

Chapter Summary

What Does a Historian Do?

Lesson 1 *What Is History?*

- A historian's job is to examine the causes and effects of events from the past.
- Learning about the past helps us understand and make decisions about the future.
- We measure time in groups of years: a decade is 10 years, and a century is 100 years. An era is a period of years grouped by similar characteristics from the time period.
- A variety of calendars have been invented to organize the days of the year. The calendar in use today is the Gregorian calendar, which started counting years with the birth of Jesus.
- In the Gregorian calendar, the years before the birth of Jesus are known as B.C., or "before Christ." The years after are called A.D., or anno domini. This phrase comes from the Latin language and means "in the year of our Lord."
- A time line helps us put historical events in time order.
- Scientists such as archaeologists, paleontologists, and anthropologists study different evidence about the events of long ago.
- A paleontologist discovered the remains of a very early human, called Lucy.

Lesson 2 *How Does a Historian Work?*

- Historians look for evidence to show proof of the things that happened long ago.
- Primary sources are firsthand pieces of evidence created by someone who saw or experienced an event. Secondary sources are created after an event. They are created by people who were not part of the historical event.
- A bias is an unreasoned, emotional judgment about people and events. Some written sources are created from a particular point of view and contain biased information.
- Historians use primary and secondary sources to understand the events of the past. They draw conclusions and make inferences about the facts in the documents.

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- Historians become experts in their field and may specialize in a very narrow field of study.
- Historians may differ in their interpretation of historical events. A variety of primary sources may support completely different historical interpretations of a person or event depending on the point of view from which they were written.

Lesson 3 *Researching History*

- Choosing a topic is the first step in researching a history topic. Next is gathering reliable research materials.
- General reference books, including encyclopedias, textbooks, and library books, are usually reliable research materials.
- A statement of fact expresses only what can be proven by evidence. A statement of opinion expresses a judgment or an attitude toward something that cannot be proven true or false. Historical research should rely on facts and primary sources rather than opinions.
- A reliable Internet article will include clear authorship information. Most likely it will be located at a site ending in .edu, .gov, and sometimes .org.
- Plagiarizing another person's ideas is wrong and should be strictly avoided. Putting ideas in your own words, including a reference to the original idea, or adding a footnote are good ways to avoid plagiarism.
- Historians avoid evaluating a historical event using modern ideas. Your evaluation of history should be based on the evidence, not on today's understanding of rights and society.