

Theory of Knowledge in History Introduction – TEACHER NOTES

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 video clip from a **documentary about World War Two**. Use it to answer these questions prior to discussion:

- What did people have to eat?

Their own bombed houses – bits of mortar, even bricks.

- How did people deal with the lack of electricity?

They connected the house to a baby.

- What was a hibernation year?

People went to sleep for extended periods in order to preserve resources.



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.

Some ideas - Solemn Anchorman / Portentous logo / Dark background / use of old people / use of old footage

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

That it carries a great deal of authority even though it is very easy to manipulate.

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:

Sources + Historians = 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.

The stars are described in terms of how many "light years" they are away. In other words, how long it takes the light from those stars to reach us; in other words, when we look at a star which is 25 light years away, we are looking at it as it was 25 years ago. When we then turn our eyes a fraction to a dimmer star maybe 100 light years away, we are looking into the past 100 years. If that star exploded into a supernova 99 years ago, we would start watching this happen next year. By the same logic, a planet circling a star 1000 light years away might have the technology to film what is going on in earth. But if they are doing that right now, they would not see us, but rather our ancestors from 1000 years ago. Maybe even the Battle of Hastings is being filmed at this very moment by alien life forms!

You could end the anecdote about the stars by getting them to guess how many light years back hubble can see (ie, how many years back in time it can look): answer = 13 billion!!!