

SCALE - PERIODIZING BIG HISTORY

Purpose

As part of the timeline activities that they completed in previous lessons, students learned about the idea of periodizing history. In this activity, they'll think about how they would periodize the past and how periodizing something—in this case, the Big History timeline—reframes it. Looking at periodization from multiple angles helps students become more critical consumers of the historical accounts they encounter.

Practices

Scale

Periodization and scale are closely tied. When we periodize history, we put boundaries around the time scale we're using to look at a historical event or process. Remind students of these connections during class discussion.

Process

Have student look at the Big History timeline and remind them that David Christian periodized it using thresholds of increasing complexity. By periodizing it this way, Christian emphasized a particular concept, that with each threshold, the world changed dramatically and there was no turning back. However, are there other ways to periodize the history of the Universe to highlight a different theme or send a different message?

Divide your class into small groups and ask them to brainstorm a different way to periodize the history of the world. Have them quickly answer the following three questions, and then share their ideas with the class:

1. In addition to thresholds of increasing complexity, how might you periodize the history of the Universe?
2. How many periods are there when you do it this other way?
3. What message or theme was your group trying to convey by periodizing in the way that they chose?

Give students about 5 to 10 minutes to figure this out, and then have them share their thinking with the class. After groups have had a chance to share, pose the following question: It's possible for multiple people to give historical accounts of the same events and for you to get a very different story based on how each person periodized that account. How does periodization help us when looking at the past? How might it cause problems when thinking about the past? Periodization can help us organize information, get a better grasp on what happened in a period of time, and make sense of large amounts of information. However, it can also sway our thinking about how history unfolded and can prevent us from seeing or understanding events that don't fit into the theme of that periodization.

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As part of the timeline activities that you completed in previous lessons, you learned about the idea of periodizing history. In this activity, you'll think about how you would periodize the past, and you'll think about how periodizing something—in this case, the Big History timeline—reframes that thing. Looking at periodization from multiple angles helps you become a more critical consumer of the historical accounts you encounter.

Practices

Scale

Periodization and scale are closely tied. When we periodize history, we put boundaries around the time scale we're using to look at a historical event or process. Think about these connections during your class discussion.

Process

Look at the Big History timeline. Remember, this timeline was periodized by thresholds of increasing complexity. By periodizing this way, David Christian emphasizes a particular concept: the world changed dramatically with every new threshold and there was no turning back. Do you think the history of the Universe could be periodized in other ways to highlight a different theme or send a different kind of message?

In this activity, you're going to get into small groups and brainstorm a different way to periodize the history of the world. Quickly answer the following three questions, and then be prepared to share your ideas with the class:

1. In addition to thresholds of increasing complexity, how might you periodize the history of the Universe?
2. How many periods are there when you do it this other way?
3. What message or theme was your group trying to convey by periodizing in the way that they chose?

After everyone has shared how they periodized the history of the Universe, think about the following question: Multiple people might give historical accounts of the same events, and for you to get a very different story based on how each person periodized that account. How does periodization help you when looking at the past? How might it cause problems when thinking about the past?

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Name:

Date:

Directions: In this activity, you're going to get into small groups and brainstorm a different way to periodize the history of the world. Quickly answer the following three questions, and then be prepared to share your ideas with the class:

1. In addition to thresholds of increasing complexity, how might you periodize the history of the Universe?

2. How many periods are there when you do it this other way?

3. What message or theme was your group trying to convey by periodizing in the way you chose?