

A HISTORY TEACHING TOOLBOX

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Practical strategies for the secondary
classroom

Russel Tarr

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For Marie-Anne

CONTENTS

How to use this book	1
1 Imparting knowledge to students	3
Chronological narratives	4
Character cards	10
Using maps effectively	13
History mysteries	18
Sweets to measure change over time	21
Hexagon learning	23
QR code treasure hunts	28
2 Debate and discussion strategies	31
Socratic seminars	32
Balloon debates	34
Silent discussion	37
Students as teachers, not presenters	37
Put the teacher on trial	40
Ditch debates, adopt arbitration	42
3 Transforming and applying knowledge	45
Design a children's storybook	46

Design a museum exhibition	49
Design a Hollywood film poster	51
Design a memorial	53
Create a social media profile	54
Design a propaganda cartoon	55
Design PlayMobil™ merchandise	56
Miming, freeze-framing, body sculptures	58
 4 Comparing, contrasting, linking	 61
Decision trees	62
Linkage bingo	64
Paper people	66
Target diagrams for categorisation	67
Venn diagrams	69
Wedding invitations and bio-poems	71
 5 Judgments and interpretations	 73
Counterfactual history	74
Diamond diagrams for prioritisation	77
Continuum lines: measure opinions on one issue	79
Wheel of life	80
Matrix grids: judge two issues at once	82
Interpretations battleships	83

A HISTORY TEACHING TOOLBOX

	Triangulation: judge three factors at once	86
	Write a school report on a historical character	86
6	Group work approaches	89
	The Apprentice	90
	Jigsaw groups	95
	Collaborative essay planning using sticky-notes	97
	Talkers and listeners	99
	Discussion group role cards	100
7	Tests and revision	103
	Revision leaderboard	104
	Keyword challenge	105
	Share possible test questions in advance	107
	Spot the mistakes	109
	Who, where, what am I?	110
	Arcade game generator	112
8	Classroom display	115
	Who tall are you?	116
	“Inspirational quote” posters	117
	Classroom windows as word walls	118
	“Currently being studied” posters	119

Share video projects with QR codes	120
“In the news...!” posters	121
“Open me” display pieces	122
9 Essay skills	125
Visual essay-writing in groups	126
Write a script, not an essay	128
Banned word list	130
Rubric grids	131
Miscellaneous essay approaches	132
10 Other ideas	135
Choose your own homework	136
Bounce the detention	139
Create bookmarks as rewards	140
Hands up if you DON’T know	141
Cross-curricular speed-dating	142
Local history scavenger hunts	144
Acknowledgements	147
About the author	149

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book provides history teachers in secondary schools with simple, practical and creative strategies to improve engagement and subject mastery in the classroom. It is broken into key sections to broadly reflect various stages in the learning process. Although the case studies I outline will refer to examples from the history classroom, many of the strategies behind them will, I hope, be easily transferable to other subjects.

As a simple target, I suggest you aim to use one key idea from each of the chapters within the academic year, preferably with different year groups. The following year, decide which ones to keep, which to refine, and which to ditch – as well as which fresh ideas you would like to try out.

All of the templates I refer to within the book can be downloaded via my blog “Tarr’s Toolbox” (www.tarrstoolbox.net) where I share teaching strategies that have worked particularly well in my own classroom. The book also draws heavily on resources I have shared on my training courses and developed on my websites www.activehistory.co.uk and www.classtools.net, through which you can contact me directly for further support.



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1

IMPARTING KNOWLEDGE TO STUDENTS

Rigorously imparting subject knowledge to students is a fundamental priority. This chapter outlines means of doing so which keep students actively engaged rather than relying solely on ‘chalk and talk’ teacher lectures.

Chronological narratives

At the start of a new topic, it's often useful to provide students with an essential chronology of events before analysing this timeline in terms of key questions. Simply delivering a narrative lecture to the class gives the students too much opportunity to lose attention. The following strategies help students engage with and absorb the narrative, and can be used in sequence or in isolation.

1. Running dictation

The running dictation is an efficient and energetic way of teaching students about dramatic moments in history.

- Before the lesson, anticipate dividing the class into teams of about five students and print off a timeline of key events for each team. This timeline should be written in the present tense (e.g. "The Spanish Armada has just set sail for England!") to give it a sense of immediacy.
- Cut the first timeline into slips and place these neatly into an envelope with the first event at the top of the pile. Repeat for the other timelines.
- When the class arrives, divide the students into their groups. Each group member should be given a number (1, 2, 3...)
- When the activity begins, position yourself at the far end of the classroom (even better, go outside where there is more space).
- Upon your signal, the first person from each team should run up to you and collect their first slip from their timeline.
- They should run back to their teams and read the slip out to their group. The rest of the team writes quick notes. The speaker can repeat details, but cannot show the slip to the team.
- When you get the impression that the teams have had almost enough time, announce that the next slip of information is available. The second person from each team should run to you, bringing the original slip with them. They exchange this for the

next slip from the timeline, and return to their teams.



- The process is then repeated until all the slips have been used up, with responsibility for ‘running’ looping through the students in each group for as long as necessary.
- When the process is completed, students should return to the classroom and spend some time in their groups comparing and completing their notes: after all, each member of the team will not have notes relating to events that they read to the rest of the group.

2. What do you think they should do next?

The running dictation is less effective for detailed, slow-paced stories which take place over many years. A better method in this case is a teacher-led lecture using the ‘What should they do next?’ format. This is particularly good for topics based around the assessment of a particular individual’s handling of a situation. For example, when studying how far the Russian Provisional Government was responsible for its own downfall in October 1917, I introduce a dilemma that they face upon taking power on a PowerPoint slide. I then discuss with the class what the appropriate response should be to increase support for the government (sometimes providing them with several options):

1. February



- The Tsar has been arrested and placed under house arrest, but **The PG lacks real power**. The Petrograd Soviet has issued “**Order Number 1**” which asserts control over the armed forces. The Minister of War has stated that “The PG has no real power...it exists only as long as it is permitted to do so by the Soviet”.
- **To the PG:**
- You must decide who should be your Prime Minister. Do you select
- (a) Kerensky (a member of both the Soviet and the Duma) or
- (b) Prince Lvov, a moderate aristocrat?
- Why?



Remember: your objective is to decide which choice would increase your level of popular support!

I then move to the next slide which reveals what the government actually did. Based on the earlier discussion, students then make brief notes on how successfully they think the situation was handled, using a grid which is already getting them to think in terms of themes rather than a chronological narrative:

As the teacher leads this exercise, organise notes under these four headings.
Note: To save time, you should just note the NUMBER of each event first (with explanation of why placed in that cell if necessary). At the end of the exercise you can then be given the PowerPoint presentation to develop your notes in more detail.

	Bolsheviks = "Methods"		Provisional Government = "Conditions"	
	 Lenin		 Kerensky	
	a. Evidence of Popularity [Fitzpatrick]	b. Evidence of Unpopularity [Pipes]	c. Evidence of Popularity [Pipes]	d. Evidence of Unpopularity [Fitzpatrick]
Military: The Soldiers				
Socio-Economic: The Soviets, Peasants				
Political: Other parties (Mensheviks, SRs etc)				

The process is repeated for other events – sometimes calling upon students to consider how the Provisional Government should act, and sometimes considering how the Bolsheviks should react.

After the teacher-led element is finished, students can be provided with the complete PowerPoint presentation to develop their tables further: if students are aware that you are going to do this from the outset, this is an efficient strategy to ensure that during the lesson they are focusing on formulating and writing judgments, rather than furiously trying to copy the factual information in each slide word for word.

3. Re-assemble a timeline in the correct order

This strategy is most effective for simpler timelines with relatively few events. I use it frequently with younger classes in a quiz format to get them engaged. Start by providing students with a list of events running down the page. To the right of the events are columns like this:

A HISTORY TEACHING TOOLBOX

	Event	My Guess	Correct Answer	Difference
	William has himself crowned as King of England			
	Godwineson swears to support William's claim			
	Edward the Confessor dies childless			

In “my guess” students number each event to reflect the chronological order in which they think they occurred (with “1” being the first event, and so on). Afterwards, the teacher then tells the class what the “correct answer” is for each event. Students then calculate the difference between the two numbers (note: this will always be a positive number – e.g. 5-3 would be a difference of 2, and 3-5 would also be a difference of 2). They then add up the total of the “difference” column to get an overall score: the student with the lowest overall difference is the winner!

One important point with this technique is that some thought should be given to providing some contextual clues within each “event” about what happened previously, or what is about to happen next (e.g. “Because Harold promised to support William, he was then allowed to go home to England”).

4. Categorise, colour-code, elaborate and chunk

Following on from the above (or, with timelines that are too complex or detailed, starting at this point) introduce the key question for investigation (e.g. “What was the most important cause of the Spanish Civil War?”). Provide students with a timeline of events. They then have to tick the appropriate column to indicate which category the event fits into. Such columns might indicate positive or negative developments for the stability of the regime. If students are working on a word processor they can simply cut and paste the event into the appropriate column.

Next, students can highlight different events in different colours according to a key (for example, social, economic and military factors) and explain their reasoning for placing the event in that particular column in that particular colour. Finally, students consider the key turning points in the narrative and chunk the timeline into appropriate titled chapters. This is a useful way of helping students to see the bigger picture.

Causes of the Spanish Civil War: Overview Timeline

Task 1

Each of the events listed in this table belongs in either the left hand ("Positives") column or the right hand ("Negatives") column. Your job is to

(a) CUT and PASTE each event into the second column if it needs to be moved;

(b) HIGHLIGHT different events into the appropriate colour using the following key:

Socio-Economic	Religious	Military	Regional
----------------	-----------	----------	----------

NOTE: different parts of the same sentence may be highlighted in different colours.

NOTE: The events up to 1921 have been done for you.

Date	Positives for Spain: signs of stability, success, improvement	Negatives for Spain: signs of instability, failure, decline (EXPLAIN AS NECESSARY)
The Monarchy		
1851		Religiously, the Catholic Church had a stranglehold over education since the 1851 Concordat. This was dangerous since Church support could not be relied upon and this would offend the large minority of non-Catholics and anticlericals in Spain.
1898		Militarily, the army was overstuffed and overpowered after the loss of Cuba in 1898. This was a source of instability as the army now lacked a role and increasingly looked for activity within Spain's own borders.
1909		Socially, problems of poverty for the peasantry and the proletariat had led to bloodshed in "Tragic Week" (1909). This created a situation where the proletariat increasingly saw the government as being against their interests.
1920		Regionally, Catalonia and the Basque region wanted independence. The refusal of the monarchy to countenance devolution meant that these regions remained disaffected with the government – increasingly so as they became the industrial

Categorised and colour-coded timeline on the Spanish Civil War

5. How do we measure/prove this?

Many of the points in the timeline will require substantiation. In the example relating to the causes of the Spanish Civil War shown above, the statement is made that "The army was overstuffed and powerful". But how do we prove this? How can this be measured? Students should identify as many of these statements as possible, turn them into questions for research ("How do we measure whether the army was overstuffed?") and then set about finding the answer. This is particularly valuable to teach students the importance of substantiating their arguments. It also helps students formulate proper questions for research, in a form that cannot be answered by a straightforward 'Google Search'.

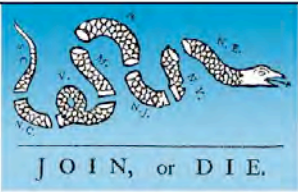
6. What questions does this timeline raise that require further research?

To lead students into an independent research activity, discuss the sorts of

questions that the timeline leaves unanswered. These can be in the form of “describe” (what, who, where, when), “explain” (why?) and “assess” (to what extent?).

7. Add captioned images and extra points from the video clips for key points in the story

In the lesson from which the following image is taken, students read through the first part of the timeline together, watch a short video clip from a documentary covering this period. They then make extra notes and added an appropriate image alongside each event. In this instance, this was leading towards students making a video documentary of their own.

What were the main causes of the American Civil War? Your Task: To Create a Video Documentary on the Causes of the Civil War			
Task 1: Gathering the material for your documentary			
1. As a class, read through the first batch events in the timeline overleaf, and then watch the first video clip carefully at the suggested point (TIP: note carefully how Ken Burns uses music, silence, gentle panning of images, changes in the narrative voice and a focus on personal stories to generate interest and emotion). 2. Next, find BOTH a picture AND an extra point of information about each of the events so far described. In this way you will be building up the raw material for your video documentary. 3. Repeat this process (reading, watching, research and note-taking) for the rest of the timeline.			
Discussion Point: At what point did the civil war become inevitable?			
Date	Event	Picture	Extra points of information from the video clip / web research
1776	In 1776, the American Declaration of Independence united all the separate states of America. It said each state in “The United States” could decide whether to allow slavery. Half the states became “slave” states, the other half became “free” states.		
1780	The “slave” states were based around the cotton plantations of the south. The “free” states were based around the factories of the north.		
1790	The “slave” states wanted the US government to respect the customs of each state (a loose “ Confederacy ”). The “free” states wanted the US government to forge a national identity (a tight “ Union ”).		
Video Clip “1” from Episode 1 of Ken Burns			
1793	The invention of a new machine, the “ Cotton Gin ”, made the cotton plantations in the South very profitable. As the cotton plantations grew, so did the number of slaves – and their conditions became increasingly unpleasant.		
1820	The “ Missouri Compromise ”, kept a voting balance of a slave state (Missouri) and a free		

Opening section of the timeline on the American Civil War

Character cards

Providing each student with a character card at different points in a historical study is a great way to engage the class with the motives of individuals and the nature and extent of change and continuity.

Method 1: Using “before” role cards to anticipate how key characters will react to circumstances

Before studying a key moment or event in history, give the class a list of the main characters involved and encourage students to consider such things as what they might believe, say and do (or what they anticipate they will gain or lose) as the story unfolds. These could be delivered as role-play presentations or imagined dialogues.

As a result of this initial activity, students will study the event in question with a much greater interest in how different people and groups were actually involved, and will be much more engaged in discussing such things as who had the most effective reactions, whose beliefs changed the most, whose reputation was enhanced or tarnished, or whatever other issues are pertinent for the topic in question.

Case study: The Little Rock Nine

When studying the desegregation of American schools in the 1950s, the case of Little Rock in Arkansas is an essential case study. In 1957, nine black students were enrolled in the school, and this sparked off riots.

After doing the necessary background reading which enabled me to identify the key characters and how they fitted into the story, I was able to provide each of my students with a different role corresponding to different key characters involved, as shown overleaf:

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The Little Rock 9: Role play / Anticipation Task

You are: Governor Faubus of Arkansas. The local school board has made you aware that nine students will be admitted early next week and they have asked you to make a statement to the press outlining your position and how you are preparing for this. You are a relative moderate, but you are aware that many of your voters have deep misgivings. What will you say?

You are: President Eisenhower. You are aware that the tension in the South is explosive and that the Little Rock situation could easily escalate into violence. You are also aware that the world's media will be focused on you. Describe how you expect things could unfold and how you will react to various scenarios.

You are: The father of a black student who has been selected – due to his/her excellent grades – to be one of 9 students to attend Little Rock High School. Try to persuade your wife that your child should take up the offer.

You are: The mother of a black student who has been selected – due to his/her excellent grades – to be one of 9 students to attend Little Rock High School. Try to persuade your husband that your child should not take up the offer.

You are: A student who has decided to take up the offer to go to Little Rock. Explain why you have chosen to do so.

You are: The leading member of the National Guard outside Little Rock School. A number of the black students have made their way into the building, but a mob is now gathering outside. What will you do to bring the situation under control and prevent it escalating further?

You are: Elizabeth Eckford, one of the black students. It is the first day of school at Little Rock. Due to a misunderstanding, you find yourself separated from the rest of the group and in the middle of an aggressive white mob. What do you do?

You are: A white student at Little Rock High. A journalist has asked for your opinion of the situation: (Who is to blame? Do you think the schools can and should be integrated?) What is your reply?

You are: Minniejean Brown, one of the black students. You have now been at the school for several weeks. You are standing in the lunch queue and you are being continually insulted, taunted and bullied by a fellow (white) student behind you. What (if anything) do you do?

You are: Ernest Green, one of the black students. You have finally graduated from Little Rock, but in the graduation ceremony you are confronted by a sea of hostile faces when you take your seat. What do you do, and what is your attitude, when your name is called out and you are expected to walk up to the stage to receive your diploma?

Role cards for the Little Rock case study

After students had delivered their presentations and we had discussed issues arising, they then watched the extract from the classic “Eyes on the Prize”

TV documentary to make notes on how events actually unfolded and how each character actually reacted and was affected. By speculating and anticipating in advance, students were much more interested and much more engaged in the discussion that followed (“Do the cases of Minnijean Brown, Ernest Green and Melba Petillo suggest that the Little Rock campaign was regarded as successful by the children involved?”, “How effectively did you think (a) President Eisenhower and (b) Governor Faubus dealt with the situation at Little Rock?” and so on).

Method 2: Using “before” and “after” role cards to study the nature and impact of change and continuity

Step 1: At the start of the unit

Another simple way to use role cards in the classroom is to produce pairs of cards for key individuals from different walks of life. The “before” card is provided to each student at the outset of a dramatic period of study (for example, Nazi Germany 1933-39, World War One 1914-1918, The Black Death 1347-1350). This first card outlines, in a first-person narrative, such things as his/her situation, beliefs, hopes and concerns at the start of the period. These may be real individuals or represent generic types.

The first student reads out their character card, and the rest of the class notes down whether the character appears to be doing well in the current circumstances, and whether they are hopeful for the future. Based on the answers to these questions, the name of the character is then placed into a matrix grid (page 82) based on these two criteria, or a debate takes place about where they should be placed in this grid using a game of ‘Interpretation Battleships’ (page 83). The process is repeated for the remaining characters, and then students then use the completed matrix grid to reflect on the overall situation on the eve of the event in question.

Step 2: At the end of the unit

At the end of the study, each student is provided with the “after” card for their character, which outlines how the character’s life and outlook has been affected over the course of the period in question. For example, some people will have become more optimistic; some more pessimistic; some will have found their situation has improved, got worse, or stayed the same; some will find that their attitudes on key issues will have changed. General conclusions and comparisons can then be drawn and key questions can start to be addressed (“To what extent did World War One lead to a social revolution?”, “Who gained, and who lost, from Hitler’s rule in Germany before World War Two?”).

Using maps effectively

Maps can provide the basis of some very effective and interesting classroom activities. The following methods for the history classroom are transferable to other topics and subjects.

1. Convert a narrative into a Google Earth Tour

Students can be provided with a timeline of key events, and challenged to plot these on a map or in Google Earth to give them a fresh perspective and gain some geographical awareness of the topic in question. For example, I have designed such a tour to teach students about Tsarist Russia on the Eve of World War One. It is illustrated with original colour photographs from the Prokudin-Gorskii archives, organised around six groups of issues: political, economic, social, military and religious.

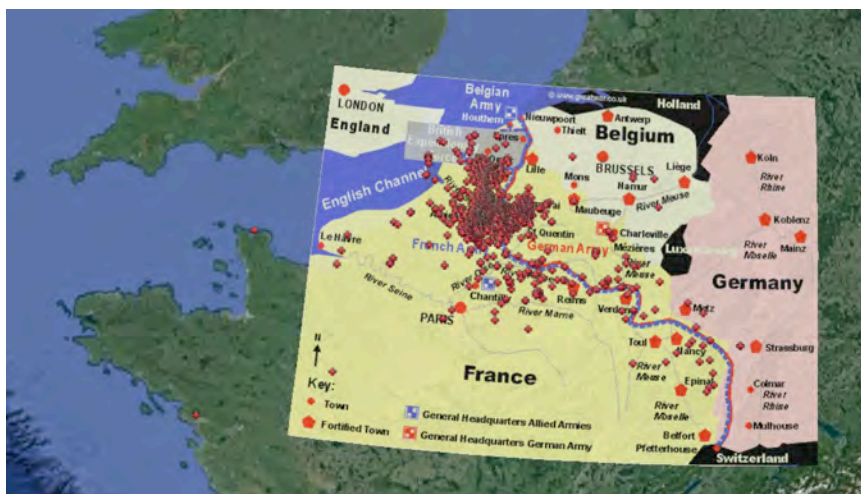
2. Place one map inside another to stress the scale of territory or impact

It is easy for students to overlook the vast scale of a territory being studied, despite the fact that in some instances this provides a crucial means of understanding the process of change and continuity. In this sense, placing one feature inside another can provide a quick but effective means of illustrating scale. For example:

- Provide students with a map of their own country (e.g. Great Britain). Then provide students with a map of imperial Russia. Ask them to draw a rectangle inside it somewhere to indicate the size of Great Britain. Then, provide students with an actual scaled map of Britain. Is it smaller than expected (likely)? What challenges would this provide to a ruler? A simpler method is to get students to guess how many kilometres are represent per centimetre before telling them the correct figure.
- Provide students with a map of their own locality. Ask them to draw around this the borders of another region, city, battle-lines or event. Then they should compare this to the reality. For example, students

could overlay a map showing the impact of the atomic bombs dropped on Japan onto their own locality to bring home the scale of destruction.

- Provide student with a ‘then and now’ overlay to demonstrate the scale of change or impact. For example, when studying World War One, I use a Google Earth Tour to zoom in on the area corresponding today to the Western Front. I ask students to anticipate where, and how many, allied graveyards can be found in this area. Then, I tick the box which reveals a folder of placemarks showing each cemetery as a small white cross. It is an absolute blizzard and generates an audible sharp intake of breath around the class. It’s a very simple, but profoundly moving, map-based starter activity.



A Google Earth visualisation of Commonwealth war cemeteries on the Western Front

3. Anticipate and research key features on a blank outline map at the start of the topic

Rather than providing students with a detailed map as a reference resource - which, more likely than not, will end up filed away and neglected - give students a blank outline map and challenge them to label key cities, borders and natural features using whatever sources they can find. This is particularly useful when the study of the topic will require frequent reference to particular regions, cities and natural features.

Stage 1: Anticipation

This phase is particularly useful if students have studied this place before.

Provide students with a blank outline map and then ask them, from their existing knowledge and through their own powers of deduction, where they anticipate certain borders and places are located. Some examples might be:

- “Here is a map of Europe in 1914. Draw a line to represent where you think the Western Front started and ended by Christmas 1914”
- “Here is a map of Austro-Hungary at the end of World War One with the national minorities highlighted. Divide the territory into new states (Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia...)”
- “Here is a map of Germany after World War Two. Label the location of Berlin, then draw the anticipated borders of the French, British, Soviet and US zones of occupation based on what you know about the Soviet occupation and the debates at Yalta and Potsdam”

Stage 2: Research

Students should start by comparing their maps with a partner and as a class (the teacher could even try to reach a class consensus on a final, whole-class map). Then, when they conduct their research to complete a master copy, they will be much more engaged in the process and willing to answer such questions as “Were the borders substantially larger or smaller than you expected?”.

If the topic is a new one, it is unlikely that the anticipation stage will be worthwhile and so students could proceed straight to this research phase. For example, I start my study of the Spanish Civil War with a homework exercise in which students are challenged to label an outline map of the Iberian peninsula with key features, cities and regions (in particular, noting where separatist movements were particularly strong, and the north-south divide in terms of agriculture and industry).

4. Use classroom debate to decide upon the most appropriate / likely border changes partway through a topic

This technique is similar to the anticipation exercise outlined above, but lends itself particularly well to topics involving debate between different parties about the most appropriate border changes. Students are arranged into small teams, with each person representing a different interest group, and they are then challenged to agree upon the fairest possible division of territory. For example:

- Provide students with a map of Palestine after World War Two. Key geographical features should be labelled in terms of population

distribution, water sources and fertile land. In teams of three (representing Arabs, Jews and the Western powers), students have to divide the territory into three areas (Palestine, Israel and International Zones) in a way which they think is most likely to bring lasting peace to the region. You should stress that you will cast a vote in favour of the best plan. Therefore, although students should aim to defend their interest group's objectives, they should be aware that being too greedy will likely mean that their plan will be thrown out altogether as being too controversial. At the end of this particular exercise, students can compare their maps to the various genuine proposals put forward before and after World War Two by the British and by the UN and discuss the merits of each.

- Another topic which lends itself well to this approach are the negotiations at Versailles (1918) and Yalta/Potsdam (1944-45) about the future of Germany. If there is time, a 'compare and contrast' exercise based on Germany's treatment after both World Wars is particularly valuable.

5. Plot the movement of individuals along a path

This approach is useful when charting the journey of a particular person over time. As an added challenge, students could be provided with a jumbled timeline and reconstruct it into the correct order by plotting the places mentioned on a map and thereby deducing the most likely order in which they happened. Google Earth is particularly effective for creating these tours, and I have created several which can be freely downloaded from www.activehistory.co.uk. Possible topics might include:

- The circumnavigation of Sir Francis Drake
- The Long March of Mao Zedong
- The voyages of Marco Polo
- The invasion of Russia by Napoleon's armies
- The journeys of Olaudah Equiano
- Medieval pilgrimage routes

6. Chart the expansion/contraction of an idea, an empire or a catastrophe

a. Empires

The growth and decline of Empires lends itself well to map work. Students should shade different territories in different colours to represent the

different time periods that they were absorbed into the Empire. For added challenge:

- Provide students with a timeline listing when various territories were incorporated, but don't label these on the map itself: instead, students have to identify where these territories are themselves before drawing the borders on the map and shading them in.
- Ensure that students are provided with follow-up questions to reflect upon so it doesn't become a meaningless colouring-in exercise: for example "Which was the period of greatest expansion?", "Can you find out who was Emperor at this time?", "Why did the empire not expand any further?", "What benefits and drawbacks would continued expansion bring?"

b. Diseases and Ideas

The spread of a pandemic like The Black Death can be charted on a map very effectively. Data exists for the time when the disease was first and last recorded in various cities all over Europe, and plotting this information on a map in various colours to represent various dates is an enlightening exercise when trying to get students to appreciate the scale and speed of how the disease spread.

c. Crime – geographic profiling

Geographic profiling is an activity I use when studying Jack the Ripper at www.activehistory.co.uk. It is the name we give to the technique used by the police to work out where a killer might live. It is usually the case that

- The murders will be committed close to home (to allow a quick 'return to base') and
- The murders will take place increasingly close to home as the police step up their presence in the area.

With this in mind, I instruct students to plot the location of each murder on the map. Then, based on the information, students are asked to speculate where they think that the murderer is most likely to live and to shade this area on the map. Finally, we look at what the most recent 'Ripperologists' have concluded before discussing the limitations of this evidence.

History mysteries

These investigations are designed as stand-alone projects lasting three to four hours. They teach skills of deductive reasoning, independent research, group work and structured writing.

My students complete at least one mystery project each year. Because the mark scheme stays the same, they provide a particularly useful way of measuring student progress over time. More importantly, they start each year's studies with a sharp and interesting focus.

Stage 1: The role-play

The first part of the History Mystery consists of a role-play element led by the teacher, usually involving some props. This is deliberately designed to pique the curiosity of the students. The role card for the “Iceman mystery” which the Geography and History departments use as a secondary school induction project looks like this:

Role Card Starter Activity

Cast: Teacher

Props: “Crime Scene” tape. A blanket, covering up something which is as much like the shape of a body as possible. A full-body white overall to be worn by the teacher.

The teacher should have the ‘body’ covered with a blanket before students get to the room. Crime Scene Tape should be placed across the classroom door. The teacher should be wearing the white coat and be carrying a clipboard to look officious. When the students are lined up outside the class, outline that over the next few lessons they will be investigating a genuine mystery. They will need to use detective skills to form their own conclusions.

Cut the tape away and instruct them to sit down away from the ‘body’.

1. Point out the body to the students. Students then have to come up with a series of questions in the WHO / WHY / WHEN / WHERE / WHAT format. Write each of these into the record grid as outlined in the teacher lesson plan.
2. With the initial questions now outlined, draw a line halfway down the board underneath the questions. This is where we will start listing some ‘answers’. Ask the students to hypothesize the answers to the questions as far as possible (some answers will be impossible as we have no evidence yet).

Based on this initial introductory role-play, the class is then invited to come up with a series of preliminary questions for investigation (e.g. "Who is this?", "Why did they...?", "When did...?", "What is...?", "Where are we?"). In the case of the "Iceman mystery", the questions that students came up with as a starting point included the following:

- Are we at the scene of a murder, or an accident?
- How did this person die?
- Was this person pushed or did they jump?
- Was the victim a child (the body seems very small)?
- Are we high up? On a balcony? In the forest? On a rooftop?



Investigators Tarr and Podbury introduce the 'iceman' mystery to new secondary students

Stage 2: The images

The next part of the investigation involves showing the students a series of images on the whiteboard. Each image helps the students to formulate fresh questions, amend existing ones or even form some provisional answers.

Stage 3: Deciding upon the five key questions

On scrap paper, students work individually to identify what they think are the five "Big Questions" that require further investigation. Note: some of these questions may be taken directly from the list; it is more likely though that students will form broader questions which aim to encompass several

“mini-questions” from the list.

The teacher then leads a classroom discussion to gather a list of ‘big questions’ and to narrow these down to what we consider to be the most popular five questions overall.

The students then write these five questions down in their sheets. They should also write a provisional answer against each one to reflect what they think is currently the most likely answer.

During this times the teacher can be cutting up the evidence slips ready for the next part of the investigation.

Stage 4: The information slips

This question formulation and resolution process then continues with a series of information slips shared amongst the class. One slip is handed out to each student and they use this to come up with a fresh question or (even better) to provide a possible answer to one of the "five big questions".

There are lots of these slips, so students who work more quickly than others can be given a second or even a third slip. Once all the slips have been handed out and analysed in this way, the students are put into groups to compare their findings.

I then use the jigsaw group approach (page 95) after this feedback phase: in other words, I create a new set of groups, with each new group containing one member from each of the old groups. The feedback phase is then repeated. In this way, every single slip has the opportunity to be discussed. This is usually a very lively phase and contains quite a few 'Eureka!' moments.

Stage 5: Individual research and write-up phase

Finally, each student produces a written report which is graded against a standardised mark scheme. Specific credit is given to students who demonstrate evidence of independent research: to this end, the teacher could construct a QR treasure hunt (page 28) to accompany the exercise for students to complete at break times.