

Teacher Introduction

These Common Core History Assessments are designed to help your students develop key literacy and history thinking skills as they learn about early humans. The assessments are intended to be *formative* more than *summative*. That is, they are meant to be part of the instructional process itself, providing you and your students with information at a point when timely adjustments in teaching and learning can be made.

Similar sets of assessments are available (or planned) for each unit in a typical world history class.

★ *Historical Thinking and the Challenge of the Common Core*

This set includes nine assessments aligned with the first nine Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standards. We have left out the tenth Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standard, which does not lend itself to assessments of the sort provided here. The set also includes two writing tasks aligned with two key Common Core History/Social Studies Writing Standards.

These Common Core standards challenge history teachers to develop in students the complex literacy skills they need in today’s world and the ability to master the unique demands of working with historical primary and secondary source texts. The Common Core standards are supportive of the best practices in teaching historical thinking. Such practices include close reading, attending to a source’s point of view and purpose, corroborating sources, and placing sources in their historical context. These are the skills needed to make history less about rote learning and more about an active effort to investigate and interpret the past.

These assessments are also useful in many ways for ELA teachers. They assess many of the skills specified in the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards, which put a good deal of emphasis on the reading of informational texts. The Anchor Standards form the basis for all of the various Common Core standards for English Language Arts.

★ *What Are These Assessments Like?*

- **A group of nine reading skills assessments and two writing tasks for each major era of world history**

Each reading skills assessment is based on one of the key Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standards—Assessment 1 addresses Common Core Reading Standard 1, Assessment 2 addresses Common Core Reading Standard 2, and so on. Two writing tasks are based on the first two College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing, which are the basis for the Common Core History/Social Studies Writing Standards. The two writing standards focus on writing arguments to support claims and writing informative/explanatory texts.

- **Based on primary or secondary sources**

In most cases, one primary source is used. In some cases, an assessment is based on more than one primary source or on a primary and a secondary source. The sources are brief. In most cases, texts have been slightly altered to improve readability, but without changing meaning or tone. Links to online versions of print media are available in the Bibliography. Please note that these links were valid at the time of production, but the websites may have since been discontinued.

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- **Brief tasks promoting historical literacy**

For each assessment, students write brief answers to one or two questions. The questions are not tests of simple factual recall. They assess the students' mastery of the skills addressed by that assessment's Common Core History/Social Studies Standard.

- **Two versions of each of the nine reading standards assessments**

A *basic* and an *advanced* version of each assessment are provided. The *basic* assessment addresses the Common Core Standard for grades 6–8. The *advanced* assessment is based on the Common Core Standard for grades 9–10 and grades 11–12 combined. Each version uses the same source or sources. In some cases, sources have been somewhat shortened for the *basic* version.

- **Easy to use as both learning and assessment tools**

These assessments do not take valuable time away from instruction. The primary sources and background information on each source make them useful mini-lessons as well as tools to assess students' historical thinking skills. The sources all deal with themes and trends normally covered when teaching the relevant historical era.

- **Evaluating student responses**

Brief but specific suggestions are provided, defining acceptable and best responses to each question asked in the assessment. The suggestions are meant to aid in evaluating students, but even more importantly, they are a way for teachers to help students better understand and master the skills on which the assessment is focused.

Assessment 1 *Basic Level*

Two Views of the Long Human Past

★ Key Ideas and Details

1. (6–8) Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

★ Using This Assessment

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Assessment 1 is designed to measure students' ability to master the skills described in Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standard 1 for grades 6–8. It asks students to cite specific textual evidence from two documents. It also challenges students to adapt that reading skill to the unique demands of thinking historically as they carefully interpret textual evidence in two secondary source accounts of a time in the past. The Common Core standard here calls for primary as well as secondary sources. However, because no written primary sources exist for this era, secondary sources only are used instead.

★ Evaluating Student Responses to This Assessment

Acceptable responses to the first assessment question should define an “invariable sequence” as meaning a series of steps that is unalterable, with the steps always in the same order. With that definition, they should see that Westropp claims that each human society goes through the same set of “necessary transitional stages,” as he puts it. He defines the stages as going from simple and primitive to more advanced and complex. He compares them to the stages of an individual developing from infancy to adulthood. Acceptable responses to the second assessment question should see that Scarre rejects Westropp’s invariable stages as too rigid. He also implies they are too negative in the way they describe earlier societies. That is, he rejects the idea of an invariable progression from “savagery” to “civilization.” As an example, he mentions seafarers from simple societies exploring the Pacific Islands many centuries ago, a feat as amazing as the Egyptian pyramids or Mayan temples. However, he suggests we should evaluate each society in terms of its own “full range of human behavior,” not merely its special accomplishments.

Two Views of the Long Human Past

Directions: This exercise asks you to read two secondary source documents carefully and answer questions about specific details in the documents. In order to better understand the documents, read and make use of the source information located just below each document. When you have studied the documents and the source information, answer the two assessment questions that follow.

CCS Standard 1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Document 1: A Secondary Source

It appears as if there were but one history for every separate people, one uniform process of development for every race. Each passes through successive phases before attaining its highest social development. For every race must pass through the necessary transitional stages before it can arrive at a higher development. These successive phases are the rude and barbarous, the hunting, the pastoral, and the agricultural. They correspond with and are similar to the stages of infancy, childhood, youth, and manhood in the individual man. This sequence is invariable in man, as an individual and collectively.

Source Information: Adapted from Hodder M. Westropp's *Prehistoric Phases: Introductory Essays on Prehistoric Archaeology* (London: Bell and Doldy, 1872), pp. 2–3.

Document 2: A Secondary Source

Author Chris Scarre edited and wrote parts of a book called *The Human Past*. In one passage in it, he disagrees with many nineteenth century scholars about the past 11,600 years. These scholars described a steady progress from simple to advanced societies. They describe a shift from hunter-gatherer “savagery” to early farming “barbarism” to urban “civilization.” Scarre calls this a “progressivist” view. He says it leaves out far too much. For one thing, it ignores the great achievements of simpler societies. “Maya temples or Egyptian pyramids may impress us,” he tells us. However, he points out that skilled seafarers from simple societies were just as amazing. Several thousand years ago, they colonized many Pacific Islands using simple twin-hulled or outrigger canoes. In any case, Scarre feels that such “spectacular” accomplishments are less important than “the full range of human behavior” in each past society. It is this, he argues, that we should most try to understand.

Source Information: This is a secondary source document written in 2014 specifically for use in this activity. This document summarizes views expressed in one passage from an article by Chris Scarre, titled “The World Transformed: From Foragers and Farmers to States and Empires.” This article is Chapter 5 in *The Human Past: World Prehistory & the Development of Human Societies*, edited by Chris Scarre (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), p. 177. The actual passage from Scarre is reproduced for the *advanced level* of this assessment.

Assessment Questions

1. In Document 1, Hodder Westropp says all human societies develop in an “invariable sequence.” Cite details from the text that explain what this sequence is and what it means to say it is “invariable.”

2. Scarre in Document 2 does not agree with Westropp that all human societies develop in an invariable sequence. Cite details in the document that explain why he does not accept this view?

Assessment 7 *Advanced Level*

The Big Change since the Last Ice Age

★ *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*

- 7. (9–10) Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.
- 7. (11–12) Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

★ *Using This Assessment*

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Assessment 7 is designed to measure students' ability to master the skills described in Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standard 7 for grades 9–10 and 11–12 combined. It asks students to do something historians must do all the time—integrate evidence found in a wide variety of primary sources presented in many visual and textual formats. It also asks them to judge the relative strengths and weaknesses of visual as compared with written sources.

★ *Evaluating Student Responses to This Assessment*

Acceptable answers to the first assessment question should see that Document 1's first paragraph raises the question of why human societies adopted agriculture if hunter-gatherer lifestyles were actually efficient, healthy, and satisfying, as some scholars claim. The answer offered in the second paragraph is that agriculture allowed societies to grow in population using much smaller amounts of land more intensively and productively. The claim is that farming communities could support one hundred times as many people per square mile as hunter-gatherer bands. This certainly made rapid overall increases in population possible, and likely. The photo (Document 2) shows multiple-story, tightly interconnected structures. These make clear how compact and densely populated one group of Native American agricultural communities could be. Document 3 shows how population began to accelerate rapidly in the centuries after the switch from forager to farming societies got under way. Acceptable answers to the second assessment question may vary. Answers should not deal merely with whether or not such societies were healthier and happier, but also with the issue of resources. Could such hunter-gatherer bands have made more efficient use of land so as not to crowd one another out? Could they have managed wildlife in such a way as to prevent overharvesting of game animals, causing their extinction, etc.? This is a speculative question that should be discussed thoroughly.

The Big Change since the Last Ice Age

Directions: This exercise asks you to study three documents carefully and answer two questions focused on what these sources have in common. In order to better understand the documents and their importance as historical evidence, read and make use of the source information located just below or next to each document itself. When you have studied the documents and the source information, answer the assessment questions that follow.

CCS Standard 7: (9–10) Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text. **(11–12)** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Document 1: A Secondary Source

The last ice age ended about 12,000 years ago. Until then, humans were foragers engaged in various forms of hunting and gathering. In other words, they obtained their food by hunting wild animals and gathering in wild plants. Many archeologists and anthropologists say this is actually efficient. What they mean is that foragers can get all the food they need with less labor and time than it would take to produce it by farming or herding domesticated plants and animals. Moreover, these experts say, the hunter-gatherer diet was healthier than the one early farming societies provided. Yet since about 10,000 BCE, as the world warmed up, humans in fact did turn to agriculture. They did so independently of one another in several places. Why did they make this change if it meant more work and less nutritious food?

There is no simple, single answer to this question. However, what is clear is that hunter-gatherer bands could never build up big surpluses of food. Each band had to roam over a very large territory just to find enough food to support them day by day. Also, hunting and gathering only supported a very low population density—that is, a very small number of people per square mile. By contrast, even early forms of farming and herding could supply a far larger population on the same amount of land—perhaps one hundred times more people per square mile. This allowed population to soar. Food could be stored for use in bad times, or to support craftsmen, priests, warriors, and others. As larger and more powerful agricultural societies developed, it would not take long for them to sweep the hunter-gatherers aside. Today, such foragers exist in very small numbers and only in very remote parts of the earth.

Source Information: This document is a secondary source dealing with the question of why, starting about 12,000 years ago, most humans made the big change from hunting and gathering to farming. A secondary source is an account of past events written later by someone who did not experience or take part in those events. This particular historical account was written in 2014 specifically for use as part of this activity.

Document 2: A Visual Primary Source



Source: Reproduced with permission from Jonathan Burack

Source Information: This photo shows densely packed, multi-storied structures in some of the ruins in Chaco Canyon in New Mexico. From 850 to 1250 CE, this canyon was a major center for religious ceremonies and trade among the Native American communities of the region. The Chaco people were a part of the Anasazi culture of sedentary farmers in the southwest of what is now the United States.

