

SCALE – TIMELINES AND PERIODIZATION

Preparation

- Download “Dmitri Mendeleev”
- Download “Marie Curie”
- Have a class timeline available (see note)

Note: This is the second activity in which students work on the class timeline. (The first is Scale—Changing Views Timeline, in Lesson 2.1.) You will need the timeline on hand to complete the following activity. If you skipped that activity, a sample timeline is included in the teacher version of the worksheet for Lesson 2.1 Scale—Changing Views Timeline.

As before, you will need to decide whether to complete this activity on paper or online, using an online app Chronozoom (www.chronozoom.com). If you decide to use paper, try to get a long roll of butcher paper. Although you shouldn’t worry too much if students make mistakes, you will want to make the paper run the length of a wall so that it can be added to over the year. If you prefer to work online, Chronozoom and other similar apps are free tools that will allow you to work with the class as a group and save the work online.

Purpose

This activity revisits timelines as analytical tools, with a specific focus on periodization. Students will add two more scientists to the class timeline, which will help them think about how the time period you choose to analyze influences the perspective you might take on a specific historical event or process.

Process

Students are going to add two scientists to the timeline they created in Lesson 2.1. Explain that they will use the same method they used earlier when looking at our understanding of the Earth, the Solar System, and the Universe.

Ask students to do the following:

1. Read the articles on Mendeleev and Curie.
2. Add to their timeline from Lesson 2.1, and include the following information about each of the scientists:
 - Birth and death dates of the scientists
 - The major contributions they made
 - Who and what influenced their thinking
3. Ask students to look at their timeline and note how some scientists appear to be clustered on it. Ask them to do the following:
 - Break these clusters of scientists into at least three distinct time periods.
 - Come up with a name for each time period. The name has to be representative of something about that cluster of people. In other words, each time period should have a theme.

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Have students share how they decided to chunk the scientists and come up with their themes. Then, tell them that this process of breaking up their timeline into new time periods is called periodization. Periodization is the dividing of history into distinct and identifiable periods. Some examples are geologic periods, such as the Jurassic and Cambrian eras; cultural time periods, such as Gothic and Baroque periods; and geographic categories, such as the dynasties in China.

Historians periodize all the time, because it helps them organize and represent the past in different ways. They might focus on particular topics or interests, or periodize in a way that highlights and supports a specific historical argument. Historians also periodize to de-emphasize some historical information. Imagine if your timeline had only men – or only women. You'd be missing part of the story! As we know, when we zoom in and out on history, or look at the same thing from close up versus far away, our understanding of that thing can change pretty dramatically. Periodization uses different time scales to help us frame the past in different ways.

Have students look at the timeline again, this time comparing the views of the scientists they just added to those that were already on the timeline. Then, have them get into groups to answer the following questions.

1. After adding Curie and Mendeleev to the timeline and comparing their views to the previous scientists, does it make sense for them to be on one timeline, or should there be two?

Sample answer: There is a case for both. If we think of this as two timelines, we see that one group focuses on things that are really, really big in the Universe, while the other focuses on things that are really, really small. However, if we look at this as one timeline, the story is more about science, tools, and who is making the contributions (more women).

2. What are other examples of periodization where we focus on shorter or longer periods of time in history?

Sample answer: A history of the United States might start with the indigenous peoples of North America or the landing of the pilgrims. Each perspective puts a very different emphasis on the story.

3. What things should you consider when establishing the period of time you are analyzing?

Sample answer: You should think about the events, people, and ideas that are important to the analysis you are trying to do. Second, you should be aware of the people and places that are excluded when you are creating your timeline.

Once students have had time to respond to the questions in groups, use the sample answers above as talking points for a full class discussion.

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Preparation

- Download “Dmitri Mendeleev”
- Download “Marie Curie”

Purpose

This activity revisits timelines as analytical tools, with a specific focus on what historians call *periodization*. You will add two more scientists to the class timeline, which will help you think about how the time period you choose to analyze influences the perspective you might take on a specific historical event or process.

Process

You are going to add two scientists to the timeline you created in Lesson 2.1. You will use the same method you used when looking at our understanding of the Earth, the Solar System, and the Universe.

Do the following:

1. Read the articles on Mendeleev and Curie.
2. Add to your timeline from Lesson 2.1, and include the following information about each of the scientists:
 - Birth and death dates of the scientists
 - The major contributions they made
 - Who and what influenced their thinking
3. Look at your timeline and note how some scientists appear to be clustered on it. Now, do the following:
 - Break these clusters of scientists into at least three distinct time periods.
 - Come up with a name for each time period. The name has to be representative of something about that cluster of people. In other words, each time period should have a theme.

Be prepared to share your method for breaking up and naming your time periods. This process of dividing your timeline into new time periods is called periodization. Periodization is the dividing of history into distinct and identifiable periods. Some examples are geologic periods, such as the Jurassic and Cambrian eras; cultural time periods, such as Gothic and Baroque periods; and geographic categories, such as the dynasties in China.

Historians periodize all the time, because it helps them organize and represent the past in different ways. They might focus on particular topics or interests, or periodize in a way that highlights and supports a specific historical argument. Historians also periodize to de-emphasize some historical information. Imagine if your timeline had only men – or only women. You’d be missing part of the story! As we know, when we zoom in and out on history, or look at the same thing from close up versus far away, our understanding of that thing can change pretty dramatically. Periodization uses different time scales to help us frame the past in different ways.

Look at the timeline again, this time comparing the views of the scientists you just added to those that were already on the timeline. Then, answer the following questions.

1. After adding Curie and Mendeleev to the timeline and comparing their views to the previous scientists, does it make sense for them to be on one timeline, or should there be two?
2. What are other examples of periodization where we focus on shorter or longer periods of time in history?
3. What things should you consider when establishing the period of time you are analyzing?