

Subject Curriculum Intent: History

Definition of Subject

It is Napoleon Bonaparte who is credited with the popularisation of the concept of history as a 'fable agreed upon'. At first glance this may seem a flippant and cynical view of the subject but it contains a fundamental truth about what history is. In history lessons at Teign School we endeavor to uncover history as just that, not one single truth, but as a series of differing stories: of peoples, of genders, and of interpretation.

History provides students with an understanding of how we have got to where we are today. Knowledge of our values, institutions and beliefs, without knowing the process by which we have arrived at them, can only be superficial. How can you understand the importance of a democratic system, and active participation in it, without knowledge of the struggle that went into producing it? How can you understand the imperative to foster a society in which people's differences are tolerated and celebrated without knowledge of what life is like when these freedoms are denied?

History helps us make better sense of the world around us and instilling this in students becomes even more important given Teign School's geographical, cultural and socio-economic position in the world.

Nature of Subject

The study of history can be fairly divided into substantive and disciplinary knowledge. Developing good substantive knowledge is essential to students' abilities as historians. Gaining a good chronological understanding of the broad sweep of history provides the framework from which more detailed depth studies can be 'hung'. Without this, units become divorced of context and therefore weakened as students are unable to see how each unit fits into a bigger story. Also critical is understanding the key concepts within the subject; ideas such as empire, migration or the Church as an institution. Allowing these topics to be built gradually through a spiral curriculum is critical to students' growth as effective historians. The spiral not only means that students apply familiar knowledge to increasingly challenging contexts but also increasingly make links for themselves. Thus, a student joining Teign in Year 7 will encounter the migration of the French to England through the Norman Conquest and later in the year will place this into the wider causes and experience of migration over time. In Year 8, through their study of the Industrial Revolution and Empire, rural to urban migration will be explored and then, as they move on through the school, the way migration underpins slavery, European wars, crime and punishment, right through to Imperial India and the American Dream as they study the subject at A-Level.

Alongside this development of the narrative of history, is a conscious focus on the disciplinary skills that students need to be able to master in order to operate as historians. Introducing students to these ensures that they are able to tackle GCSE and A Level exam papers, but more importantly will equip them with the tools to study any area of history, inside or outside the classroom. The ability to read sources critically, to recognise cause and consequence and to be able to track change and continuity over time are all key aspects of the study of history as a discipline.

The content versus skills debate is ever present in the discussion of history teaching and while it is true to say that these two separate strands exist at Teign, we advocate strongly for a 'skills through content' approach; as the Historical Association argue, the historical concepts are all of great importance but 'none of them can be taught separately from the substance of history'.

Purpose of Subject

The purpose of History is to help us make better sense of the world around us and instilling this in students is only more important when we live and work in a part of the country where there is relatively limited diversity. Teign students almost universally lack the firsthand experience of a multi-ethnic society and are less well travelled than those from more metropolitan areas. It is the job of the history curriculum to broaden that experience and equip students with the confidence to be curious but not surprised when they encounter difference, to ask questions but not to prejudge, to be informed not closed-minded.

It is not just this substantive knowledge and cultural capital that is so important to our students. Growing up as they are in the age of information, young people are increasingly getting their ideas and information about the world from outlets that either offer an echo-chamber of their own outlooks, or expose them to un-curated, raw information that frequently requires filtration to make it digestible. Therefore, the ability to look critically, to question and not accept at face value the narrative with which they are presented becomes ever more important. This then is the purpose of History: it gives us perspective.

Design of Subject

The History curriculum at Teign is designed to provide both large pathways and smaller stepping stones of knowledge and skills to scaffold up through the shift from primary to Key Stage 3, to the demands of the GCSE and on to the challenges and independence offered by Key Stage 5 study. Underpinned by Teign's wider pedagogical principles we have designed a curriculum which:

- Incorporates helpful challenge from the outset, equipping students with a set of core historical skills and themes and then exposing them to increasingly challenging contexts in which to apply this familiar skillset.
- Makes determined use of rigorous explicit instruction delivered via our team of subject expert teachers, allowing flexibility to ensure that teachers are always playing to their own subject knowledge strengths.
- Embeds both knowledge and skills through use of deliberate practice with clear parameters and modelling so what success looks like is made explicit and understood.
- Makes feedback valuable and organic, using it to lead assessment rather than the other way around.
- Cements vocabulary explicitly at the centre of units of work to allow for access, understanding and stretch at all Key Stages.
- Revisits core skills, knowledge, themes and vocabulary regularly through a familiar process of low-stakes retrieval tasks, ensuring these are embedded to the point of mastery.

Extension of Subject

At Teign there is a wide range of opportunities, across the keystages, to extend their experience of history outside the classroom. This is important to gain a feel for the idea that history is not just something that exists in books, but the events, people and places they learn about are real and they can share in that lived experience. A student that has stood at the base of the White Tower and looked up and stood inside the window recesses understands in a way that someone that has simply been taught that the walls are 90 feet high and 15 feet thick will never do. The other aim is to develop students' cultural capital. We have specifically chosen the Tower of London as our site study at GCSE to take them away from Devon and see the capital. We also offer enrichment trips to the Normandy beaches and to the Imperial War museum and HMS Belfast where they stay on board. In 6th form we take students to Exeter University to use their library as a research resource for their coursework assignments and to show them what a tertiary education setting is like to raise their aspirations.