



History in primary school

Primary teachers bring a variety of personal opinion and understanding to the teaching of history. History has always been contested by a range of views and perspectives as illustrated in these examples.

What is history?

History is merely gossip. Oscar Wilde

A lot of history is just dirty politics cleaned up for the consumption of children and other innocents. Richard Reeves

History is the present. That's why every generation writes it anew. But what most people think of as history is its end product, myth. E. L. Doctorow

Or is history?

A necessity. Individuals, communities, societies could scarcely exist if all knowledge of the past was wiped out. As memory is to the individual, so history is to the community or society. Without memory, individuals find great difficulty in relating to others, in finding their bearings, in taking intelligent decisions – they have their sense of identity. Marwick 1989 in *History Stages 4–5 syllabus*, NSW Board of Studies.

Macquarie Essential Dictionary defines history as: *the branch of knowledge dealing with past events. It is the record of past events and what they mean to us and how we interpret them. It is also a continuous, systematic written narrative, in order of time, of past events as relating to a particular people, country, period, person etc.* Some would consider that oral histories are also a record of history. The discussion is ongoing.

History is everywhere. Learning about history could overwhelm the school curriculum. It is necessary to define and limit the scope of history teaching in both primary and secondary schooling.

What history is outlined in the HSIE K–6 syllabus?

The *HSIE K–6 syllabus* defines the scope of history to be taught in primary school. Each stage can be summarised as follows:

The concept of personal and family heritage which is important to both us and others, is outlined in Stage 1. Heritage occurs as change over time and influences what we think and feel about ourselves, our family and our community.

Stage 2 has a large and significant history component. History in Stage 2 includes the shared history of Aboriginal people as a result of the discovery and British colonisation of Australia. The journey of the

First Fleet and early days of settlement around the Sydney area and the Aboriginal resistance and reaction to colonisation form the basis of teaching and learning. Information about the changes that have occurred in local areas as a result of settlement are identified and explained.

In Stage 3, students learn about the different influences on the development of Australian identities and heritage. The history is largely about the development and application of democracy in Australia. The history of the people, places and events of historical significance leading up to and including Federation are addressed.

History is implicit in all areas of HSIE.

Q. Can I teach about ancient history such as ancient Egypt or Vikings etc, in primary school?

A. No. There is no ancient history in the *HSIE K–6 syllabus*. *Societies and civilisations of the past* is one of the mandatory topics covered in Stage 4 History, for Years 7 and 8 (*History Years 7–10 syllabus*, 2003). The K–10 HSIE syllabuses have been written as sequential learning. The teaching of ancient civilisations in primary schools is not appropriate.

Teaching about ancient civilisations in primary school also contributes to overcrowding the primary curriculum or could deny student's their curriculum entitlement if it replaces other content requirements.

Q. I teach a gifted and talented class, my students need to be accelerated. Shouldn't they do some of the Stage 4 topics such as ancient civilisations?

A. If a class or group of students is accelerated into the next Stage, then it is appropriate that they do the content of the next Stage. However, for individual students who will remain with their Stage cohort it is better to provide enrichment activities as their study of material from the next Stage will cause additional work and unnecessary complications for the next stage teacher. Gifted and talented students in HSIE should be given deeper and more complex tasks on the subject matter of their stage of learning. Where there is the intention to accelerate a particular student into another Stage in all subjects this student should have access to the content of the next Stage.

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