

Theory of Knowledge in History Historians

These teacher notes are only designed to serve as a starting point – plenty more ideas could be developed and added.

Examples to watch (Early Modern History)

a. Depiction of Henry VIII (a central figure in Protestant history)

Watch **Harry Hill**'s assessment of Ray Winstone as Henry VIII.

- What does he think are the main inaccuracies with the performance?

The accents, the cardboard cut-out view of Henry

- Why do you think the producers of the film made these errors?

More dramatic, more clear-cut

b. Depiction of Mary Tudor in the film “Elizabeth” (central figure in Catholic history)

You will see the scene of the **execution of Latimer and Ridley**, two famous Protestants.

Here are essential facts about what really happened (according to the Protestant historian John Foxe, anyway...!). For each, consider why the filmmaker may have changed it:

The Facts	The Film	Why did the filmmaker change things?
Mary said that burning them was kind – because God would not send them to hell if they were punished on earth.	Mary is burning them in the hope that they will go to hell "for all eternity"	So that Elizabeth stood out in sharp relief to her evil sister.
Latimer and Ridley were the only people executed that day.	A woman is added.	Emotional impact.
Ridley came out dressed in his robes, which he gave to passers-by; Latimer wore a simple white gown.	Both wore white gowns.	Visual confusion could otherwise result.
Ridley's brother tied a small barrel of gunpowder to each man's neck.	This does not happen.	The viewer would not understand what this was
When the fire started, Latimer leaned into the flames and the gunpowder blew his head off.	This does not happen.	The resulting scene would be too gruesome.
Ridley was not so lucky. The flames burned his legs off slowly before finally reaching the gunpowder.	This does not happen.	The resulting scene would be too gruesome.

2. To persuade

History can also be used as a form of persuasion or propaganda. To justify present day values and policies, the past can either be demonised (“Victorian Britain was disgustingly racist, sexist and homophobic”) or idealised (“Victorian Britain was not afraid to stress its belief in community, family, authority and self-help”).

Method 1: Using history to oversimplify issues

	Example 1: Social	Example 2: Political
<p>Those wishing to avoid or delay change will use history as nostalgia. This boils down to the fact that people and societies like to see themselves as “part of a process” and are naturally uneasy about drastic, sudden change. This makes people unwilling to accept change or to move forward.</p>	<p>Anti-Immigration Bias The present unease about immigration levels into the UK is partly founded on the largely belief that the country used to have a much tighter national identity characterised by warm beer, cricket on Sundays followed by tea with the vicar and maybe fish and chips for supper (when the Home Secretary announced that “Chicken Tikka Massala is the new national dish” a few years ago there was uproar).</p>	<p>Royalism The invention of the coronation ceremony was a product of the late nineteenth century to combat republicanism; so too was the change of the Royal family’s name to “Windsor” during World War One.</p>
<p>Those wishing to pursue or accelerate change will use history to stress how such developments are a long-term trend and nothing to be worried about.</p>	<p>Pro-Immigration Bias a. Current history syllabuses in the UK stipulate that immigration should be presented as a “good thing” for a country – economically, socially and culturally – and all official announcements stress that “Britain has always been a nation of immigrants”.</p>	<p>Nazism Hitler cleverly presented his regime as “The Third Reich” to stress its heritage with the previous two, and manufactured histories to persuade people that Jews were evil.</p>

Examples to watch (Modern History)

	What is the message of this source?	How does it get this message across?
"Matchstick Wars"	Not only can war escalate very easily – but the West tend to be most responsible for aggression.	The battle starts when the Western matchstick starts getting aggressive.
"The Eternal Jew"	Jews are filth. They "swarmed" over Europe.	Emotive language; equation of Jews with rats.
"World at War: Foreign Policy"	Hitler was pure evil on every possible level.	Takes all aspects of his character – even the inoffensive ones – and tries to read something into them (e.g. holding a magnifying glass is NOT propaganda by any stretch – such examples of his physical shortcomings were banned). Also: why is Eva Braun always described as Hitler's MISTRESS rather than his partner / fiancée?

Method 2: Using history to complicate issues

- Too little history is a bad thing; but so is too much. History can be used to keep wounds open, to perpetuate the mistakes and prejudices of the past rather than move on from them.

Northern Ireland (consider cutting this out)

- The problems of Northern Ireland are difficult to solve because both sides are being crushed by their sense of history. Ancient religious differences between Irish Catholics and English **Protestants** lie at the root of the problem – but when did two people last come to blows over the nature of transubstantiation in the sacrament of the Eucharist? The subsequent (sometimes brutal) colonisation of Northern Ireland by Protestant English then feeds into the picture – William of Orange’s defeat of (Catholic) James II at the **Battle of the Boyne** in 1690 is still celebrated by “Orange Parades” each year which frequently flare into outright violence.
- The danger is that this “burden of history” can be used to justify a lack of change: these problems are clearly insoluble, so why bother even trying?

Memorial Days

- There are now a whole range of “Memorial Days” on the calendar. They arguably create more confusion than they are worth.

Task: Discuss each of the following three memorial days, and take a class vote about the purpose of each one after discussion.

		Possible Purpose 1	Possible Purpose 2
Armistice Day	11 th November	To honour the war dead and admire the sacrifices they made for their countries	To pity the war dead and reflect on the utter futility of war
Holocaust Memorial Day	27 th January	To reflect on the suffering of all victims of racial persecution	To stress the unique suffering of Jews and therefore their right to be in Israel
Slavery Memorial Day	25 th March	To celebrate the abolition of slavery in the British Empire	To highlight the collective guilt of the British people for slavery and their obligation to compensate black people for it