

# 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:*

### What *is* analysis of historical significance?

Historical significance first appeared in England's National Curriculum for history in 1995. It entered the assessment framework (Level Descriptions) in 2008. In 2014, it became part of the History NC 'Aims'. One thing never changes, however: it is hard.

But history teachers have written a great deal about historical significance – rationales for teaching it, its relationship with other types of historical analysis and ways of getting pupils to explore it in practice. Here is a quick guide to starting points in *Teaching History*:

#### What do you do?

Despite having been on the NC since 1995, historical significance was so little discussed at the start of the century that **Phillips (2002) TH107** called it 'the forgotten Key Element'. He developed an acronym 'G.R.E.A.T.' to support pupils in thinking about why events are historically significant. **Counsell (2004) TH114** challenged the 'are' in that sentence. She argued that historical significance is ascribed rather than being a property of the thing itself, that it is much more than just 'consequences' (or why have it as a separate idea?) and that it certainly shouldn't be reduced to 'relevant to today'. Using 5 'Rs' to illustrate the possibilities, she argued that pupils need to consider why events or people are often judged significant and how and why these judgments shift across time and space, rather than simply being asked to argue for the historical significance of something. Drawing on these articles and his own classroom practice, **Bradshaw (2006) TH 125** later built a framework for progression in work on historical significance. Some teachers, such

as **Osowiecki (2004) TH 117**, **Osowiecki (2005) TH 118** have built practical sequences around the 5 'Rs'. Other history teachers, such as **Brown & Woodcock (2009) TH 134** have linked historical significance to work on local history. **Allsop (2009) TH 137** explored it through popular music.

During the brief period in which there was a serious effort to secure proper progression from such Key Stage 3 work, **Hall (2008) TH 131** discussed what appropriately demanding work on historical significance could look like for Years 10 and 11. This GCSE course didn't last, but it would be worthy of study should opportunity to create stronger follow-on from the best Key Stage 3 work ever re-emerge.

Meanwhile, some authors have researched students' ideas about significance. **Conway (2006) 125** considered children's preconceptions and **Cercadillo (2006) TH 125** compared English children's ideas on historical significance with those of Spanish children.

But to probe the issue further, try looking beyond the words 'historical significance' in a title. One might argue that the implications for getting pupils to think about historical significance are huge in pieces as diverse as, say, **Rogers (2008) TH 133**, **Llewellyn & Snelson (2009) TH 135** and **Salmons (2010) TH141**, or, indeed, in any article at all about 'Interpretations', with which historical significance has strong connection.

