



SCALE – PERIODIZING HUMAN HISTORY

Purpose

In this activity, students will use a similar process to the one they used in the opening activity of this lesson, but this time they'll try to periodize human history. Not only will this get them thinking about the richness of human history, but also the different ways in which they might tell stories about human history. This reinforces the idea that periodization is really an analytical tool in history, one that can help people understand and explain events of the past.

Process

Remind students that in the opening activity of this lesson, they re-periodized Big History. In this lesson, they're going to take on a similar task, but this time they'll periodize human history. Human history has been periodized in many different ways, but they are going to come up with a fresh perspective. For example, some people might look at human history as a history of wars. Others might look at it in terms of human migrations and demography, while others might think about the structure of governments over time. The list is endless.

Your students' job is to periodize human history based on a particular theme. After they've done that, they're going to tell a story and draw some conclusions based on that theme. Put your students into groups (these can be the same groups as before or new groups) and ask them to think about history and what they really want to know about it. Are they interested in the history of food? The history of religion? Or the history of farming? Once they've settled on a theme, they need to look at the Big History timeline and break up the major events in history according to their theme.

Then, they should add these events to a new timeline and answer the following questions:

1. What are the major turning points in your timeline?
2. What story are you trying to tell by using this framing to explain human history?
3. What was the hardest part of periodizing according to a specific theme?
4. Do you think your timeline is missing any important events in human history? Can your theme reasonably convey what happened over time?

Once students are done with their timelines, have each group give a very short explanation of how they periodized. As each group presents, hang their finished timeline up where everyone can see it. Keep doing this, so that they are lined up vertically (one timeline on top of another). Once everyone is done and you can look at the timelines all together, ask the students how this changes their perceptions of human history. Is each timeline, although themed differently, telling basically the same story? Do the stories complement one another, making the past a richer story? Do any of the timelines appear to contradict one another?



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Process

In the opening activity of this lesson, you re-periodized Big History. In this lesson, you're going to take on a similar task, but this time you're going to periodize human history. Human history has been periodized in many different ways, but you are going to come up with a fresh perspective. For example, some people might look at human history as a history of wars. Others might look at it in terms of human migrations and demography, while others might think about the structure of governments over time. The list is endless.

Your job is to periodize human history based on a particular theme. After you've done that, you're going to tell a story and draw some conclusions based on that theme. Your teacher will put you into groups and ask you to think about history and what you really want to know about it. Are you interested in the history of food? The history of religion? Or the history of farming? Once you've settled on a theme, look at the Big History timeline and break up major events in history according to your theme.

Then, add these major events to a new timeline and answer the following questions:

1. What are the major turning points in your timeline?
2. What story are you trying to tell by using this framing to explain human history?
3. What was the hardest part of periodizing according to a specific theme?
4. Do you think your timeline is missing any important events in human history? Can your theme reasonably convey what happened over time?

Once you're done with your timeline, be prepared to give the class a short explanation of how you went about periodizing. Does looking at the timelines all together change your perception of human history? Is each timeline, although themed differently, telling basically the same story? Do the stories complement one another, making the past a richer story? Do any of the timelines appear to contradict one another?

