

Theory of Knowledge in History Introduction

A. Why is history so important to society?

- History is to society what memory is to the individual.
- An individual without memory finds the world confusing; a society with no sense of history is unaware where it has come from or where it is going.
- Historians therefore have the job of providing members of society with:
 - A sense of identity
 - An understanding of the world as it is today
 - Lessons in right and wrong
- Because the world never stands still, the job of the historian is never finished: each generation and each society will revisit and rewrite history with fresh questions.

Task 1: Watching a Video

You will be shown a short clip from a **video documentary about World War Two**¹. Use it to answer these questions prior to discussion:

- What did people have to eat?
- How did people deal with the lack of electricity?
- What was a hibernation year?



Figure 1: Children getting ready for their Hibernation Year, c1942.

Task 2: Follow-up Questions

List here all the sources and techniques used in this news report to give it a sense of authority.

What point do you think the producers of this clip were trying to make about "Television History"?

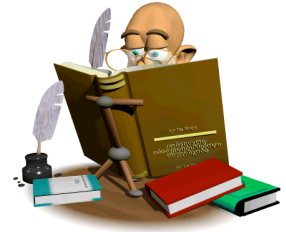
¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHjXA99Uqns>

B. How is History produced?

- "History" is not "What happened in the past" or even "The surviving evidence of what happened in the past".
- It means "What historians choose to interpret from the surviving evidence of the past"
- To reduce this to a formula, we might say:

$$\text{Sources} + \text{Historians} = \text{Histories}$$

- So it is important to consider what the nature of the surviving evidence is, and how historians then choose to select and present it.



In these three TOK sessions, we will therefore investigate three ways in which we gain a "knowledge" of History:

a. The Sources :	What are the limitations of the surviving evidence?
b. The Historians :	What are the limitations of the historians using that evidence?
c. The Histories :	What, therefore, are the limitations of the histories produced?

Note:

We will focus not only on books, but particularly on History in film, TV and the internet – which are increasingly becoming the main way through which people gain their "knowledge" of the past.

Task 3: "The past is not dead; it is not even the past"

Your teacher will now explain (through reference to the solar system) the meaning of this quote. Summarise his essential argument here.

You will then watch a short **video about the size of the known universe²**.



Figure 2: The Pinwheel Galaxy, 27 million years ago (or light years away)

² http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXfCcklDm_Q