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Designing Assessments for the Primary History Classroom

How do you assess well when teaching primary history?

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Assessment tasks need to provide assessment information about students' understanding across the three strands of the History curriculum. These tasks should be stimulating activities that support student engagement, and be useful for evaluating teaching practices. Furthermore, assessment data should enable appraisal of individual goals, map out the next steps in learning, and offer information about the successes and challenges generated by the units.

Teachers have become increasingly skilled at developing engaging and authentic learning experiences that often include a performance element, such as portfolios, passion projects and expo products. With these new and innovative approaches, which can include digital technologies, it is crucial for teachers to identify and use assessments that provide purposeful evidence that improves student learning. A good assessment task links teaching and learning, is aligned with the standards, and also provides rich information that enables teachers to plan for future learning.

What Needs to Be Assessed?

The History curriculum is one of four areas that makes up the Humanities in the Victorian curriculum. When considering what needs to be assessed, the curriculum components fall into three main categories.

Historical Knowledge and Understanding

Knowledge and understanding in History relates to the key content in the curriculum, including names, dates, issues, events, timelines and places.

Historical Concepts

Concepts are essential because they enable us to organise and categorise information to make sense of complex ideas. Concepts underpin curriculum planning, and should be embedded in understandings that drive the unit. Key historical concepts in the Victorian curriculum include chronology, historical sources as evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, and historical significance.

Table 1. Victorian Curriculum F–2 standards linked with historical key concepts and skills.

Level F–2 Standard	Key Concepts	Inquiry and Skills
Knowledge Students explain aspects of daily life to identify how some aspects have changed over time while others have remained the same. They describe personal and family life, a person, a site, or an event of significance in the local community.	Significance Importance of a person, site or event.	Chronology Understanding the sequence of dates and events.
Skills Students use sources (physical, visual, oral) including the perspectives of others (parents, grandparents) to describe changes to daily life and the significance of people, places or events. They compare objects from the past and present. Students create a narrative about the past using terms and a range of sources.	Continuity and Change What has changed and what has remained the same?	Source Analysis Interpreting physical, visual and oral sources.
	Cause and Effect How do people, decisions and events impact on subsequent events? What is the cause? What is the effect?	Questioning and Responding Developing research skills and communication about chronology, sources and key concepts.
	Empathy Understanding how others think and feel.	
	Perspectives People have different views. How can these be interpreted and understood in context?	

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Historical Inquiry and Skills

Historical skills are both discipline-specific and transferable to other interdisciplinary inquiries. The Historical inquiry skills are listed in the Victorian curriculum with verbs, and include ‘asking questions’, ‘analysing’, ‘evaluating and reflecting’, and ‘communicating’ (describing and explaining). The curriculum capabilities can be integrated with the History curriculum to support deep learning. For example, the Critical and Creative Thinking skills related to Inquiring are Identifying, Exploring, and Organising Information and Ideas.

The mandated curriculum concepts and skills do need to be taught, experienced by students, practised and assessed. The key knowledge, concepts and inquiry skills form the basis for planning curriculum and assessment tasks throughout a unit. Table 1 highlights the Level 2 standard and possible associated concepts and inquiry skills.

Types of Assessments

The purpose of ongoing assessments is to provide feedback to students and to inform and adjust teaching sequences to meet the

needs of each student in the class. Informal assessments can form part of the ongoing generation of assessment data that are recorded as work samples, checklists and anecdotal records. Formative assessment involves asking students to answer higher-order questions such as ‘why’, ‘when’, ‘how’ and ‘what’ during the learning experience, either individually or in groups.

The formative assessment samples in Tables 2 and 3 incorporate digital products and opportunities for self-assessment. When designing these tasks it is essential that the digital program or app is easily accessible for the level that students are at. For example, an app such as *Puppet Pals* is fairly intuitive and easy to use, so the focus is on creating a digital product and communicating historical content and skills rather than on learning how to use the app. Allow students some time to ‘play’ and familiarise themselves with the tool prior to completing the task.

Planning Summative Assessments

Summative assessment tasks require explicit criteria so that the students understand

Table 2. Formative assessment samples for F–2.

Focus*	Formative Assessment Task	Self-assessment
Personal histories	<u>My story</u> Interview parents/guardians to learn about their past. Students draw photos (or use real photos) to represent a story of their family and when they were born. Students record the story by creating a book or on a digital app (e.g. <i>Book Creator</i>).	I can tell a story about my past. I can explain special events in my life.
Use critical and creative thinking strategies: • pose questions to find out information and ideas about the past.	<u>Your story</u> Interview another child about their family and their story. Add to their own digital story and explain what they learned about another person's story, starting with: 'I interviewed ... and I found out ...'	I can ask questions to find out about someone else's story. I can explain another person's story.

Table 3. Formative assessment samples for Years 5–6.

Focus*	Formative Assessment Task	Self-assessment
Significance of an event/development, an individual and/or group. Continuity and changes for different groups from the past to the present.	<u>Create Instagram posts (past and present)</u> Create two Instagram posts, one when the event occurred and one in the future discussing the impact of the event on individuals, communities, society and environment.	I can explain the significance of an individual or event. I can identify change in a specific event and the effect of the change.
Use critical and creative thinking strategies: • visualising ideas • summarising and paraphrasing information • reflect on the application of these strategies in different situations	<u>Twitter: Create a tweet</u> Use post-it notes to mimic tweets and place them on a board, or create a thread on a padlet. Summarise what was learned. Use different modes of thinking and attention to detail. Students can work in groups or individually.	I can summarise and paraphrase information from different sources. I can represent thinking processes using visual models. I can respond to others' ideas. I can reflect on the strategies I have used to determine their effectiveness.

* Adapted from the Australian Curriculum and Victorian Curriculum

the expectations of a task and can use the criteria to guide and plan their response. Summative assessment tasks in the History classroom need to have a clear purpose and be comprehensive in terms of meeting the demands of the content knowledge, concepts and skills that are required to be assessed as part of the mandated curriculum. The various assessment products in the History classroom can be designed creatively and negotiated with students so that they become 'passion projects' that allow students to

demonstrate their knowledge within the scope of the unit. Students can also use a range of digital tools and data sources to create content that can be assessed. Performances, digital products and expos are examples of summative assessments, but the process of building up to the final product can include rich teacher-, self- and peer-assessment opportunities.

The first stage is to identify the key content, concepts and skills in the standards. The

Table 4. Designing assessments.

If the desired result is to ...	then you need evidence of ...	so the assessments must require something like:
refer to key content, concepts and skills (standards, understandings, essential questions) ...	• using and interpreting sources • understanding continuity and change • understanding cause and effect • communicating significance • seeing from different points of view • representations of the past • empathising with • reflecting on ...	• identify, plan and create tasks that can be used to elicit student understanding of key content, concepts and skills.

Table 5. Determining assessment evidence for a unit on Australian immigration.

If the desired result is to ...	then you need evidence of ...	so the assessments must require something like:
understand that: • there are push-and-pull factors that influence why people migrated to Australia throughout history (including cultural, economic, environmental and political factors) <u>and thoughtfully consider the questions:</u> • who were the people that came to Australia? • why did they come?	<u>Explaining:</u> • Australian immigration • the push-and-pull factors influencing migration. <u>Interpreting:</u> • data, maps and timelines related to the history of immigration in Australia • images and stories of migration. <u>Applying:</u> • how immigration has and continues to influence Australian society today. <u>Seeing different perspectives:</u> • understanding peoples' actions and opinions from different regions across the globe. <u>Displaying empathy/respect by:</u> • perceiving sensitively others' thoughts and feelings. <u>Reflecting on:</u> • implications for migrants living in Australia.	• a research project presented orally, as a digital product or as part of a portfolio. Research can be conducted online, with a family/friend, an excursion to an immigration museum etc. • answering where they came from. What was happening in that region and in Australia at the time? Why did they come to Australia? How and when did they travel to Australia? What did they have in their suitcase and why is this significant? What did they do and where did they live when they arrived? What were the opportunities and challenges? What contributions have they made to their community? After hearing/seeing the different class presentations, create a graphic organiser to identify the various push-and-pull factors.

- 1 H. Lynn Erickson, Lois A. Lanning and Rachel French, *Concept-based Curriculum and Instruction for the Thinking Classroom*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2017).
- 2 Grant J. Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 2nd ed. (Pearson, 2005).
- 3 Ibid.

curriculum plan should highlight both the key content (including key terms and critical factual knowledge), concepts and skills that form the assessment tasks for the unit. At the unit-planning stage, formal and informal, formative and summative assessments should be incorporated in the planning documentation in order to support alignment between the intended outcomes of the unit (standards, understandings, essential questions).¹

When beginning a History unit, it is important to acknowledge and assess the prior learning that students bring with them in order to plan instruction. Planning assessments should be completed after planning the unit outcomes and before planning learning experiences using a 'backward design' approach to curriculum planning.² The sequence in Table 4 has been adapted to support planning assessments.³

Beyond being simply a tool to evaluate student learning, assessment should also be considered a means to enhance, encourage and inspire future learning.

The forms that assessments take in the History classroom are many and varied. In fact, any learning experience can be tagged in planning documentation as an assessment task, and teachers tend to make ongoing informal assessments and provide informal feedback based on what students do, say, make and write during class.

However, some key assessment tasks are specifically designed to provide assessment information against the unit understandings, which will guide the assessment in terms of what information is needed. The next step is to consider how the information can be generated and recorded.

Table 5 shows the sequence from planning desired results and considering key concepts and skills when planning assessment for one understanding related to a unit on Australian immigration.

Assessment information provides teachers with the opportunity to reflect on whether their planning enabled student understanding of historical knowledge, concepts and skill development, and had the potential to direct future learning experiences. Beyond being simply a tool to evaluate student learning, assessment should also be considered a means to enhance, encourage and inspire future learning.⁴

4 David Pace, 'Assessment in History,' *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 11:3 (August 2011): 107–119.

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