# Historical Evidence: Model based on: (Lee & Shemilt, 2003), (Wineburg, 1999) and (Morton & Seixas, 2012)

Without evidence, there is of course no history to speak of, only speculation. This was one of the most tricky aspects to create a model for as working with evidence is such a complex process. I have tried to take some of the complexity of Wineburg’s thinking on the issue whiulst also looking at the practicalities of the classroom. When working with sources the danger is that we simply read them uncritically or through a modern lens. As Wineburg notes, the “spread of activation” effect leads us to think down similar lines of thought once we have been pushed in a certain direction. For example, when looking at a document which discusses slavery, then the modern mindset overrides other aspects of the document and leads us to condemn the practice without engaging with the meaning of the source itself. Wineburg gives the example of a group of people given an 1892 document about Columbus Day. Non-historians used the document to comment on the shame of Columbus’ conquest in 1492, these readers used these source to “…confirm their prior beliefs. They encountered the past here and labelled it.” (Wineburg, 1999, p. 498). Yet on the other hand, “…historians used the document to puzzle about 1892, not 1492. They paused long enough to allow their eyes to readjust from the flashing neon of Columbus’s name to go down to the bottom of the document to ponder the context of the document’s production’ Historians contextualised the document about Columbus instead of using it as a window on the past.” (Wineburg, 2007, p. 11)

Meanwhile the “availability heuristic” leads us to privilege information which is more readily available in our memory regardless of the trustworthiness or the reliability of less readily available sources. This means we often deal with sources uncritically as they are available to us rather than test them against harder to obtain information. This is especially true of the use of textbooks by students. The “availability heuristic” leads us for example to believe that we will not contract lung cancer from smoking, despite all the evidence to the contrary, if we know of a close relative who smoked and lived to the age of 95 (Wineburg, 2007). With this in mind, the strands for the evidence concept are quite complex:

1. When we write history we need to create interpretations of the past based on evidence. INFERENCES are drawn from a variety of primary sources to create interpretations of the past.
2. Historical evidence must be CROSS-REFERENCED so that claims are not made based on single pieces of evidence. CROSS-REFERENCING means checking against other primary or secondary sources.
3. Historical evidence has multiple uses. The UTILITY of a piece of historical evidence varies according to the specific enquiry or the questions being asked.
4. Working with evidence begins before the source is read by thinking about how the AUTHOR, intended AUDIENCE and PURPOSE of an historical source might affect its WEIGHT for a purpose.
5. Historical evidence must be understood on its own terms. This means thinking about the CONTEXT in which the source was created and what conditions and views existed at the time.

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|  | **Misconception** | **Emergent****100pts** | **Developing****200pts** | **Mastered****300pts** | **Mastery** |
| **Signpost 1**Drawing Inferences | *Seeing evidence as a series of windows on the past or a collection of facts to be unearthed.* |  | *Y7/8* | *Y9/10+* | *Understanding that the past is not a set of fixed and known events. Evidence isn’t a collection of facts about the past.* *Understanding that inferences can be drawn from evidence which go beyond the obvious content of the sources.* |
| **Signpost 2**Cross Referencing | *Claims about the past are often shaky or unwarranted as they are based on single pieces of evidence.* | *Y7* | *Y8/9* | *Y10+* | *Understanding that history is a complex web and should be constructed from a wide array of complimentary and contradictory sources. Commenting of the certainty of inferences drawn from multiple sources.* |
| **Signpost 3**Utility of Evidence | *Seeing evidence as inherently useful or otherwise based only on what it says.* | *Y8* | *Y9* | *Y10+* | *Understanding that all evidence can have multiple uses and that its utility depends on the questions which are being asked. Evidence does not have a fixed value of utility, it varies according to the enquiry.* |
| **Signpost 4**Evaluating Evidence | *The provenance of evidence is not questioned.* | *Y8* | *Y9* | *Y10+* | *Understanding that a source will reflect the views of its author. Explaining the impact of author, audience, purpose on a source.* |
| **Signpost 5**Evidence in Context | *Understanding historical evidence and inferences from evidence through a modern mindset. Judgments are made without reference to context.* | *Y8* | *Y9* | *Y10+* | *Historical evidence should be understood on its own terms and be recognized as an area of complexity and confusion. Interpreting historical evidence in historical terms rather than understanding it through a modern mindset. Sources cannot be understood quickly and easily – they require work. Context has an enormous impact on the meaning of a source.* |

**History Using Evidence Feedback**



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|  |  | **Emergent****100pts** | **Developing****200pts** | **Mastered****300pts** |  |
| **Signpost 1**Drawing Inferences | *Seeing evidence as a series of windows on the past or a collection of facts to be unearthed.* |  |  |  | *Understanding that the past is not a set of fixed and known event and that inferences can be drawn from evidence.* |
| **Signpost 2**Cross Referencing | *Claims about the past are often shaky or unwarranted as they are based on single pieces of evidence.* |  |  |  | *Understanding that history is a complex web and should be constructed from a wide array of sources.*  |
| **Signpost 3**Utility of Evidence | *Seeing evidence as inherently useful or otherwise based only on what it says.* |  |  |  | *Understanding that all evidence can have multiple uses and that its utility depends on the questions which are being asked.* |
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| **COMMENT:** | **Mark** |
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