



## Using a Timeline (Continuity and Change, Cause and Consequence)

### Why a Timeline?

Students often encounter little bits and pieces of history out of context and unconnected to larger historic themes. Consequently, students don't develop a sense of historic era and they don't connect individual events to larger movements and themes. This affects the students' grasp of history topics and restricts students' engagement in critical analysis.

Timelines help students understand the order of historic events, and helps students place new events and figures in relation to those they've already studied. They provide a visual aid for identifying cause and effect relationships between events, and a visual prompt to activate student prior knowledge. They allow students to recognize how historic events, eras and topics overlap in time as well as which events have continuity or have changed. They can be used to categorize similar or related events into themes, eras, and topics, and to help students compare elements in different time periods

### Activity

In this ongoing activity, a timeline is collectively constructed by students. It may be made of butcher paper and covered in student drawings, primary sources, and recipe-sized cards noting laws and events. The main classroom timeline may be supplemented by smaller posterboard-sized lines that include only a few elements, such as changes in farming or in environmental regulation over time, or a chronology of legislation related to voting rights and disenfranchisement. But timelines should always be constructed by students so they reflect the students' own learning.

### Preparation

1. Cut a long strip of butcher paper. Your class timeline should be displayed as prominently as possible in your room, and should be easily reached for adding new elements. If it's hard to reach, you'll be less likely to add elements daily. But if you don't have space in your classroom for your timeline, try hanging it in the hallway near your class.
2. In bold colored marker, place marker dates on the paper. These will be determined by the course content. Be sure to leave space for dates before and after the time period your class will explore, however, as your class will almost certainly encounter events that precede and follow the designated beginning and conclusion of your unit explorations.

3. Decide how the class will display elements on the timeline. Will you ask for volunteers to illustrate events that go on the line? Will you ask the class to vote on how they wish to illustrate various elements—with a student illustration, a copy of a primary source, a historic image or...? Will you decide each time how an element that goes on the line will be represented?

## All Ready

Start your classroom timeline at the beginning of the school year. Add to it throughout the year.

At the conclusion of an exploration of a significant event or person, ask the class if they would like to include that person or event on the class timeline. Tape the representation of the new element to the timeline, with a date and title prominently visible. When posting a person's life rather than a single action by a person, you may wish to list dates of birth and death.

Every day or two, begin your history study with a review of the timeline. Settle your students on the floor in front of the line and invite them to do a silent "walk and talk" of the events on the line. Allow a minute or two for this activity, and then invite a student to stand and do a walk-and-talk aloud (see video). The students don't need to account for every element on the line; they should just use the elements as prompts to tell a story about a particular era or theme, or inventory various things that were happening during the same time period. Let students finish before correcting any mistakes they may make in their storytelling.

When deciding which elements to put on your timeline, it's better to err on the side of generosity than stinginess. The more elements on your line, the better it reflects your class's learning, at least if you are engaged in rich history explorations. But don't limit your dates to events you explore in formal history lessons; include elements from other disciplines as well. Language arts, science, music, math; if you encounter a historic topic in one of those areas, add it to the class line. If a student finds something at home that relates to history, invite them to add it to the line. A dynamic, full-to-the-brim timeline is a sign of a class that's engaged in history full-tilt.

As your class explores history, allow and encourage your students to view and reference the timeline spontaneously to situate new evidence in relation to what they've already studied, or to infer the timing of a new historic element for which they have no date.

Watch this video and listen to a student walk and talk her way through her class timeline.

<http://www.youtube.com/user/Bringinghistoryhome#p/u/8/HIXsh0YjTuwr>