History Framework Brainstorm: How Historians Work

The framework will facilitate the process of being a historian by allowing students to organize their research in an expert model or through an expert’s process. Historians: examining and explaining the past.

- Choose an important question/subject; formulate their research question determined:
  - By personal values
  - By concerns of those who support the historian’s work
  - By the nature of the time in which the historian lives
  - Or a combination of these things
- Choose an approach: personal, social, economic, political, etc. of their subject
- Further questions:
  - Does the evidence for subject exist?
  - Where can it be found?
- Determine that records do exist and can be located and used.
- Biases come into play as they pick and choose among resources.
- Review primary and secondary documents to formulate the narrative/research paper/tertiary evidence.
- Check reliability of evidence using tests of corroboration and consistency.
  - Triangulation
  - Always involves checking one source against another
  - Consider additional sources that help you decide which report is accurate
  - There is no one true source of history event
- Interpret and organize evidence to make meaning of it all
  - Arrange material so that it supports a particular conclusion (in the historian’s mind as a hypothesis, or as a result of his investigation)
  - Once satisfied that the evidence supports a conclusion, must present it convincingly and clearly
  - Historian must include any evidence to the contrary
  - Look to other methods for analysis from other fields (psychology, anthropology)
  - Statistical analysis that explore ratios, percentages, averages, etc.
- “most historians do not use computers to generate new data, but to gain easier access to existing sources of historical information.
- Remember that primary sources are not all entered and digitized, something to consider
- Philosophy of history during the time has major baring on what historian writes

Sources
- Library research
- Primary documents
- Secondary documents
- Oral history
- Eyewitness accounts
- Journals
- All periodicals

Primary Sources
- What
  - Nonverbal artifacts (coins, etc.)
  - Oral histories
  - Records
  - Maps
  - Art
  - Diaries, journals, letters
  - Propaganda
How

- Read in the light of the age it was created: contemporary context
- Fourfold technique
  - Bring a knowledge of the period and tentative hypothesis or at least expectation on the significance
  - Read the text carefully from beginning to end until a pattern of meaning and significance appears
  - Compare your original hypothesis with the pattern of significance that has arisen from your close reading of the text (test for validity)
  - Use general pattern of meaning that you have established as the key to interpreting every detail in the source.
- There are common patterns that historians find in different primary sources: formal treatises
  - Means vs. ends
  - Unresolved inner conflicts
  - Underlying assumptions
  - Implications of rhetoric
  - Doctrine as psychological biography
  - Doctrine of intellectual biography
- Pg 60-90: how to read the different types of primary sources