

History Labs: A Guided Approach to Historical Inquiry in the K-12 Classroom

TEMPLATE

History Lab Title: (can be a variation of the overarching question)

Grade Level:

Duration of the History Lab: An investigation can be as brief as one class period or take multiple days.

Curriculum Alignment:

Common Core Standards Alignment: History Labs demonstrate and build the literacy skills (reading and writing) that are emphasized in the Common Core Standards.

National Standards Alignment (optional): [National Center for History in the Schools \(UCLA\)](#)

- Standards in Historical Thinking
- Content Standards

Overarching Question:

- The essential question that guides the History Lab and addresses a curricular indicator.

Focus Question/s: Teacher-generated topic question or questions to more closely guide the historical investigation. The focus questions should relate back to the overarching question.

History Lab Objectives: (SWBAT or other)

Topic Background:

- Important information on the historical context of the History Lab topic for background knowledge.

Materials:

- Tools, resource sheets (with bibliographic citations), graphic organizers, rubrics, etc.

Historical Sources with Annotations:

- Summarize the text, context, and subtext for each source utilized.
- Explain carefully how each source fits into the History Labs procedure and helps to answer the overarching question.

Procedures:

- I. Initiate the History Lab
- II. Frame the History Lab
- III. Facilitate the History Lab
- IV. Present information and interpretations
- V. Connect to the overarching question
- VI. Assess student understanding of content and process



Be explicit in questioning and provide potential responses.

Steps in a Teacher-Generated History Lab

- I. Introduce the overarching question, based on a curricular indicator, which will guide the History Lab:**
 - The question should be thought-provoking and encourage inquiry and discussion.
 - The question should address the curricular content.
 - The question should deepen students' understanding of history as an interpretive discipline, by emphasizing historical thinking skills, such as causality, change and continuity, turning points, multiple perspectives, significance, impact, and context.
- II. Initiate the History Lab:**
 - Access prior knowledge. Students can read from narratives, poems, journal entries, or accounts, listen to excerpts from speeches, or examine maps, broadsides, or political cartoons. This activity should engage students and set the context for the History Lab.
- III. Frame the History Lab:**
 - Facilitate the framing of topic focus questions that relate to the (larger) overarching question. Teachers can direct this step, depending on the ages and ability levels of their students, or have students take the lead.
 - Ensure that students have identified the relevant questions. If necessary, lead students to important questions they have not considered.
 - Have students identify sources of information that would provide answers to the focus questions.
- IV. Model the historical process:**
 - Model the process of analyzing a historical source. Use a focus question as an example.
 - Identify the "who, what, when, where, and why" information.
 - Determine context, subtext, and relevance of the source to the focus question.
- V. Facilitate the History Lab:**
 - Have students choose focus questions to investigate.
 - Provide students with relevant historical sources.
 - Have students work in cooperative groups or independently to generate interpretations from the source materials.
 - Have students cite information from the sources as evidence to support their interpretations.
 - Multiple interpretations may emerge.
- VI. Present information and interpretations:**
 - Individuals or representatives from groups will present their interpretations and defend the sources that provided the evidence for their decisions. In a debate format, students can also refute the interpretations of their fellow students or historians.
 - Discuss the ways in which the interpretations are related. Look for commonalities and differences.
 - The teacher will facilitate the discussion to ensure that the interpretations are supported by solid factual information and reasoning.
- VII. Address the overarching question:**
 - Students will synthesize the information gained during the History Lab to address the overarching question.
 - Student responses can be oral, written, or expressed through a variety of products.
- VIII. Assessment:**
 - Assess students' understanding of the historical content and historical thinking skills (process).

History Labs Glossary

Analysis – Close examination of the parts of something in order to identify the relationships between those parts or between each part and the whole.

Focus Questions – Teacher-generated topical questions to address the overarching question.

History Lab – A set of inquiry-based learning experiences that address an indicator within the history curriculum

Indicator – Statement that describes what students will know and be able to do over an extended period of time.

Objective – Statement that describes what students will know and be able to do during a discrete period of time, generally a class period.

Overarching Question – The question that guides the History Lab and addresses the indicator on which it is based.

Source Work Terms

Text – What is visible/readable – What information is provided by the source?

Context – What was going on during the time period? What background information do you have that helps explain the information found in the source?

Subtext – What is between the lines? Must ask questions about:

- Author - Who created the source and what do we know about that person?
- Audience - For whom was the source created?
- Reason - Why was this source produced at the time?
- Style - How does the author use language and rhetorical devices to convey meaning?