

Context

Definition: The circumstances that form the setting for an event. This could, for example, include the type of society (e.g. urban) or the common ideas (e.g. Darwinism) that are relevant to your event.

Key Questions:

- How did the historical or social context of your event bring it about or affect its impact?
- How does understanding the values held at the time affect how we should evaluate your event?
- Did most people at the time hold those values?

Example: The growing acceptance of Enlightenment ideals, such as natural rights, during the 18th century helps us understand the call for revolution by the Americans in response to British actions.

Causation

Definition of Causation: The process whereby something changes or occurs through action.

Key Questions:

- To what extent was the outcome of your event dependent on a particular person, sequence of events or movement?
- Or, rather, if the conditions or variables remained more or less the same was your event bound to happen anyway?
- What does your event reveal about how to bring about change?

Example: Some argue that it was inevitable that slavery was going to end in the United States with or without a civil war.

Impact

Definition: An effect, influence or change brought about by an action

Key Questions:

- What were the social, economic or political consequences of your selected event?
- Were the consequences intended? Were there unintended consequences?
- Were they positive or negative?
- Why did your event succeed or fail to effect change?
- How does your event illustrate how change does or does not happen?
- Were there other factors involved?
- Can the impact still be felt today?

Example: The invention of the cotton gin led to a greater demand for slavery.

Reflection of Values

Definition of Values: principles or standards of behavior; a judgment of what is important in life

Key Questions:

- To what extent does your event embody an American value?
- Does your event embody the ideals stated in the Declaration of Independence?
- Are there American values shared by all?

Example: Abolishing slavery moved America closer to fulfilling our value of political equality as stated in the Declaration of Independence when Jefferson wrote that “all men are created equal.”

Perspective

Definition: a point of view (often developed from life experiences); a particular attitude toward or way of regarding something

Key Questions:

- How can other perspectives help us to better understand your event?
- What, for example, can a focus on economic, psychological, gender, or environmental factors add to our understanding of your event?

Example: Different perspectives affect the focus and interpretation of history. A feminist may focus on the US Constitution's failure to provide for gender equality while a Marxist may see it as a product of the founding fathers' own economic interests rather than Enlightenment ideals.

Memory

Definition: something remembered from the past; a recollection

Key Questions:

- How does bias affect our memory of the event?
- How has our interpretation of your event changed over time? Why?
- How does our national or textbook memory of your event compare to your research?
- How does it serve the nation today to remember your event?
- How should we remember your event?

Example: How the Antebellum South (the South before the Civil War) is remembered often depends on one's race or region. Should we remember the Antebellum South with nostalgia for its small-town southern values or should the memory be dominated by slavery?

Lessons Learned

Definition: an occurrence or example that serves or should serve to warn or encourage

Key Questions:

- Did our society learn anything from your selected event?
- How can we know that we learned from an event?
- Has enough time passed to know if we learned from the event?
- What should we learn from your event?
- Do we learn from events?

Example: Many historians argue that the failed appeasement of Hitler leading up to WWII has led US leaders to take stronger stances against hostile powers, such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq, in order to avoid a larger conflict.