

# LITTLE BIG HISTORY KICKOFF

## Purpose

In this activity, you'll introduce your students to the Little Big History project (LBH), which is the culminating project for the course. It's a good idea to get your students started on this as soon as possible so they have time to work on elements of the project throughout the rest of the course.

Your students will be using a Big History approach to examine a single object about which they'll create a Little Big History. This is an opportunity for them to practice what they've learned throughout the course. Remind them of the "Little Big History of Silver" from Unit 3.

Note: This is a great time to think about showing one of the History Channel (H2) Big History videos, since these are great examples of Little Big Histories. You'll watch *Below Zero* and *Horses* in later LBH activities, so if you do decide to have your class watch a video, choose one of these instead (access the videos from Lesson 6.1 on the Big History course website):

- *Superpower of Salt*
- *Defeating Gravity*
- *Megastructures*
- *Pocket Time Machine*
- *H2O*

## Practices

### ***Reading, writing, claim testing, interdisciplinarity, scale, causation***

The Little Big History Project is a culminating activity that engages ALL of the BHP practices. Obviously, students will read and write, and as part of this, they will be constantly testing claims. They are going to use multiple disciplines, over large scales of time and space, to explain the process of how something came to be today. That process will undoubtedly include elements of cause and effect. Challenge your students to find all the places their BHP practices are used as they start to develop their LBHs.

## Process

Exactly what is a Little Big History? We define an LBH as meeting these three criteria:

- It captures change over time and includes at least three thresholds of increasing complexity.
- Unlike many histories, the chronological account must refer to at least one time period, event, or piece of evidence dating from before the evolution of humans.
- Since Big History uses many approaches to knowledge, such as geology, cosmology, biology, and chemistry, an LBH should include at least two approaches to knowledge.

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Your students will work on teams to investigate one of the following:

- an object or a commodity (anything that is bought and sold)
- a process or technical innovation
- a social construct or institution
- an activity

Assign your students into groups of three or four (or let them choose their own groups). These student teams will be working together a lot, so it's important to think carefully about how you group them.

Before students decide on their LBH topic in a group brainstorm, have them evaluate some ideas as a whole class so that they'll feel confident they understand what types of things are suitable for an LBH, but also so that you can work with them on appropriate scope.

Before students begin brainstorming, it's important that they understand the process. Choosing a topic may seem like one of the most daunting parts of the LBH project — but it's also the most fun. This is an opportunity to pick something they're interested in, learn about it, and then share what they've learned with their classmates. Encourage your students to think about their favorite products, possessions, or activities. If they like playing baseball, they might consider focusing on a baseball as their topic. If they enjoy cooking, they might think about choosing a particular spice to research. It's probably easier to choose an item that's tangible rather than an idea or concept. For example, coffee is easier to trace back through the thresholds than a concept like war, which might be overwhelming because of the possibilities.

Before they decide that something is a good object to investigate, have students ask themselves some questions about the topic. Let's say they're interested in sports and would like to investigate something related to that interest.

Here are some possible questions for critique:

1. Is my LBH idea too big or too small? (Sports is a very big topic—probably too big.)
2. How could I narrow or expand the idea? (Narrow it down to one sport; or a tool for a sport, such as a baseball bat; or think about gaming in general.)
3. Am I really truly interested in this topic? Do I really want to study it for the rest of the school year?

Ask students to add to this list of evaluative questions and nominate some possibilities for an LBH.

Once the class feels confident that they know how to distinguish a good topic from a bad one, have them get in their groups. Give them 5 minutes to settle on two objects or commodities that they think they want to investigate further. List these topics somewhere in the room so students see them on a regular basis as a reminder of the Little Big History project.

# LITTLE BIG HISTORY KICKOFF

## Purpose

This is the official kick-off for your Little Big History project (LBH for short), which is the culminating project in this course. It will give you the opportunity to use all the skills and knowledge you've gained so far. For this project, you'll use a Big History approach to examine a single object and create an LBH.

## Practices

### *Reading, writing, claim testing, interdisciplinarity, scale, causation*

The Little Big History Project is a culminating activity that engages ALL of the BHP practices. Obviously, you'll be reading and writing, and as part of that, constantly testing claims. You are being asked to use at least two disciplines, over large scales of time and space, to explain the process of how something came to be today. That process will undoubtedly include elements of cause and effect. Can you find all the places your BHP practices are used as you put together your Little Big History Project?

## Process

Remember reading the "Little Big History of Silver" in Unit 3? Now it's your turn to create your own.

What is a Little Big History? We define an LBH as meeting these three criteria:

- It captures change over time and includes at least three thresholds of increasing complexity.
- Unlike many histories, your chronological account must refer to at least one time period, event, or piece of evidence dating from before the evolution of humans.
- Since Big History uses many approaches to knowledge, such as geology, cosmology, biology, and chemistry, your Little Big History should include at least two approaches to knowledge.

You'll work on a team to investigate one of the following:

- an object or a commodity (that is, anything that is bought and sold)
- a process or technical innovation
- a social construct or institution
- an activity

Basically, just about anything that interests you and that you can research.

Your teacher will guide you through a series of steps to help you produce a group collaborative paper, an individual paper, and a group presentation of your LBH.

Your teacher will put you into groups of three or four people. You'll be working with the other students in your group a lot for the remainder of the school year. Before you get into your groups to brainstorm the subject of your LBH, you'll spend some time brainstorming as a class so that you feel confident that you recognize a good topic versus from a bad one.

Sometimes it's hard to pick a topic, but remember, you don't have to make the final decision right now! Choosing a topic may seem like one of the most daunting parts of the Little Big History project — but it's also the most fun. This is your opportunity to pick something you're interested in, learn about it, and then share what you've learned with your classmates. Think about your favorite products, possessions, or activities. If you like playing baseball, you might consider focusing on a baseball as your topic. If you enjoy cooking, you might think about choosing a particular spice to research. It's a good idea to choose an item that is tangible rather than an idea or concept. For example, coffee is easier to trace back through the thresholds than a concept like war, which could take you in so many directions you might be overwhelmed by the possibilities.