

New, Novice or Nervous?



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

This page is for those **new** to the published writings of history teachers. Every problem you wrestle with, other 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:*

Using historical scholarship in the classroom

As another World Book Day goes past, you have been watching the English department wax lyrical about all of the wonderful books that pupils might read. You know that there is a wealth of well-written historical scholarship out there for pupils to dive into, yet you are not sure about how best to get pupils over the initial hurdle and reading scholarship, particularly the older pupils in your school. How can you get pupils reading historical scholarship?

The obvious answer is to start them off by reading scholarship in lessons. Yet how can you justify the time spent on this? How might reading scholarship enhance your existing curriculum? And what approaches might you use to achieve this?

How could others' work help?

From Key Stage 3 through to A-Level, pupils need to learn that the past has been interpreted in different ways, and to understand the different responses that have been given over time to complex historical questions. Start with **Foster (2011) TH142**. Note how she gets Year 9 pupils examining the way in which two historians – Goldhagen and Browning – use the *same* piece of source material to construct quite different interpretations. Foster uses this controversy to get pupils from across the ability range reading substantial extracts from the scholarship.

Of course it is not just that historians form different interpretations – they bounce off one another in doing so. Take a look at **Richards (2012) TH148** who got her A-Level pupils examining the similarities and differences between how historians have interpreted the relationship between Elizabeth I and parliament. A similar approach is taken by **Laffin (2013) TH149** who wanted her pupils to avoid 'pigeon-holing' historians in simple categories such as 'revisionist'.

In these examples scholarship is being used as a way in to studying historical interpretations, particularly in helping pupils see that one reads history not just for content, but for how that content is being shaped into an argument.

It's not just the arguments that historians have, however, which entices us to read their scholarship: it's also the way they guide us through the human complexity of the past. Both **Bellinger (2008) TH132** and **Black (2012) TH146** were inspired by Orlando Figes' book *The Whispers* and used this to introduce pupils to the wide range of experiences had by those who lived in Stalin's USSR.

Remember too what it is that we want pupils to be aiming towards. By taking the written scholarship of historians, we can model for pupils what good historical style looks like. For an example of how this might work, have a look at **Ward (2006) TH124**. Note how she uses the language of Eamon Duffy to get pupils thinking about how they might develop their own writing. It is worth considering, too, how Ward distinguishes between

reading for content, reading for argument and reading for style.

Finally, take a look at the articles in this edition **Burn and Holliss (2014) TH154** both of whom use historical scholarship to help develop more sophisticated generalisations about the past. There is, particularly in the article by Burn, an interesting relationship between the way we read scholarship as history teachers and how we use this scholarship in the classroom.

