

Delving into the past



“History is not the accumulation of events of every kind which happened in the past. It is the science of human societies.”

– Fustel de Coulanges



Rediscovering the past

History exists all around us. In your own neighbourhood, you might have seen changes taking place: a mall where there was once a house, a garden where people once dumped garbage.... Change in the surroundings, in people's ways of living, together with the events around them, when seen in the timeframe of centuries, or even decades, gives you a history of the place.

Visit a place of historical importance, such as a fort or a palace. Note the following details:

- What is this place?

- Who had it built? When and why?

- Who has lived in this place since it was built? Does anyone still live here? Why or why not?

- What are the important events that took place here?

- What is special about this place?

Of dates and timelines



History is at one level a record of events. Some events are seen as very important: these may even define how we understand the past. Take the birth of Jesus Christ, for instance. It is considered by Christians to be the most important event in the history of the whole world, and events are thus dated in the Christian calendar as before the birth of Christ – “BC” (before Christ) or after his birth “AD” (Latin for Anno Domini or “in the year of our Lord”). Most countries today have also adopted the Christian system of dating events.

In History, we see time as something that moves in one direction only – forwards. There is of course a past that we know about, and to enable us to understand this, we use “timelines”. Just as we have a number line in mathematics, we have “timelines” in history and mark events on it. The interesting thing is that there is no year 0: the year 1 AD begins when the year 1 BC ends!

A simple timeline tells you the sequence in which events have happened. Use the table below to create a timeline of your own (it’s okay if there are some boxes without an event).

When I was...	What happened in your state (one important event)	What happened in India (one important event)	What happened in the world (one important event)
...born (year)			
...three			
...six			
...nine			

Now draw a ‘year’ line, from the year of your birth to 2009, with 1 cm representing 1 year. Mark the years.

Under this, now mark the events that happened, putting the events of the same year one under the other. Is there an important event that happened in other years, but which you have not marked? Put the events down under the right year. You can mark more than one such event.

Now, pair up with a friend and “read” each other’s timelines: can both of you understand what happened when?

Where in the world did they come from?

Hidden in this illustration are ten objects from different periods in history and some ancient civilizations. Can you find them out? The objects are given on the facing page.



Illustration: Dhvani Shah

- Stone age cave painting
- Clay tablet with cuneiform writing
- Harappan seal
- Woolly mammoth
- Egyptian mummy
- Ziggurat
- Minoan dancing girls
- Olmec stone head
- Trojan horse
- Chinese soldier from the terracotta army



Recreating the stories of people from long ago

“History creates comprehensibility primarily by arranging facts meaningfully and only in a very limited sense by establishing strict causal corrections.”

– Johan Huizinga

In 1978, a team of archaeologists found some graves in Central Asia, near a place called Tillya Tepe (Pashto for ‘mound of gold’). There was a rumour that a golden man was buried here in a coffin of gold, and the local people sometimes sold artefacts to collectors. When the team began to excavate the area, they found six 2000-year old tombs of five women and one man hidden in the ruins of a 4000 year old temple! Together, these graves contained a collection of more than 20,000 artefacts dating to around the 1st century BCE, including coins, belts, medallions, crowns and other jewellery, made of gold and set with

gems like turquoise and lapis-lazuli. Some of these artefacts were local, and many of these showed the influence of ancient Greece. Others, like Chinese bronze mirrors and ivory plates from India, showed that these people were well-connected with different lands.

In 1979, war began in Afghanistan, and these treasures disappeared. It was thought that they had been destroyed by bombing. But they were found in 2003, hidden safely away in an underground vault by the curator of a museum.

Now think and answer the following questions:

- Why do you think the archaeologists chose to excavate the area near Tillya-Tepe?

- What kind of things can survive for 2000 or 4000 years? What things can't?

- How do we know that the people whose graves the archaeologists found were connected with ancient Greece, China and India?

- How do the actions of people in the present influence the past?

News of many such discoveries is available on the Internet on channels such as The History Channel, National Geographic and Discovery Channels. If you have the facility, you can look up some of these websites.

The language of history

There are many new words that you find as you begin to learn history. Here's a list of clues: you may know some of the words, and some may be new to you. Can you guess what they are? Take the help of an adult, if necessary.

1. People with their own society and culture living in a particular area at a particular time: _____.
2. The scientific study of people and cultures of the past by examining their artefacts, inscriptions, monuments, etc.: _____.
3. To dig out: _____.
4. The study of coins: _____.
5. A method using radioactive material to determine the age of something: _____.
6. A way of representing history across thousands of years: _____.
7. Wedge-shaped writing: _____.
8. A dead body that has been embalmed and stored for a long time: _____.
9. To apply medicines to a dead body to prevent decay: _____.
10. An Egyptian seal: _____.
11. Egyptian writing: _____.
12. A picture that represents a word or words: _____.
13. Tall conical structure with a square base and triangular sides: _____.
14. To take over another kingdom: _____.
15. A fortress: _____.

These words are hidden in the grid below: can you find them? They may be written forwards or backwards, going up or down, or even diagonally!

B	O	P	S	T	P	N	L	E	D	A	T	I	C	F
C	I	V	I	L	I	Z	A	T	I	O	N	L	N	R
A	C	E	T	M	C	S	O	A	X	Z	U	L	S	O
R	V	O	E	U	T	H	W	V	E	Y	M	M	U	M
B	E	T	N	I	O	P	P	A	A	G	I	I	F	R
O	U	Q	I	F	G	Y	V	C	Y	H	S	E	D	O
N	F	G	L	K	R	L	U	X	A	I	M	N	L	F
D	E	C	E	A	A	G	S	E	P	B	A	A	X	I
A	V	E	M	I	M	O	T	Q	A	J	T	T	Y	E
T	R	I	I	U	O	R	R	L	O	K	I	E	A	N
I	D	O	T	X	P	E	M	N	L	M	C	S	B	U
N	R	S	E	F	W	I	T	L	E	F	S	V	E	C
G	U	N	T	L	E	H	C	U	O	T	R	A	C	I
Q	N	S	Y	G	J	L	M	P	X	C	B	Z	O	U
A	R	C	H	A	E	O	L	O	G	Y	P	W	T	Y

Answers to clues:
 1. civilization; 2. archaeology;
 3. excavate; 4. numismatics;
 5. carbon-dating; 6. timeline;
 7. cuneiform; 8. mummy;
 9. embal; 10. cartouche;
 11. hieroglyphs; 12. pictogram;
 13. pyramid; 14. annex;
 15. citadel

Developed by Sheel.