Historical Thinking Skills

# For professional historians history is not about memorizing facts and dates - history is all about applying these skills to primary source documents.

# Sourcing: Thinking about a document’s author and its creation.

* Who created this?
* Why was it created? What purpose did is serve?
* What do we know, or what can we infer, about the author and their point of view?

# Contextualizing: Situate the document and its events in time and place.

* When was it created?
* What else was happening in the world at this time?
* How does the document fit into the historical events and ideologies of the time?

# Close Reading: Carefully consider what the document says, and the language that is used to say it.

* What is the message of the document?
* What words or phrases does the author use? How do those words/phrases affect the meaning and tone of the document?
* What can we infer about this document based on the author’s style, tone, and language?

# Using Background Knowledge: Use historical information and knowledge to read and understand the document.

* How does this connect to other knowledge I have?
* How does this document help me to understand the events we have studied?

# Reading the Silences: Identify what has been left out, or what is missing from the document.

* What point of view is not represented here?
* What are some counter-arguments to this document?
* What inferences can we make about the author’s bias based on what they leave out?

# Corroboration: Ask questions about important details across multiple sources to determine points of agreement and disagreement.

* Are there other documents that agree with points in this document? Which ones? How many?
* Are there documents that disagree with points in this document? Which ones? How many?