

The Historian's Craft: Creating Timelines and Using Personal Narratives

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Overview:

This lesson introduces students to important aspects of the historians craft: researching important events using both primary and secondary sources; weighing the unique contributions and limitation of each type of source; comparing how timelines of varying scope provide information of different textures and depth; and analyzing how the scope of a timeline affects the depth of context it provides for historic events such as September 11, 2001.

Students assess timelines whose formats vary by media, length of time, and depth of description of key events.

Although the timelines contain information on the same event, their points of reference differ, providing students different perspectives. The powerful first-person oral history timeline on DVD Disc 2 presents the sequence of the day's events as told by 9/11 survivors, eyewitnesses, and victims' family members. The long-term timeline provides perspective on possible causes of 9/11, and student interviews of family members enrich their understanding of and connection to the events of 9/11.

Goals—students will:

- become familiar with the sequence of events leading up to and including the attacks on September 11, 2001
- be able to differentiate between primary and secondary sources and the unique contribution of each to historical analysis and understanding
- understand the impact that the scope of a timeline and the language used to describe events can have on one's understanding of historical events.

Objectives—students will:

- assess the contributions and limitations of primary and secondary sources to the search for historic truth
- analyze how the scope of a timeline can dramatically change one's perception of a historical event
- experience the historian's craft by interviewing their family members or friends

Analyzing primary source documents is more complex than reading a summary in a textbook or other secondary source.



Interdisciplinary applications:

History, sociology, world studies, literature, science

Time allotment:

Three class periods

National Standards:

NCSS:

- ◆ Time, continuity, and change
- ◆ Historical knowledge
- ◆ Understanding of event sequences
- ◆ Civics
- ◆ Culture/cultural regions

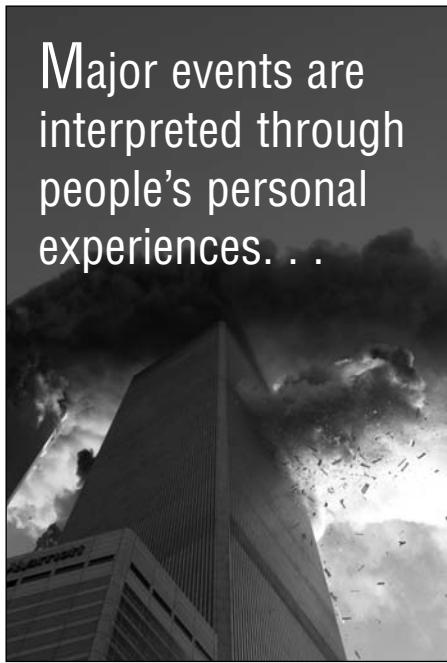
Background for activities:

Major events are interpreted through people's personal experiences, cultural background, and philosophical and spiritual beliefs. This can pose a challenge for students trying to understand what happened during an event and the circumstances that might have led to it. Analyzing primary source documents is more complex than reading a summary in a textbook or other secondary source. Likewise, timelines that are shorter in

scope may lead to very different conclusions as to the causes of a particular historical event than timelines of a greater scope.

This raises the interesting question of when history "began," and how closely events across time can accurately be connected as "causes" and "effects." A further consideration is how complete and comprehensive any timeline is. An example of this is how one interprets the "fall" of the Roman Empire. Did it occur over a short period of time (such as a day or a week), or did Rome decline over a very long period of time, through the rule of

many emperors and changing events within and from without the empire? The shorter version seems to see the fall as a rapid, short-term drama, while the decline version appears to describe the fall as a slow historical trend. The extent to which you choose to address these issues depends on the time available. This lesson provides a compelling introduction to such exploration.



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Materials and supplies:

- Timeline DVD Disc 2

- Computer(s) with internet access

- Student Handouts:

Activity 1: "9/11 Commission Report Timelines"

Activity 1: "Graphic Organizer for Oral Histories: Interviews of 9/11 Survivors"

Activity 2: "Timelines of Different Scopes"

Activity 2: "Long-Term Timeline, 1979-2001"

Activity 3: "Oral Histories—Personal Interview Instructions"

Like other historical events, the scope of one's examination of events that could be considered antecedents to the September 11, 2001, attacks can influence one's reactions, assumptions, and conclusions. Looking at the event in the context of a single day may create one set of reactions, assumptions, and conclusions, while lengthening the foreground prior to 9/11 may result in a very different set. Listening to victims' family members relate the events of the day provides a more personal, immediate understanding of the 9/11 attacks. Students should be aware of biases arising from differing life experiences, cultural backgrounds, ideological foundations, and even styles of communication that are integrated into any timeline. Therefore, it is very important for students to understand that the scope of a timeline and the language used to describe events can influence how they view and understand historical events. The critical thinking skill of analyzing assumptions will be invaluable to students throughout their lives.

This lesson is divided into three activities. In the first activity students analyze the events of September 11, 2001, from the perspectives of survivors of the 9/11 attacks, using oral histories as primary sources. This provides the opportunity for students to compare the characteristics, advantages, and limitations of primary and secondary sources. In the second activity, by comparing a timeline based on secondary sources spanning 22 years, to the single-day timeline based on primary sources, students assess the effect of scope on determining the causes of historic events, as they search for connections between 9/11 and previous events. The culminating activity has students experience historic research firsthand by interviewing their family members or friends regarding their experiences on 9/11.

Students should be aware of biases arising from differing life experiences. . .

Timelines that are shorter in scope may lead to very different conclusions as to the causes of a particular historical event than timelines of a greater scope.

Essential Questions:

- In what ways do oral histories provide information and perspectives that might contrast with a traditional timeline?
- How does a historian use primary sources such as first-person interviews to "write history"?
- How can you know truth in history, especially when events are controversial?

Procedures

Warm-up activity (15 minutes)

Have questions posted before class begins. Briefly review the concept of cause and effect with students, and lead a discussion using the following focus questions:

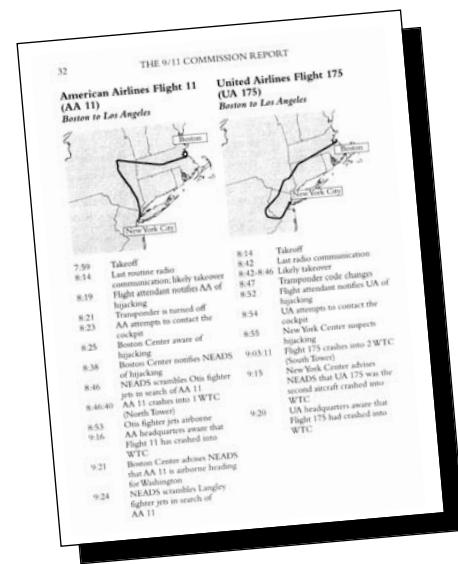
- ◆ How can you know the truth in history, especially when events are controversial?
- ◆ How can a timeline suggest, imply, or prove that particular causes bring about an event?
- ◆ Which method do you feel would give you a better understanding of an event: secondary reports and timelines, or first-person accounts? What are the respective advantages and disadvantages of each?
- ◆ Why are reports, personal stories, and even timelines not always to be trusted or believed?
- ◆ How is 9/11 typically viewed: as a single day, a series of days up to and including attacks, or as the result of a conflict long in the making? Explain.

Activity 1: Oral Histories—The Human Experience (one class period):

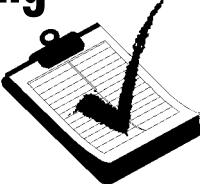
This activity introduces students to the power of firsthand oral histories. The personal accounts of September 11, 2001, as told by survivors and victims' family members are presented in a timeline format. The interviews are very moving, and it is advised that teachers preview the Timeline DVD (Disc 2) prior to showing it to students. The entire group of interviews lasts 70 minutes, but you have the option of selecting any number you prefer. If you have only 20 minutes, we recommend showing interviews "South Tower" (9:58 min), "Hijacking of UA 93" (2:40 min), and "North Tower Collapses" (4:57 min). Show interviews to the entire class, pausing after each to allow students to complete their graphic organizer and ask questions. You have the option of discussing each interview in detail immediately, or waiting until the last has been shown.

To introduce students to the power of oral histories as well as the sequence of events, lead students in examining the Student Handout of the "9/11 Commission

Report Timelines." You have the option of leading a discussion comparing takeoff times, destinations, length of time in the air, and crash sites, or quickly highlighting only the aspects you choose. These timelines, while providing both chronological information and a map of flight paths, are far less engaging than the interviews students are to watch of people who experienced the attacks of 9/11 firsthand. Some are family members who were on the phone with their loved ones on the planes or in the towers. Others are people who escaped the World Trade Center buildings before they collapsed. The combination of these accounts of the unfolding events of 9/11 creates a timeline with a very personal perspective.



Teaching TIP



If you have only 20 minutes to show the video timeline, we recommend showing "South Tower" (9:58 min), "Hijacking of UA 93" (2:40 min), and "North Tower Collapses" (4:57 min).

Discussion questions—

Examining the oral histories of 9/11:

- What information is gained from these interviews? What is left unsaid?
- How does the information presented in the interviews generate different impressions about the day's events than the information found in traditional timelines or reports from someone not directly connected with the event?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of relying on first-person accounts?
- In what ways do the interviewees' statements serve as a tribute to the victims of the 9/11 attacks?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of relying on first-person accounts?

Activity 2:

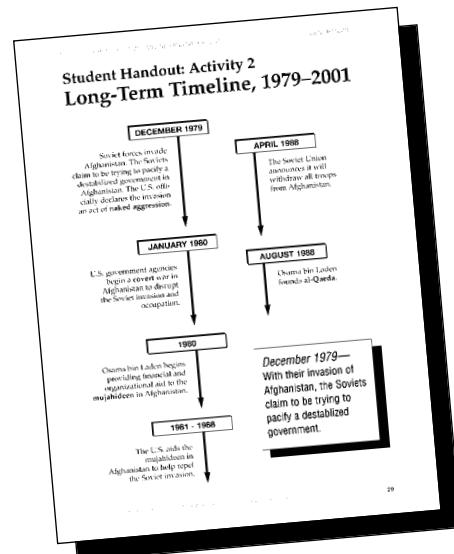
Timelines of Different Scopes

(one to two class periods):

1. To help students organize the 22 years of events, ask students to take notes on both their reading and group and class discussion. Students may arrange their notes into a “Facts” column on the right and a “Questions, reactions” column on the left. This activity lends itself to collaborative analysis. You should divide students into groups before the activity begins.

2. After distributing the Student Handout “Long-Term Timeline,” allow 10–15 minutes for silent reading of the new timeline and review of the previous one, encouraging students to highlight key points and ask questions. After students finish reading silently, allow 10–15 minutes for group discussions:

- Which timeline do you feel provides the most useful information regarding **what happened** on the day of the attacks? Explain your answer.



- Which timeline provides the best explanation of **why** 9/11 occurred? Explain your answer.
- How has your understanding of the events and the causes of 9/11 changed after examining the longer timeline?
- To truly understand the events and the causes of 9/11, how important is it to have both timelines? Would one be sufficient? Why or why not?

3. Have groups share their findings with the class, asking for any corrections or additions that other students feel are needed. After reviewing groups’ conclusions, continue with a whole-class discussion about historical causation. Refer to the idea that all events have multiple causes, some of which are in the more distant past while others are more immediate. Ask about how they view 9/11—as a single day or as a series of events going back 20–30 years. Ask them how each view of the



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event provides a different perspective. Build vocabulary by defining “context” as the set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, etc. that one should be aware of to better understand the event or situation. The longer timelines are great illustrations of providing context.

Activity 3: Oral Histories

To build oral and written communications skills, have students create a timeline or news article using as primary sources interviews of their friends and family members who remember details of that day. A list of questions is provided on the Student Handout for “Activity 3: The Historian’s Craft.” Students may use some or all of those questions and should be encouraged to add their own as the interview proceeds. Another option is to lead a class discussion to guide students in developing their own series of questions. This will reinforce appropriateness of topics and phrasing of interviews on this sensitive subject, as well as give students ownership of and familiarity with the questions. Students should interview subjects who can remember different details of the day’s events as they unfolded. To acquire sufficient information, you might allow students to interview more than one person, but require that the source of each response be very clearly labeled. Students should keep in mind both the unique value of primary sources—particularly live or recorded interviews—as well as the limitations of the information that one primary source can provide. Since 9/11 was a traumatic day for people around the world (not just New Yorkers or Americans), remind students to ask their questions with sensitivity.

Suggested follow-up activities:

- Have students present their findings to the class, with each focusing on the three most interesting segments of their interviews
- Have students post their interviews on LearnAbout9-11.org, where they can solicit comments from other students.

***Have students
post their
personal interview
timelines on
LearnAbout9-11.org***

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**Examples of student activities available
with the complete curriculum
on the following pages.** ➔

August 6, 2001—
U.S. intelligence compiles a briefing titled, "Bin Laden Determined to Attack the United States."

Student Handout: Activity 3

Oral Histories

PERSONAL INTERVIEW INSTRUCTIONS

To gain firsthand experience of the historian's craft, you will create a timeline or news article using interviews with friends and family members who remember details of that day as primary sources. Be sure to only interview subjects who can remember the details of the day's events as they unfolded. To acquire sufficient information, you may interview more than one person, but you must be careful to label the source of each response very clearly.

Keep in mind both the unique value of primary sources as well as the limitations of the information a primary source can provide.

Since 9/11 was a traumatic day for people around the world, not just New Yorkers or Americans, be prepared to ask your questions with sensitivity.

QUESTION LIST

Think of the following list as a menu of questions to select from. You may ask some or all of them. You can and should add your own questions as the interview proceeds.

- When did they first hear of the attacks?
- What did they hear about first?
- Where were they when they first heard of the attacks?
- How did they receive further information (watching TV, listening to the radio, getting information from the Internet, etc.)?
- Did they continue to listen to the radio, watch TV, monitor the Internet, etc., throughout the day?
- When did they learn of about each aspect of the attacks: the hijackings, the four different plane crashes, and the collapse of each tower? What was their reaction to each?
- What action did they want to take or want the government to take?

| Long-Term Timeline's Vocabulary: | |
|--|--|
| • DECEMBER 1979 | • OCTOBER 1993 |
| naked aggression - behavior intended to cause harm or pain that is not hidden in any way | militant - a fighting, warring, or aggressive person or party |
| • JANUARY 1980 | • APRIL 1995 |
| covert - secret | surge - a period of intense effort that improves a competitor's standing |
| • 1980 | • JULY 1995 |
| Mujahideen - fundamentalist Muslim guerrilla fighters | radical Islamists - advocates of extreme revolutionary changes in current Muslim practices, conditions, or institutions |
| • AUGUST 1988 | intent - having the mind and will focused on a specific purpose |
| Al-Qaeda - a worldwide pan-Islamic terrorist network headed by Osama bin Laden | • AUGUST 1995 |
| • 1991 GULF WAR | guerrilla - a member of an irregular, usually indigenous military or paramilitary unit operating in small bands in occupied territory to harass and undermine the enemy, as by surprise raids |
| Persian Gulf - an arm of the Arabian Sea between the Arabian Peninsula and southwest Iran, an important trade route, especially for oil | • FEBRUARY 1998 |
| conservative Muslims - Muslims favoring the preservation of established Islamic customs and values, and opposing change | fatwa - a legal opinion, ruling or order issued by an Islamic scholar |