



# Teaching History Motivating Middle School Minds



Many conversations about teaching history

- Dissatisfaction with our approaches to teaching History
- Problematic dichotomy between content and skills
- History as interesting but irrelevant and incoherent stories from the past
- Wrote for the HTA NSW in 2006
- *Teaching History* – Christine Counsell
- Research interests in History education



Independent school in Sydney

- Boys School 3 – 9, Co-educational 10 – 12
- Compulsory History in Years 7, 9 and 10
- Introduction of Project Zero Teaching for Understanding as a curriculum model
  - Understanding Goals
  - Cultures of Thinking
  - The Heart of the Discipline



Curriculum planning that encourages historical understanding and historical thinking

- Historical Understanding
- Historical Significance
- Evidence
- Continuity and Change
- Cause and Consequence
- Historical Perspectives
- Historical Empathy
- Contestation and Contestability

Concepts that organise the knowledge of experts need to organise the instruction of students!



Doing History involves...

- Un-training student thinking towards History
- Problematising the past through inquiry
- Tackling evidence
- Developing a conceptual understanding of historical ideas
- Recognising the distinctive nature of the subject
- Adductive reasoning
- Motivating students to think for themselves



- Relationship between content and concepts is planned and considered.
- Conceptual knowledge enhances historical knowledge
- Deep knowledge required for deep understanding to occur
- “the most important thing is what you choose to teach”  
David Perkins (2008)



**Challenging and engaging**

- Questions to help students to do the work of an historian
- Consider genuine sources through lens of historical inquiry
- Wrestling with History – not diluted and not de-problematised!
- As Christine Counsell (2004) says, “if there’s no problem there’s no History.”



- **Medieval Europe**
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Year 7 case study
- 12 – 14 lessons
- 3 lesson seq (Continuity & Change)



To what extent did the Black Death transform Medieval life?



- Appealing
- European focus
- Conceptually rich
- Historically significant
- Window into Medieval attitudes



Understanding Goals

- How can an appreciation of the Black Death help us to understand Medieval attitudes?
- What can a study of the Black Death teach us about how things change in history, why things happen and the consequences.
- What role do primary sources play in helping us to understand Medieval history?
- Who are 'others' and how do we communicate our findings to them?



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni\\_Boccaccio](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Boccaccio)

- Italian scholar and poet
- Wrote 'Decameron' which he completed in 1352
- Written in Florence, Italy
- He provides an account of the Black Death in the city of Florence.





Think about...	Record comments here
Troublesome words? What do you think they mean?	
Describe what Boccaccio is seeing.(what happened?)	
What appears to have changed in Florence? (What's happening?)	



Quick  
 Angry  
 Surprised  
 Evil  
 Panicky  
 Aggressive  
 Timid  
 Reckless  
 Resilient



- A focus on extended writing and writing as ‘joined up thinking’
- Using language to release the conceptual – The language of causation!
- Encouraging students to play around with ideas refining their thinking as they go
- ‘Lumping’ and ‘Splitting’ ideas, making connections and prioritising
- Adding complexity - Historiography

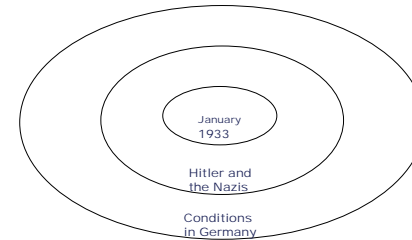


## Why was Hitler able to become Chancellor of Germany?

- Conceptual focus: Causation
- 3-4 lesson sequence
- Complex question with areas of disagreement amongst historical community
- Students encouraged to form their own argument
- Encouraged to review their own thinking as they progress. Formally and informally

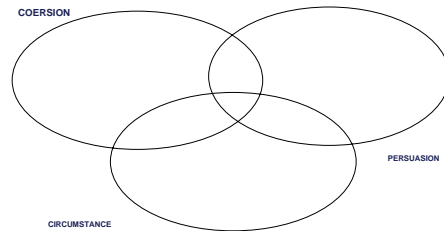


## Sorting and Prioritising



## Sorting and Prioritising

The sight of Nazi Storm Troopers marching in the streets gave the impression of discipline and energy at a time of chaos. This appealed to the German middle class



## Historiography

- Challenging textbook presentation of history which can present a single and simple narrative
- Adding complexity (and confusion) through changing interpretations
- Encouraging students to consider how they can support their view with the opinions of others – linking to a concept of evidence



Peer evaluation – maturity in the world of the immature!

- Receiving feedback in light of an agreed criteria
- Creating a ‘critical community’ – like a historian would write for – where student ideas have to stand up to scrutiny
- Rules – Be helpful, Be specific, Be Nice! (Berger 2003)



Year 9 History  
Marking and Feedback Criteria for Essay Answers

Criteria	Marks
<b>A student in this band will:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show that they really know their history (details, terms and concepts)</li> <li>• Be well organised using PEER paragraphs</li> <li>• Make use of appropriate words and phrases to create more sophisticated explanations and assessments</li> </ul>	9-10
<b>A student in this band will:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show that they know some history (details, terms and concepts)</li> <li>• Pay some attention to the organisation of paragraphs (all of them make not make a clear point or be linked directly to the question)</li> <li>• Attempt to use words and phrases that help the explanations and assessments</li> </ul>	7-8
<b>A student in this band will:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the odd accurate historical detail</li> <li>• Pay some attention to the organisation of paragraphs (may leave some paragraphs incomplete or unconnected to the question)</li> <li>• Ignore words and phrases that could assist their explanations and assessments</li> </ul>	5-6
<b>A student in this band will:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not have put in much effort at all</li> </ul>	1-4



A key factor that laid the foundations for Hitler's success was the Great Depression. The decline in economic prosperity spread despondency through the country. People did not care how this situation was to be resolved. They just wanted it to be done. Angers flared, men and women were suffering. Putting pressure on the government. The old system wasn't working. Simply - people were desperate and Hitler's promises were more than appealing. This was what they needed, supply met demand. Hitler exploited the people's need.

Contrary to the opinions of <sup>functionalists,</sup> ~~intentionalists~~ it is arguable that Hitler was self motivated and

*Handwritten notes:*  
 - Good use of language (pointing to 'despondency')  
 - Good connection of points (pointing to the flow of the text)  
 - Very description (pointing to the paragraph)



In January of 1933, Adolf Hitler was able to become the chancellor of Germany, because of the fundamental fact that he was given power by President Hindenburg. This is because of the underlying detail that Hitler was needed in Germany at the time of the Great Depression by politicians, and by the citizens of Germany. Hindenburg elected him in thinking that he could always be controlled. As we now know, he was wrong.

Hitler was very well known for his fantastic oratory skills, that proved him to be an influential speaker, and so he was regarded as a very powerful politician. It was said that if Hitler had died before 1938, he would still be one of the greatest politicians of all time. He used this ability to spread his message throughout all of Germany. He used radio, newspapers, film and posters to do so, as well as organising rallies around Germany, where he himself would go to tell people of what he planned to do, and why he could help them. He gave the Germans people to blame for all their problems, such as their loss in the war, the great depression and unemployment. His extremist approach appealed to the people of Germany. In some of his rallies, it is said that he had succeeded in whipping the entire crowd into a frenzy. He spread his message so well, that he gained much support from the citizens of Germany... *What time?*

The conditions in Germany at the time of Hitler's rise were terrible, as

*Handwritten notes:*  
 - Very description (pointing to the paragraph)  
 - What time? (pointing to the end of the paragraph)



The Great Depression saw an unstable time in the German Reichstag: article 48 was used to control the people and gave politics the power to make decisions without the need to be democratic, communists were found guilty of setting fire to the Reichstag which exacerbated political tensions and President Hindenburg was very old and was increasingly thought to be senile. Hitler took advantage of the government's situation and persuaded Von Papen and President Hindenburg into making him chancellor of Germany. They saw Hitler and the Nazis as a threat to their political power and thought this was the only way to control him. Hitler convinced them that he would be able to pass laws and manage the communists within the Reichstag.

Good use of words

Another great example of words

In conclusion, Hitler was able to become Chancellor through his will and ability to adapt in times of change and crisis. By using these changes to his advantage, Hitler was able to take control of the Germany's situation and persuade the citizens and politicians that he was a man who would save them from the crises at hand. They believed that he would be able to help them through the tough times and out the other side. They thought that through him Germany could once again be a prosperous and affluent nation.

Possibly could have written a bit better.



- Historical concepts not skills
- Foregrounds understanding and thinking
- Problematic and interpretive (wrestling)
- Guided inquiry – Thoughtful questions and choices
- Distinct nature of History – Doing History!
- Tackle misconceptions
- Metacognition
- Challenging and engaging



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- National Research Council. (2005). How Students Learn: History in the Classroom. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.



# Teaching History

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