is not supported by the cemetery and village finds. The voices missing are the builders' own: Merer's log is the nearest the evidence comes, and it records work, not words. Weighing value against limits, claim by claim, is what analysing an interpretation means.

Sources

All sources below were retrieved on 25 August 2026.

- **Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 2** (Greek writer, about 484–about 425 BCE; visited Egypt about 440 BCE) — his account of the pyramids' building: 100,000 men in three-month shifts, twenty years, machines of short beams — via the Wikipedia article “Great Pyramid of Giza”.
- **Workforce estimates for the Great Pyramid** (about 13,000 on a normal day, up to 40,000 at the peak), linked to Mark Lehner and the Ancient Egypt Research Associates; the **workers' cemetery at Giza**, found 1990; and **Jean-Pierre Houdin's internal-ramp idea** (published 2006–2008, still debated) — via the Wikipedia article “Great Pyramid of Giza”.
- **Diary of Merer (Wadi al-Jarf papyri)**, boat logs of white limestone moved from Tura to Giza under King Khufu, found 2013 by the team of Pierre Tallet — via the Wikipedia article “Wadi al-Jarf papyri”.

- **Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860)** — “women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men”, Middlemore translation, Part 5 “Society and Festivals” — via en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Civilization_of_the_Renaissance_in_Italy/Part_5.
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- **The dome of Florence’s cathedral**, built by Filippo Brunelleschi, finished 1436 — via the Wikipedia article “Florence Cathedral”.
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- ***Kingdom of Heaven*** (film, director Ridley Scott, 2005) and historians’ split readings of it — via the Wikipedia article “Kingdom of Heaven (2005 film)”.
- ***Assassin’s Creed II*** (video game, Ubisoft, 2009), Renaissance Italy 1476–1499, real figures including Leonardo da Vinci — via the Wikipedia article “Assassin’s Creed II”.

VC2HH8S06 — *analyse historical interpretations and debates*

Taught with .E02, .E03, .E04, .E05 and .E06. .E03 is taught through its pyramid case and through the generalised form used in the TOC chapter block — theories about the decline of ancient societies — using the fall of the western Roman Empire; the curriculum’s other named empire in that elaboration is not taught. .E04 is taught through its Renaissance Italy option; the Ottoman Empire is the curriculum’s other study choice and is noted in the section but not taught. .E01 is excluded entire per TOC §2A-C; the id is retained as a linkage key only and is not taught or quoted. Draws on: VC2HH8S06.E02, VC2HH8S06.E03, VC2HH8S06.E04, VC2HH8S06.E05, VC2HH8S06.E06 (taught) · VC2HH8S06.E01 (excluded entire per §2A-C — retained as linkage key only).