

# New, Novice or Nervous?



## The *quick* guide to the 'no-quick-fix'

This page is the starting point for all who are **new** to the published writings of history teachers. Every problem you wrestle with, other history teachers have wrestled with too. Quick fixes don't exist. But if you discover others' writing, you'll soon find – and want to join – something better: an international conversation in which *others* have explored, debated and tackled *your* problems.

*This edition's NNN problem is:*

## Getting pupils to see change over time

You want Year 8 to think about a big chunk of time as a whole, let's say the whole nineteenth century. You've tackled the topics – Great Reform Act to Great Exhibition; industry to India - but it's all falling apart in their heads. Isolated stories are drifting off into a void of forgetfulness. How do you get them to join it all up, remember it, use it and *want* to use it?

Focusing on 'change and continuity' seems like a solution, but it doesn't sound very exciting. You've tried to get them to comment on 'change', but what they produce is superficial, dull or just plain wrong.

How can you get them seeing a period *as a unity*? How can you get them *interested*? How can you make the earlier topics *come alive* in new ways?

### How could others' work help?

Sometimes new teachers see words such as 'change' or 'continuity' and start to dream up abstract tasks that go nowhere. Pupils feel obliged to plonk in the words 'change' and 'continuity'. They stop *thinking* about the *content*. Such teachers forget that words such as 'change' and 'continuity' are just useful tools that help historians think about content in new ways.

Look at your big chunk of time. What connections, contrasts, processes or trends can you see? Do the words 'change' or 'continuity' *help* in describing any of them?

Now design a really interesting *question*, one that forces you to reach a judgement about those connections, contrasts, processes or trends. Find one that makes **you, as teacher**, think hard about *how much* change there was, *what kind* of change it was or *how rapid* it was. Armed with a good question, you can help pupils work towards building their own account. Without a question, there is no puzzle to solve and no account for them to produce. Don't even begin to try to plan your lesson sequence without a carefully worded question.

Now study other teachers' efforts. You will quickly gain confidence.

To see a 'change and continuity' question at work and an engaging approach that made Year 9 *think about the content*, begin with **Foster (2008) TH 131**.

Reflections on change can be structured as narratives. **Gadd (2009) TH 136** realised that her Year 8s enjoy making bigger stories out of smaller ones. Gadd made narrative into a fascinating puzzle about 19th century Britain and India. Her article is full of creative ways in which her pupils structured big narratives linking up British and Indian events. Underlying this was Gadd's concern to give pupils confidence with chronology and knowledge.

Now take a look at how teachers use questions starting with 'When...?' Cecilia Axelsson, had a huge challenge – how to give immigrant teenagers from various backgrounds a sense of the 19th and 20th centuries in their new country, *quickly*. See **Axelsson, Cunning Plan (2012) TH 149**. What 'when...?' questions would help

*your* students to argue about change and continuity across the chunk of time you're tackling?

Axelsson was starting from scratch. Wondering how to get pupils to analyse change, she began by reading an account by London teacher, Ben Jarman. Round off your own reading journey with **Jarman (2009) TH 136**.

