

### Students of history should understand...

**History:** History is an interpretative account of the past supported by evidence that survives. History is not simply an account of “what happened”; the past cannot be known except through a disciplined process of problem solving.

**The Past:** The object of historical study is the past. Recognizing the “pastness of the past” directs historians to understand people of the past by contextualizing their actions: what they were trying to accomplish, the nature of their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge, the culturally and historically situated assumptions that guided thought and action.

**Historical Evidence:** Historians use primary and secondary sources to make sense of the past. History students should know that primary and secondary sources come in diverse forms, represent diverse perspectives, and have distinct strengths and limitations as evidence about the past.

**Complex Causality:** Historians are intensely interested in the how and why of historical events. Historical accounts are multiple and layered, avoiding monocausal explanations and reductionist thinking.

**Significance:** Significance is the indefinite standard by which historians determine what questions are worth asking; what parts of the past are worth teaching, learning, and remembering; and which pieces of the extant past properly belong in a meaningful, coherent account.

### Students of history should be able to...

**Evaluate Historical Accounts:** Recognize historical explanations in their most common forms: narrative, exposition, causal model, and analogy; identify an author's interpretation and critically scrutinize the evidence and analysis used to support it; and critically evaluate, compare, and synthesize historical accounts.

**Interpret Primary Sources:** Distinguish primary from secondary sources; assess the credibility of sources and make judgments about their usefulness and limitations as evidence about the past; consider how the historical context in which information was originally created, accessed, and distributed affects its message; and address questions of genre, content, audience, perspective, and purpose to generate subtexts that illuminate the intentions of the author.

**Apply chronological reasoning:** Take account of the role of time, sequencing, and periodization in historical narratives. Contextualize: Place an event, actor, or primary source within the context of its time in order to interpret its meaning and significance.

**Construct a historical argument using primary sources:** Construct acceptable historical accounts that interpret the past using primary sources as evidence for knowledge claims in ways that demonstrate understanding of historical concepts, especially the nature of historical evidence, interpretation, and perspective.



# MEASURING COLLEGE LEARNING --- --- IN HISTORY

By Lendol Calder and Tracy Steffes

**SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL**

Measuring College Learning Project

May 2016



SSRC