

SCALE - HISTORY OF ME

Purpose

In this activity, students write a history of themselves, and then have the opportunity to reflect upon the scale at which they examined their own history. This helps students understand that their own personal narratives do have things in common with the much larger Big History narrative. It also introduces the concept of both temporal and spatial scale. This creates an opportunity to make it clear why historians will occasionally zoom out (in terms of both time and geography) to create a larger context for understanding a single history.

Practices

Writing

Students are asked to write as part of this activity. This is meant to be fun, informal writing. BHP has a lot of formal writing activities, so this is a nice way for students to write without being bound by the rubric or more formal rules of writing.

Process

Explain to students that they are each going to write their own personal history. It's going to be a really quick activity. It won't be graded, and they shouldn't get stressed out about grammar or spelling. Have them take out a piece of paper and take 4 minutes – yep, 240 seconds – to write the history of their lives.

The directions are purposely open and vague. It's important not to dictate the scale at which students write about their own lives.

After students are done, ask these follow-up questions: By a show of hands, ask students to indicate whether they included:

- their time in high school
- their childhood
- their parents
- their parents' childhoods
- their grandparents
- anything that happened over 100 years ago
- anything that happened over 1,000 years ago

The most probable result of this exercise is that most students will have talked about their childhood and their parents. Grandparents are iffy. One hundred years ago is very rare. Point this out to the students, and then ask these questions:

- How many of you talked about anything that's further away than the state we're currently in?
- How many of you talked about anything that's further away than the country we're currently in?
- What is the most distant place any of you mentioned?

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Pose some of the following questions to your students (along with the talking points):

1. Why did you pick the facts and events that you picked?
2. You only had a few minutes to write your entire history—how did you decide what was important enough to include?

Sample reflection point: This quick thinking is especially interesting because you don't have time to think about it. You have to make snap judgments, and that says something about how you think when you think spontaneously rather than in advance.

3. Is it ever possible for a “history of you” to be complete? What would it mean for the history to be complete? How could you tell? How long do you think it would take you to write it?

Sample reflection point: You actually have to be selective no matter what, because you can't possibly include literally everything.

Discuss the following with your students:

There's a “natural scale” in time and space that people in our society think of when writing a biography or autobiography. For example, in telling their own story, they probably thought that their parents were worth mentioning, and possibly their grandparents, but probably not more distant ancestors. (Many other cultures think differently about this!) They might have included events before their conception and birth, but probably not more than 100 years before, and almost certainly (unless they're already thinking very, very big!) not more than 1,000 or 10,000 years before. Why not? Did events that happened hundreds, or thousands, or millions, or billions of years ago affect their story?

This discussion can bring up things like the fact that the Universe, Earth, and life exist; the geography of the Earth; the form and composition of our bodies and our genetic makeup; the migration of people from one place to another; the fact that everyone currently alive shares the exact same set of ancestors if you go back far enough—probably just a few thousand years, according to recent research—and if any two of that set of ancestors had not had children there would be a completely different set of people alive today.

Now, ask students: If their story started one thousand or even 1 million years ago, how would it be different?

Wrap up by discussing why scale matters. Let students know that they will think about scale, both the time scale and spatial scale, throughout the course. They should use timelines to help them with scale, and they should also use the language of spatial scale when talking about where things happen in history. We will use the terms *personal, local, regional, national, and global*, to help us think and talk about scales of space – there are many other terms, but those are the ones we'll use in this course.

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Purpose

In this activity, you'll write a history of yourself, and then you'll reflect upon the scale at which you examined your own history. This will help show you how your own personal narrative has a lot in common with the much larger Big History narrative. This activity also introduces the concept of both temporal and spatial scale. This will help you understand why historians will occasionally zoom out (in terms of both time and geography) to create a larger context for understanding a single history.

Practices

Writing

You are asked to write as part of this activity. This is meant to be fun, informal writing.

Process

Take 4 minutes to write a "history of you." Do your best, and include whatever you want in your history. Don't worry about spelling and grammar, this is more about the details of your life.

When you're done, your teacher will ask you a series of questions, such as, how many of you wrote about:

- your time in high school?
- your childhood?
- your parents?
- your parents' childhoods?
- your grandparents?
- anything that happened over 100 years ago?
- anything that happened over 1,000 years ago?

You probably wrote about your childhood and your parents. You *might* have written about your grandparents, but you probably *didn't* write about anything more than 100 years ago.

Also, did you write about anything that is further away than the state you're currently in? Did you talk about anything that's further away than the country you're currently in? What is the most distant place you mentioned?

You can't really think about history without first thinking about the scale at which you're examining it, so it's really important. This includes both time scales and spatial scales. In this course, you'll use timelines to help with scale, and you'll also use the language of spatial scale when talking about where things happened in history. The terms *personal*, *local*, *regional*, *national*, and *global* will be used to help us think and talk about scales of space. There are many other terms, but those are the ones we'll use in this course.