

# TEACHING THE Concept Of The Past

## Overview

A series of practical activities provides an introduction to, and helps students to develop, a concept of the past.

## Objectives

Students will

- understand the concept of past time on a personal level
- sequence personal events in the past using simple mathematics
- discuss the importance of past history to their own lives
- speculate on the importance of the present to the future

## Subjects/Skills

- social studies, math
- inference, evaluation, research

## Age Level

Grades 4–8

## Materials

- 20-foot tape measure
- one envelope per student
- index cards or slips of paper
- paper clips or clothespins
- three handouts (pages 9–10))

## Time Required

Allow 1 hour to prepare this activity and 1–2 class periods to complete it.

## Preparation

1. The day before the activity, ask students to write down two objects of importance to them, excluding animals and people. One item should be something treasured by them now, in the present. The second should be something they loved five years ago. They

should seal their list in an envelope, to be opened at the end of the activity.

2. Prepare a card or slip of paper for each student, with a month and year from the past 10 years written on it.

## Procedure

### Activity 1: Thinking about the Past

1. Distribute and ask students to read Worksheet #1 (page 9).
2. Ask students to complete Worksheet #3 (page 10) to apply concepts of the past and present to their own lives.
3. Distribute Worksheet #2 (page 9) and ask students to complete it individually or as a group.
4. As a group, discuss the implications of these activities with students.

### Activity 2: Getting a Grasp on the Past

A tape measure is a handy tool for accessing past time in regular, visual increments. Starting with the present at one end, each 12-inch section can equal increments of any number of years.

1. Extend a 20-foot tape to its full length at the front of the classroom and lock it open. Let each 2-foot segment represent one year (e.g., each 2-inch segment will equal one month).
2. Allow each student to select a slip of paper with a month and year written on it. Ask students to come forward, one at a time, to locate her/his month and year on the tape.
3. As each student clips the paper to the tape, ask her/him to state:
  - how old they were on that date
  - where they lived
  - if they could read and write
  - the kind of clothes they might have been wearing at the time
  - a song they might have known
  - an activity they might have done
 Because the past is shared by everyone, classmates can help each other with answers, although each student

should find her/his spot on the tape.

### Activity 3: Follow-up Discussion

1. Complete this activity by asking students to discuss these questions:

- What could you discard or remove so that no one would know that you personally have been: a) in this classroom; b) in this school; c) in your home; or d) in your town?
- What could you discard or remove so that no one would know that humans have been in your city or state?
- If you could keep only three items, what personal belongings would you like to have for the rest of your life? What would you do to preserve them?
- Conservationists raise funds to preserve important objects, buildings, and places where people lived in the past. Can you explain why they do this?
  - If the only items from the present that we preserved for the future were broken pop bottles, paring knives, and videos of "Rocky and Bullwinkle," how would people in the future describe us?
  - List any three events of the past 100 years that have changed the way you live life today. What would your life be like if they had not happened?
  - Is it true that the past has made us what we are today? Explain why this is or is not true.
  - If you could pick any time period in which to live, what would it be and why? Where would you go to find out more about it? (This question can serve as a springboard for research or writing activities for older students.)
- 2. Ask students to open the sealed envelopes they prepared. As a group, discuss whether they would change either of the items that they listed.
- 3. Close the activity with a group discussion centered on these questions: Do you think that the past is important? Why or why not? What can we do to protect our past?

**Student Worksheets****WORKSHEET #1:*****What is the Present and What is the Past?******What is the Present?***

The present is time "now." We all live in present time. We live in what we call "now." We may dream about the past and the future, but we all live now, in the present.

We can think of the present as a picture, a big instant photo that has all of us in it, and all the things we own now, and all of the people and things that we know now. The present is like a huge puzzle with many pieces all in their place.

***What is the Past?***

The past is time "then." The past is time one second ago; one minute ago; one hour, week, month, or year ago; 100 or 1,000 years ago—as far back as you can imagine.

The past is also like a huge jigsaw puzzle. In the past, pieces of the puzzle have been lost, forgotten, stolen, or they have crumbled, rusted, or disappeared. Often, the further back into the past you go, the more that pieces of the whole picture are missing.

*What do you think about the present and the past?*

**WORKSHEET #2*****What is Passing? What has Passed?***

The items on the list below are in the process of passing from common knowledge and common public use. As they pass, they are being replaced by new things that fulfill the same functions. In a few years, the listed items will be considered curiosities from the past. They will have disappeared

from the picture of the present.

Your task is to discuss each item on the list—either in writing or in discussion, describe its form and function, and explain what is replacing each item in the present. See if you can think of other items to add to the list.

- drive-in movies
- television antennas
- typewriters
- dumps and landfills
- cloth handkerchiefs for your nose
- enclosed telephone booths
- smoking in public places
- marbles
- books
- paper dolls
- ice cream trucks
- home milk delivery
- dumping trash on roads from cars

*Can you think of other items that are fading from use?*

WORKSHEET #3

*Time Puzzle*

To see how quickly pieces of the whole picture puzzle disappear when we move into the past, answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper.

1. What is the name of your favorite song?
2. What color shirt are you wearing?
3. Who is the president of the United States?
4. Who is sitting next to you?
5. Is it clear, cloudy, or rainy today?
6. What did (do) you have for lunch?
7. What color are your eyes?
8. Name a piece of jewelry you are wearing.
9. What are you wearing on your feet?
10. What is the first name of the president's wife?

One week ago when this class met:

1. What was the name of your favorite song?
2. What color shirt were you wearing?
3. Who was the president of the United States?
4. Who was sitting next to you?
5. Was it clear, cloudy, or rainy?

6. What did you have for lunch?
7. What color were your eyes?
8. Name a piece of jewelry you were wearing.
9. What were you wearing on your feet?
10. What was the first name of the president's wife?

One month ago when this class met:

1. What was the name of your favorite song?
2. What color shirt were you wearing?
3. Who was the president of the United States?
4. Who was sitting next to you?
5. Was it clear, cloudy, or rainy?
6. What did you have for lunch?
7. What color were your eyes?
8. Name a piece of jewelry you were wearing.
9. What were you wearing on your feet?
10. What was the first name of the president's wife?

Answer the same questions for each of the following time periods:

- Two years ago on this day at this hour
- Ten years ago on this day at this hour

**RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS**

Abbau, Marcy, ed. *Architecture in Education. A Resource of Imaginative Ideas and Tested Activities* (Philadelphia: Foundation for Architecture, 1992).

Dwight, Pamela, ed. *Landmark Yellow Pages. Where to Find All the Names, Addresses, Facts, and Figures You Need* (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1993).

Florida Department of State. *Florida Heritage Education Program Lesson Plans, Series 1* (Tallahassee: Division of Historical Resources, 1996).

Hunter, Kathleen. *Heritage Education: A Community-School Partnership* (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, Information Series No. 73, 1993).

Kyvig, David E. and Myron A. Marty. *Nearby History. Exploring the Past Around You* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982).

Levstik, Linda S. *History from the Bottom Up* (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies "How To Do It" Series, Series 5, Number 1).

Metcalf, Fay D. and Matthew T. Downey. *Using Local History in the Classroom* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982).

National Archives. *Teaching With Documents. Using Primary Sources from the National Archives* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1989).

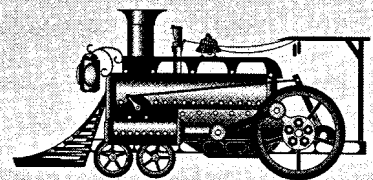
National Park Service, Cultural Resources Division. "Teaching with Historic Places." CRM 16(2): 1-24, 1993.

National Trust for Historic Preservation. "Focus on Heritage Education." *Historic Preservation Forum* 6(1): 5-45, Jan.-Feb. 1992.

Weitzman, David. *Underfoot. An Everyday Guide to Exploring the American Past* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976).

White, Charles S. and Kathleen A. Hunter. *Teaching with Historic Places. A Curriculum Framework* (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1995).

Compiled by KC Smith



*The Education Station invites examples of lesson plans and activity ideas, comments about useful resources, and articles about unique approaches to teaching archaeology. Please accompany material with illustrations and black and white photos. Do not send color slides or negatives.*

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