Education & Communities

Public Schools NSW

History K-6

Historical inquiry in the primary classroom

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Welcome

Welcome to the *Historical inquiry in the primary classroom* resource.

This resource explores the process of undertaking an historical inquiry process using the historical concepts and skills described in the *History K-10 Syllabus* (2012), Board of Studies, NSW. This resource is designed to assist you to:

- understand the central role of historical inquiry in the history syllabus
- engage with the guiding principles for constructing an historical inquiry
- build capacity in developing an understanding of the continuum of historical skills required in teaching the historical inquiry process.

Teachers may use this resource individually or as a stage/group.

Overview

This resource explores the importance of historical inquiry in the History K-6 Syllabus. It is organised into three main sections:

Section heading	Description
Introduction: What is historical inquiry?	In this section you will define the historical inquiry process and explore its key role in developing student questioning, explanation and communication.
Constructing an historical inquiry	In this section of the resource, you will engage with a number of activities designed to enhance familiarity of the historical inquiry process. You will consider the use of key inquiry questions and sources when planning learning experiences in the primary classroom. You will also become familiar with constructing an historical inquiry through teaching ideas.
Professional reflection	In this section reflect on your knowledge of historical inquiry by planning for teaching using the historical inquiry process in your classroom.

Rationale

The purpose of this resource is to build teachers' capacity to appreciate and utilise historical inquiry as a discipline-based approach. Historical inquiry allows the student to question, interpret, explain and communicate their reasoning as an historian. The essential role it has in the teaching and learning of historical knowledge, understanding, concepts and skills in the history syllabus is pivotal in the development of student engagement with the past.

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Introduction to historical inquiry

What is historical inquiry?

The process of developing knowledge and understanding by posing questions about the past, and applying skills associated with locating, analysing, evaluating and using sources as evidence to develop an informed argument or interpretation.

Board of Studies NSW *History K-10 Syllabus* (2012)

The skills of historical inquiry are developed through teacher-directed and student-centred learning, enabling students to pose and investigate questions with increasing initiative, self-direction and expertise. In the teaching of history there should not be an artificial separation of content and process, nor a focus on historical method at the expense of historical knowledge.

(Australian Curriculum: History)

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Activities

Activity	Description
	 Watch the video of Dr Kay Carroll discussing the use of historical inquiry in the syllabus. The transcript is also provided.
	Consider and discuss the following questions: • What opportunities for historical inquiry could you embrace in implementing the syllabus? • Briefly describe historical inquiry focused learning. • How could you promote historical inquiry in your classroom?

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Transcript of Dr Kay Carroll – historical inquiry in the syllabus

Well, I'd like to think rather than challenges in the new syllabus it gives primary teachers new opportunities in the teaching of history. They already do so much particularly well. They know that children learn from stories. They know that children learn about the past from their families and they always begin with that. So, that won't change but a new opportunity perhaps to bring in artefacts from the home. Those photographs that children learn about. Those stories that have been told. Pieces of music. Perhaps a particular brooch or a personal piece of jewellery. A piece of pottery. Whatever it might be to actually bring them in and allow them to tell a story. So, that's a new opportunity with the syllabus that primary teachers will have to actually engage in what we call 'inquiry based learning' which allows I guess the children to learn directly from the World, not just about the World in a textbook or on a SMART board but actually engage and explore and ask questions. You know whose object was this? Where did it come from? Why is it important? What does it tell us? How would it have been used in the past? What does it mean to us? How significant is it? And these are the sorts of opportunities that primary teachers will have to use inquiry learning in a relevant and practical way for the classroom for their students to bring history alive.

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Constructing an historical inquiry

What is historical inquiry?

Historical inquiry occurs when:

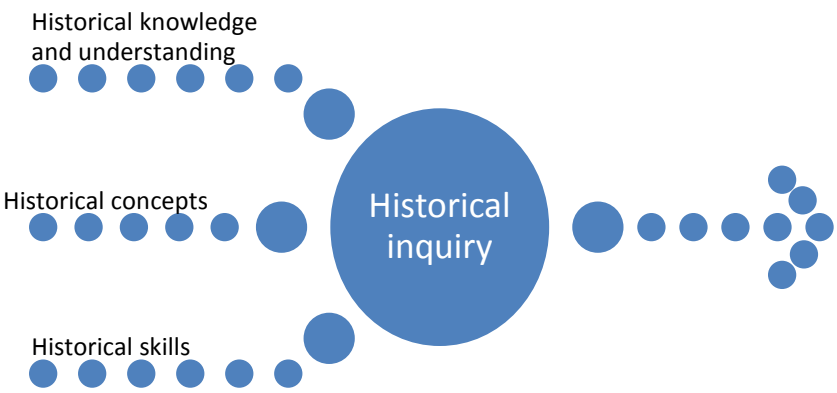
- programming is based upon the continuum of skills using the key inquiry questions from the syllabus
- students are assisted to analyse different historical interpretations of an event, place, group or person
- teachers and/or students pose questions about the past and apply skills such as locating, analysing, evaluating and using sources
- students develop an informed argument or interpretation including a range of perspectives using historical knowledge and understanding.

Historical inquiry is included in the historical skills outcome for each stage of learning:

Stage	Outcome	Historical skills outcomes
Early Stage 1	**HTe-2**	demonstrates developing skills of historical inquiry and communication
Stage 1	**HT1-4**	demonstrates skills of historical inquiry and communication
Stage 2	**HT2-5**	applies skills of historical inquiry and communication
Stage 3	**HT3-5**	applies a variety of skills of historical inquiry and communication

How does it work?

A well-constructed historical inquiry, just like a jigsaw puzzle, should tie together the continuum of concepts and skills and the metalanguage of history while stimulating curiosity and developing problem-solving, research and critical thinking skills in students.



Historical inquiry is cyclical in nature and uses the key inquiry questions as the beginning core element. By starting with key inquiry questions, there will be a strong focus on the use of historical sources as evidence, where the teacher might present a source, such as a photograph (primary source) and then ask questions about that source. Who, what, where, when and why questions, such as, '*How do we know? Where can we go? Who do we ask?'* should guide the inquiry. Incorporating concepts and skills will enhance an exploration of historical knowledge and understanding.

The evidence that is gathered for an historical inquiry is then used to construct credible claims, which are referred to as historical narratives or descriptions about the past. In other words, historical interpretations seek to provide answers to the guiding historical questions. The outcome of the inquiry should allow students to present their findings in a rich and meaningful way, using literacy and numeracy skills, an understanding of chronology and ICT.

Working with historical inquiry could include the following learning activities as a guide:

Learning activities
• read and analyse a variety of sources for diversity, cause and consequence • compare and contrast different accounts or descriptions of the same event, person, issue • record personal feelings to different accounts or texts • respond to texts – including role plays • develop a discussion using different viewpoints • be critical – cross-check for reliability, share different points of view and conclusions • map the decisions of people in the past by noting consequences and identifying moral issues • include a range of perspectives including a shared history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Activities

Activity	**Description**
	 Watch the Dr Kay Carroll video of the historical inquiry process in primary. The transcript is also provided.

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Activity	Description
	Consider and discuss the following questions: • What importance does the role of questioning play in the historical inquiry process? • How are primary and secondary sources significant to historical inquiry? • In what ways could you incorporate higher-order questioning into your pedagogy?

Transcript of Dr Kay Carroll – historical inquiry process in primary

The historical inquiry process in primary might look something like this. I guess it starts with the question, so it's quite a different approach rather than the teacher perhaps presenting the knowledge, it's starting with a question. Perhaps it's a physical artefact or a source and it's getting students to look at that particular aspect and say 'Well, what do we know about this? What can we observe? What deductions can we make?' And it could be something like a photograph. Who do we see in the picture? What's in the foreground? What's in the background? What might they be doing? What does this tell us? What might we notice about the clothing that they're wearing? What about the expressions on the face? So, actually drilling down using questioning and a lot of the inquiry questions – the who, the what, the when, the how and the why guide the process through. You might look at the sources in depth and then relate them to a larger story. So, for example you might look in Stage 3 at migration and you might look at a picture book such as Anh Do's, 'Littlest Refugee' which brings to life the migrant experience to unpack it and give them context and a particular narrative. And then you might look at some further sources, they might be primary or secondary. To start to unpack it you might build in some research which is very important allowing the students to gather their resources think about a particular question about why do we have migrants coming in this particular time? What were the struggles for freedom that they might have experienced? And putting those sources together in a very rich way where they might create a new text or a source booklet or something using ICT, perhaps a little movie. And then coming back and reflecting and thinking about what do these sources tell us? And have we actually been able to answer the question? And is there more that we can do? So, the historical inquiry process begins with the questioning, finding out information, doing further research, selecting, sifting, sorting, working out exactly what's of importance and relevance. Thinking about the bias or the limitations and then thinking about how we might create that to actually tell a story or tell a particular situation and why this happened and then reflecting and sharing that.

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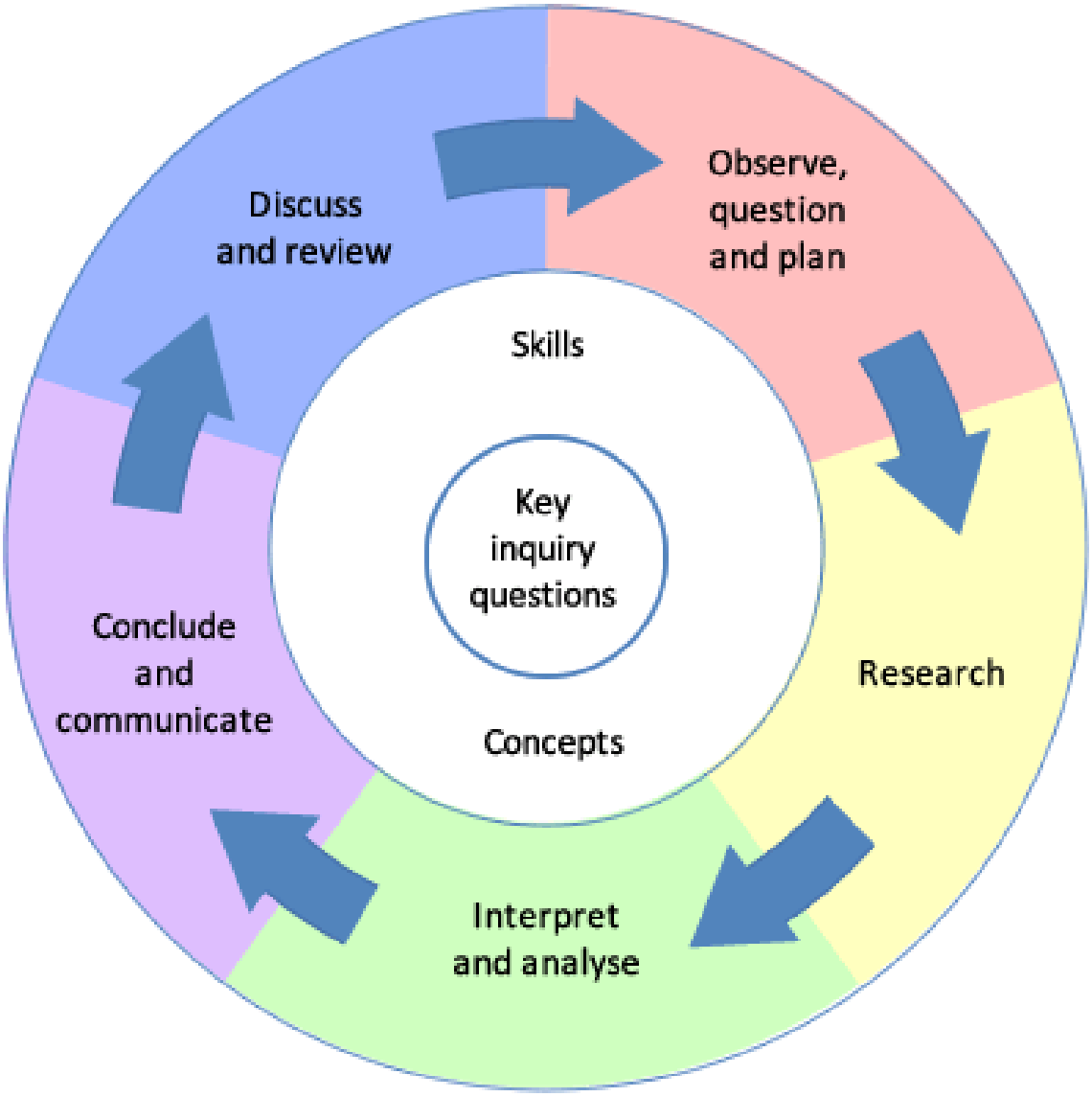
Historical inquiry in the classroom



1. **Observing, questioning and planning** – Is there a historical controversy or mystery students are intrigued by? Decide on a specific person, place, issue, event or development to investigate. Why is it of significance? What is needed to investigate the topic?
2. **Researching** – Think about where the topic fits in the history syllabus and what outcomes will be focused on. Locate and select appropriate primary and secondary sources. These may either support or cast doubt over your topic question(s).
3. **Interpreting and analysing** – Critique the sources by thinking about the evidence that can be derived from them, distinguishing between fact and opinion, adopting different perspectives and deciding what information is the most important.
4. **Concluding and communicating** – Develop a conclusion to the topic/inquiry question based on the sources. Select the most effective method for communicating this information. Develop drafts and allow time for editing. Take into account the audience when presenting.
5. **Discussing and reviewing** – All information is contestable. Allow for conclusions to the original question to be discussed. In light of new evidence, conclusions may change at a later date, in which case the topic is reviewed and the inquiry process begins again.

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Historical inquiry in practice K-6

Process: Observing, questioning and planning

Step 1 – Plan the topic

Historical inquiry requires that students ask historically relevant questions in context. Rich historical questions are those that launch an investigation. The pedagogy of questioning is supported by the Quality Teaching model to enhance deep understanding, deep knowledge and higher-order thinking.

The key inquiry questions in the syllabus provide a framework for historical inquiry which develops students' historical knowledge, understanding and skills.These questions highlight the central importance of investigation in the discipline of history and provide an opportunity to focus on concepts such as continuity and change, significance and perspectives. As the key inquiry questions used in the syllabus are broad questions, they will need to be broken down by teachers to help students make sense of key historical ideas and significant past and present events.

Stage	Topic/Key inquiry questions
Early Stage 1	**Personal and Family Histories** • What is my history and how do I know? • What stories do other people tell about the past? • How can stories of the past be told and shared?
Stage 1	**Present and Past Family Life** • How has family life changed or remained the same over time? • How can we show that the present is different from or similar to the past? • How do we describe the sequence of time? **The Past in the Present** • What aspects of the past can you see today? • What do they tell us? • What remains of the past are important to the local community? Why? • How have changes in technology shaped our daily life?
Stage 2	**Community and Remembrance** • Who lived here first and how do we know? • How has our community changed? What features have been lost and what features have been retained? • What is the nature of the contribution made by different groups and

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Stage	Topic/Key inquiry questions
	individuals in the community? • How and why do people choose to remember significant events of the past? **First Contacts** • Why did the great journeys of exploration occur? • What was life like for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples before the arrival of the Europeans? • Why did Europeans settle in Australia? • What was the nature and consequence of contact between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and early traders, explorers and settlers?
Stage 3	**The Australian Colonies** • What do we know about the lives of people in Australia's colonial past and how do we know? • How did an Australian colony develop over time and why? • How did colonial settlement change the environment? • What were the significant events and who were the significant people that shaped Australian colonies? **Australia as a Nation** • Why and how did Australia become a nation? • How did Australian society change throughout the twentieth century? • Who were the people who came to Australia? Why did they come? • What contribution have significant individuals and groups made to the development of Australian society?

Process: Researching

Step 2 – Contextualise the topic

Research may be teacher-facilitated or student-directed by locating relevant and appropriate historical websites. As a specific skill in the K-10 Skills Continuum, research concerns posing questions, planning an historical inquiry and identifying a range of sources suitable for the topic.

	Outcome and specific continuum skill
Snapshot **Early Stage 1**	Communicates stories of their own family heritage and the heritage of others HTe-1

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	Outcome and specific continuum skill
	• pose questions about the past using sources provided Early Stage 1 students explore a 'floor storm' of teacher-acquired photographs from quality websites or resource kits using a wide range of generic families as stimulus. The teacher facilitates student-devised questions which would prompt further inquiry and communication of personal and family histories.

Process: Interpreting and analysing

Step 3 – Analyse the sources

This step is concerned with the exploration of sources by comparing features of objects and stories using a range of questioning techniques. Analyse the sources e.g. a variety of documents, photographs, passports, video footage, oral stories and personal artefacts to gather evidence. Constant discussion, questioning, and reflecting are vital to interpreting and analysing a variety of sources. Teachers can strengthen students' use of historical skills by encouraging them to locate relevant sources, offering different points of view, critiquing sources and creating scenarios based on evidence. The elements of problematic knowledge, cultural knowledge and connectedness are addressed in this section of the inquiry process as outlined in the Quality Teaching model.

	Outcome and specific continuum skill
Snapshot **Stage 1**	Describes the effects of changing technology on people's lives over time HT1-3 • identify and compare features of objects from the past and present Students in Stage 1 analyse sources to describe the effect of changes within family home life e.g. images of family life from 1900s, 1930s, 1950s, 1970s and present, video footage from Australian Screen archives, objects from home, virtual or site study visits. Teachers facilitate student inquiry to interpret the usefulness of sources to find evidence of change.

Process: Concluding and communicating

Step 4 – Develop a response to the key inquiry questions

Students communicate their understanding and develop a response to the key inquiry questions. It is during this step that teachers provide opportunities for students to present their findings using narrative or descriptive texts in a range of communication forms e.g. oral, graphic, written, role play and digital technologies.

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	Outcome and specific continuum skill
Snapshot **Stage 2**	Describes and explains how significant individuals, groups and events contributed to changes in the local community over time HT2-2 • use a range of communication forms (oral, graphic, written) and digital technologies In small groups students in Stage 2 communicate their findings about the contributions of a diverse range of local groups. Presentations can take the form of compiled narratives, such as, an online newspaper (letters to editor, community feel good piece, award nominations, informative texts) written from interviews, diaries and research.

Process: Discussing and reviewing

Step 5 – Reflect and respond

Finally, students discuss, reflect and respond to the work achieved by their peers. As part of the cyclical nature of the inquiry process, if a new direction takes shape, return to the process of interpreting and analysing sources in light of shifting evidence. Hattie (Visible Learning, 2009), reiterates feedback as one of the most influential components to increasing student educational outcomes.

	Outcome and specific continuum skill
Snapshot **Stage 3**	Describes and explains the struggles for rights and freedoms in Australia, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples HT3-4 • respond, read and write to show understanding of historical matters Explore the historical inquiry process and gather evidence about the referendum of 1967, the stolen generations, MABO or the freedom rides of NSW. Students respond and review the key inquiry question/s in relation to peer findings. This can take the form of peer assessments, self-assessment or pre-and post-online surveys.

Activities

Activity	Description
	Engage with the PowerPoint *Historical inquiry in practice K-6* in the Resources folder of the Portfolio. This resource outlines the inquiry process step-by-step using Australia as a Nation context.

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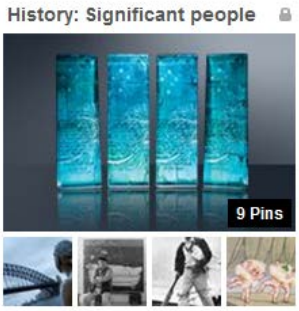
Activity	Description
	 Engage with the NSW HSIE K-6 *History: Migration* board, a curated list of high quality historical websites with information, photographs, documents, timelines and video footage of people who migrated to Australia. Find it on Pinterest.
	 Engage with the NSW HSIE K-6 *History: Significant people* board, a curated list of high quality historical websites with references to significant people who have contributed to Australian society. Find it on Pinterest.
	Use the planning for historical inquiry template, and the knowledge you have gained from this resource, to plan a range of primary and secondary sources for teaching a selected topic and stage. The topic you select will impact on the ability to complete the table. Some areas may be difficult to access suitable primary or secondary sources.

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Planning for historical inquiry: matrix

Topic:
Stage:

	Observing, planning, questioning	Researching	Interpreting and analysing	Concluding and communicating	Designing and reviewing
Outline of activities					

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Professional reflection

Throughout this resource, you have looked at:

- developing a common understanding and metalanguage for the historical inquiry process
- identifying the importance of key inquiry questions
- constructing an historical inquiry in the primary classroom
- becoming familiar with teaching ideas which support historical inquiry.

Reflecting on historical inquiry

Historical inquiry is an active process which enables students to question, analyse, interpret, explain and communicate their understanding of the past. Exposure to valid interpretations and perspectives using sound evidence gathered from primary and secondary sources enhances the investigative process.

Additional resources

Work towards developing students' understanding of the historical inquiry process using a number of useful links below to help you get started:

Further reading/additional resources	**Description**
	Further reading: *Historical literacy* – Tony Taylor & Carmel Young, 'Index of Historical Literacy'. Historical literacy
	 Historical Inquiry – Understanding the Past (Copied under PtVB)

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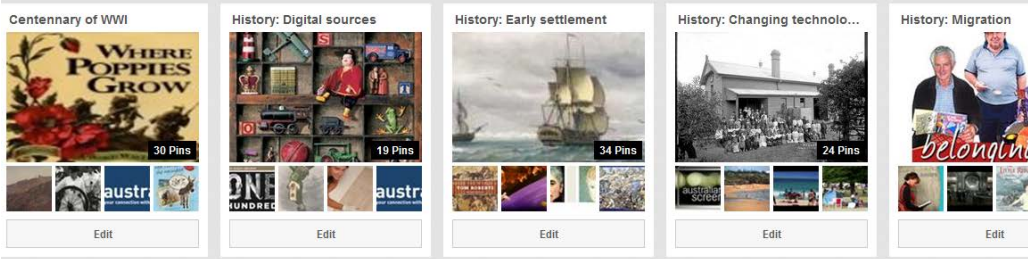
Further reading/additional resources	Description
	 History Teachers' Association of Australia
	 Facing History and Ourselves (Copied under PtVB)
	 HSIE K-6: ideas, teaching strategies and resources Blog
	 NSW Human Society and its Environment K-6 Pinterest