

TOOLS FOR LEARNING HISTORY

What are these magical tools that transform the study of history? We will begin with these:

1) **Think About the big picture** – Just when did world history begin? With the first civilization? With the first written records? With the first human beings? Or maybe with the creation of the earth...or even the universe! Really “big history” dwarfs the importance of our own era if we put it within the context of the history of the universe. Even though it is rather arbitrarily agreed that history begins with written records, that limited time line still means that the “story” of history is very big. It is important to identify “marker events” that make a difference in the course of history, and to distinguish them from the myriad of details that can make us feel that history is just a bunch of unrelated facts.

2) **Think about themes** – An important tool in organizing and understanding history is thinking about themes, or unifying threads, that may be separated, even though they often intertwine. The themes in the AP World History curriculum that may be followed throughout history are humans and the environment, cultures, political structures and power (government and politics), economic systems, and social structures.

3) **Think about chunks** – The study of world history becomes more manageable if you “chunk” it into different time periods, a process called periodization. History textbooks usually chunk content into regions, but periodization is much more than that. It requires a student to think cross-culturally about a time period and analyze interactions among societies, as well as changes in political, economic, or social arrangements within societies. Even though history is broken up into periods, you are still seeing the big picture because you are concerned with broad patterns and “marker events” that change the course of world history. Big picture events and trends that make one period distinct from another are generally cross-cultural in that they impact several areas of the world, and they also often create change in more than one theme area. For example, an international war (such as World War II in the 20th century) that not only challenges government structures and officials,

but also brings about major economic and social class changes is likely to be a marker event. The AP World History curriculum chunks history into six periods, although many other periodization patterns are possible.

4) **Think comparatively** – Another way to think thoughtfully about history is to analyze through comparison that makes use of the big picture, themes, and chunks (#1, 2, and 3 above). For example, you may be interested in comparing social class (a theme) in India and China between 600 and 1450 C.E. (chunk). If you think about how social class in the two societies is different as well as similar, you gain a better understanding of both than you would if you just learned about them separately. You may compare many categories in history: societies or regions, belief systems (such as Buddhism and Hinduism), economic systems (such as capitalism and communism), revolutions (such as the American and French Revolutions), or demographic patterns (such as different migrations of people from one area to another).

5) **Think about continuity and change over time** – To approach history as a story necessarily means that you must think about change over time. What happens in the beginning of the story? What events occur that make the story change? What happens in the middle of the story that is caused by something that occurred earlier? How do all the events and characters that interact throughout the story influence the ending? Every time you tell a story, you are making connections among its various parts. In the same way, history is much more meaningful if you make connections across time periods. What happened in Latin America during the period from 1450 to 1750 that shaped the events of the 19th century? What happened in the 19th century that shaped the 20th century? How have events and people during all three time periods interacted to help explain modern day news stories from Latin America? Just as importantly, you must think about continuity over time: despite the changes, what threads have remained the same?

6) **Think about perspective** – We will never know all the events that have occurred in the past because knowledge of many of them has not been passed on to later generations. No one thought to tell their children about these occurrences, and so remembrance of them ceased when individuals died. However, some people, places, and events are remembered, sometimes through stories told around the fireside at night, or often through written records. Historians look at all kinds of evidence in order to reconstruct the past, including physical evidence left behind,

such as remnants of buildings, pottery, and clothing. In order to find out what really happened, a historian (or history student) needs many skills, including the ability to analyze perspective, or point of view. The slave's view is usually different from the slaveholder's, and the conqueror usually doesn't see things the same way as the conquered. If a historian finds a letter from a 16th-century European nobleman that praises his king, the historian must take into account the nobleman's point of view. To a historian, history is not a collection of static facts, but is an exciting, dynamic puzzle that must be interpreted and analyzed.

7) Think about Causation – Historical events always have effects on later happenings, and so it is important to analyze and evaluate the interaction of multiple causes and/or effects. A good historian understands which events are related and which are not, and so distinguishing among coincidence, causation, and correlation is an important skill to apply. A correlation exists when a change in one event or pattern coincides with a change in the other. Correlations are an indication that causality may be present; they do not necessarily indicate causation. Historical researchers seek to identify the causal link among events and patterns by collecting and analyzing many kinds of data. Historians are interested in both short term and long term effects of events. For example, a short term effect of the French Revolution was the beheading of King Louis XVI. A long-term effect was to upset the balance of power in Europe and pave the way for new forms of government that transformed the continent.

8) Think about Contextualization – Historical thinking requires the connection of historical events and processes both to specific circumstances of time and place and also to broader processes. Whereas the broad context for world history is the world, the broad context for European history is Europe. However, these contexts often intertwine. For example, Europe's involvement in the two 20th century world wars cannot be understood without considering the wars within the context of world history. Likewise, regional movements within any continent must always be considered within the context of the continent as a whole.

AP WORLD HISTORY THEMES

**Theme One:
Humans and the
Environment**

This theme emphasizes demography (the science of human populations) as people migrate, settle, spread disease, and alter the environment through technology. Human interactions with their environment have impacted the course of world history in many ways.

**Theme Two:
Culture**

This theme focuses on cultural influences that have shaped societies throughout history, including belief systems (such as religion, philosophies, and ideologies), science and technology, and the arts and architecture.

**Theme Four:
The Economy**

A study of economic systems includes the many ways that people have made a living throughout history, such as agriculture, pastoralism, trade, commerce, and industry. This theme also investigates labor systems, and economic ideologies such as socialism and capitalism.

**Theme Five:
Social Structures**

Social structures include gender roles, family and kinship, race, ethnicity, and social classes. These social structures have impacted the course of world history in very different ways than politics and economics, but their influence is equally as important.



THE BIG PICTURE: TECHNOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSFORMATIONS (to 600 B.C.E.)

Be sure to keep up with these broad trends and themes for the period before 600 B.C.E.:

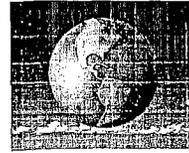
- 1) During the Paleolithic era, hunters and gatherers gradually migrated from their origins in East Africa to Eurasia, Australia, and the Americas, adapting their technology and cultures to the new areas.
- 2) Interactions among different groups of people on the planet were usually limited to groups that were geographically nearby, but interactions increased steadily throughout the time period, both in frequency and distance.
- 3) Physical geography and the natural environment interacted with human activities to shape changes and continuities during the time period.
- 4) This period is made up of two time periods that are distinguished by big changes in human lifestyles, including these "marker events": the development of agriculture and early agricultural communities, and the appearance of the earliest urban-based societies.



**THE BIG PICTURE:
UNIT TWO: ORGANIZATION
AND REORGANIZATION
OF HUMAN SOCIETIES,
c. 600 B.C.E. to c. 600 C.E.**

Be sure to note these broad trends and themes for Unit Two:

- 1) New belief systems emerged and spread beyond political boundaries, so that societies organized on the basis of religious and cultural traditions. Universalizing religions – such as Christianity and Buddhism – appeared for the first time.
- 2) The number and size of empires grew dramatically as large empires encompassed smaller states. Cities also grew and became centers of political, economic, and religious power, and social structures became increasingly hierarchical.
- 3) The volume of long-distance trade, communication, and exchange increased substantially through land and water networks such as the Silk Roads, Trans-Saharan caravan routes, and Indian Ocean sea lanes. Separate networks connected societies of the Americas, but they did not connect to networks in the Eastern Hemisphere.



**THE BIG PICTURE:
600-1450 C.E.**

Three themes run through the era from 600 to 1450 C.E. that make it distinct from other eras:

- 1) **Belief systems were unifying forces for societies.** This period saw the rise of another great universalizing religion – Islam. Like Christianity and Buddhism, Islam spread from its origins to many different lands to be embraced by people with very different backgrounds. Like Christianity and Buddhism, Islam was a missionary religion, deliberately spread by its adherents. Buddhism became a very important force in China during this era, and made its way to Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia. Christianity became an important organizing force in most parts of Europe.
- 2) **Civilization spread to many parts of the globe.** Civilization spread to Sub-Saharan Africa, northern and western Europe, and Japan. The zones of civilization spread in the Americas as well, and some important civilizations appeared in Southeast Asia. More nomads came into contact with civilization centers, and the influence of nomadic groups peaked.
- 3) **Trade and communications networks increased the interdependence of numerous societies.** Technologies spread from their origins, and many more cultural exchanges took place. Virtually all water and land trade routes grew more complex, bringing more goods to more people, but the spread of disease accelerated as well, with the appearance of the bubonic plague as an international epidemic in the 14th century.

Despite the spread of civilization to new areas, the influence of the old empires lived on during this period. Even though political lines were reconfigured and governing styles changed, the Middle East, China, India, and the Eastern Roman Empire remained quite powerful. The greatest cities of the Eastern Hemisphere were in these areas, and the people of the new areas imitated the culture and social structures established by the older civilizations. In the Americas, Teotihuacan and Mesoamerican also developed as cities, but they had no contact with the cities in the East. However, by the time the era ended in 1450, the world was already beginning to change as Europeans prepared to set sail on the Atlantic Ocean, largely because they were emboldened by the accomplishments of their ancestors who lived between 600 and 1450.



UNIT TWO: ORGANIZATION AND REORGANIZATION OF HUMAN SOCIETIES, c. 600 B.C.E. TO c. 600 C.E.

By 600 B.C.E. the old river valley centers of civilization in the Middle East had been eclipsed by many factors, including the devastating collapse of trade and cultural connections around 1200 B.C.E. No such event had occurred in eastern Asia, where the Zhou Dynasty remained strong, and civilizations continued to develop in Mesoamerica and the Andes Mountains region. Most significantly, some major changes began to usher in a new era in the world's story: the development of large states and empires that lasted through the middle of the 1st millennium C.E. and connected to one another through transregional trade networks. Religious and cultural systems were also transformed so that belief systems provided the "glue" that held large empires together. Shared beliefs reinforced political and economic structures and practices, and in some cases insured that civilizations would continue even after their governments fell.

No single "marker event" started the new era, so it is easy to argue that the era actually began or ended a little earlier or later. However, by 600 B.C.E. some clear changes had occurred, including the shift of civilization centers away from the older centers in the Eastern Hemisphere. For example, on the Indian subcontinent, human activities centered on the Ganges River Valley to the east of the Indus River Valley. In China, the Huang He (Yellow) River remained active, but farming became more intense and cities began to grow along the Yangze River Valley to the south. By the mid-1st millennium B.C.E. Persia, a new empire in the Middle East, was stirring. In the area around the Mediterranean Sea a new civilization was emerging from the ashes of Mycenae in Greece by about 800 B.C.E.

These new civilizations differed from earlier ones in several ways:

- **Size and political strength** – Empires developed as a political form as rulers strengthened governmental and military organizations to allow them to rule larger land areas. New systems of rule – called states – mobilized surplus labor and resources that made it possible to expand territory and conquer surrounding states. For example, Rome controlled areas that stretched from northern Europe to western Asia to northern Africa. The

Mauryan Empire on the Indian subcontinent was far larger than the area controlled earlier by the Harappans. Whereas Han China was not larger in land space than the old Zhou Dynasty, the emperors generally had more centralized control of the area.

- **More complex cultures** – During this era several of the world's great religions emerged as forces determining the course of world history, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. In China the important philosophy of Confucianism emerged as a powerful cultural influence. Even though Hinduism and Judaism have roots in the earlier era, all these belief systems diffused to lands outside their areas of origin so that their overall impact on world history became enormous. Many civilization areas produced art and literature that remain influential today.
- **More numerous and better written records** – We know more about these civilizations than we know about the river valley civilizations partly because they were more recent, but also because their written records were more numerous and systematic. All developed sophisticated forms of writing, and some began to use a simplified system of symbols (alphabets) that allowed literacy to become more widespread, though not universal.
- **More complex long-distance trade** – During this era great trade routes connected the civilizations by land (the Silk Road) and by sea (the Indian Ocean trade). Although trade was still confined by hemisphere (west was not trading with east), the trade contacts and distance travelled grew tremendously. These trade routes increased the prosperity of the empires and spread ideas, including belief systems, as well as material goods.
- **More contacts between nomads and sedentary people** – Partly because of the extended trade routes, the boundaries of the empires expanded, and people from urban centers came in contact with those living on the periphery. In central Asia nomadic groups took over the transport of goods across vast plains, and in some cases settled into communities that grew into great trade cities along the Silk Road. Attacks of nomadic groups on civilization centers grew, although a great deal of the contact was peaceful as all benefitted from growing trade routes.
- **More direct influence on modern civilizations** – Many modern beliefs and practices may be traced much more directly to the civilizations of this era than to the earliest civilization era. This is true partly because we have more knowledge of the later era, but also because their beliefs and practices were more similar to those of the modern era. For example, modern law codes are much more similar to Roman law codes than they are to Hammurabi's Code of early Mesopotamia. Religious beliefs that devel-



**UNIT THREE:
REGIONAL AND
TRANSREGIONAL
INTERACTIONS –
c. 600 to c. 1450**

The third period in our story of the world is the chunk of time from c. 600 to c. 1450 C.E. The map of the world in 600 had changed greatly, with all the large empires split into smaller, often quarrelsome political units. Various Germanic tribes had settled into the area of the Western Roman Empire, and generally had little contact with one another except for conflicts with near neighbors. The Indian sub-continent had returned to its regional political factionalism, but Hinduism and the intricate web of jati gave continuing structure to Indian society. In 600 C.E. China had been through almost 400 years of political chaos after the fall of the Han Dynasty in the early 3rd century C.E., but was on the verge of political centralization made possible by the unifying influences of Confucianism and Daoism. This era from c. 600 to 1450 C.E. saw the emergence of important new civilizations, the revival and expansion of some old civilizations, the peak of influence of nomadic groups, the importance of belief systems as unifying forces for societies, and increasing interconnections among the world's people through an intricate network of trade.

Chunking historical analysis by regions is necessary in order to keep the changes in the world's story manageable, but it is important to see important themes that run through the time period, especially as they build on the previous period and create a bridge to the period that follows. Before we get to the unifying themes, let's think about what did NOT happen during the era:

- 1) **Eastern and Western Hemispheres were not joined.** Trade networks intensified during this era, but no sustained contact between the hemispheres occurred. The Americas developed in isolation from the connected realms of Asia, Europe, and Africa. Other areas of the world also developed on their own, including Australia and Polynesia.
- 2) **Innovations were not numerous, although technology expanded.** Expansion of technology was more characteristic than innovation, although print technology was invented in east Asia, as well as explosive powder. Previous technologies, such as camel saddles, stirrups, silk-making techniques, and steel plows, diffused far beyond the origins of innovation.
- 3) **No political form became dominant.** During the era from 600 B.C.E. to 600 C.E., empire was the dominant political form. Empires in this era were smaller, and many other organizations emerged, such as kingdoms, caliphates, and khanates, so that no single form is associated with overall political organizations of the era.
- 4) **Environmental changes were not as great as in other eras.** More areas became agricultural, but there was no massive transformation of areas from their natural environment such as those that occurred as early agriculture spread. For example, soil had been depleted of its nutrients in most areas of the Roman Empire, a factor that contributed to the decline of the civilization.
- 5) **Most societies remained patriarchies with clear social distinctions.** During this era we see few changes in gender relations, although in some areas, inequality between the sexes actually grew. Slavery remained characteristic of most social systems, although it did decline in some areas. Status and wealth were still based primarily on land ownership, and disputes over land distribution among classes remained problematic.