VCE History 2016–2021

Study Summary

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| **Please Note: This study summary includes excerpts from the VCE History Study Design. The summary is not a substitute for the VCE Study Design. Users are advised to consult the VCAA website to view the full accredited study design and other resources.** |

Scope of study

History involves inquiry into human action in the past, to make meaning of the past using primary sources as evidence. As historians ask new questions, revise interpretations or discover new sources, fresh understandings come to light.

Although history deals with the particular – specific individuals and key events – the potential scope of historical inquiry is vast and formed by the questions that historians pursue, the availability of sources and the capacity of historians to interpret those sources. VCE History reflects this range of inquiry by enabling students to engage with a range of times, people, places and ideas.

Ancient History investigates individuals and societies (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome and China) across three millennia. Global Empires explores the ideas and power relations accompanying the growth of empires in the Early Modern period. Twentieth century History examines the aftermath of the Great War as well as the causes and consequences of World War Two. Australian History investigates national history from colonial times to the end of the twentieth century and includes the histories of Indigenous Peoples. Revolutions explores the causes and consequences of revolution in America, France, Russia and China.

Rationale

The study of VCE History assists students to understand themselves, others and their world, and broadens their perspective by examining people, groups, events, ideas and movements. Through studying VCE History, students develop social, political, economic and cultural understanding. They also explore continuity and change: the world is not as it has always been, and it will be subject to change in the future. In this sense, history is relevant to contemporary issues. It fosters an understanding of human agency and informs decision making in the present.

The study of history fosters the ability to ask searching questions, to engage in independent research, and to construct arguments about the past based on evidence. Historical comprehension enables a source to be understood in relation to its context; that is, students make links between the source and the world in which it was produced.

We can never know the whole past. Historical knowledge rests on the interpretation of sources that are used as evidence. Furthermore, judgments of historical significance made by historians are central to the discipline. Historians do not always agree about the meaning that is taken from the past: historical interpretations are often subject to academic and public debate. The study of history equips students to take an informed position on such matters, helping them develop as individuals and citizens.

Characteristics of the study

VCE History incorporates a consistent approach to disciplinary thinking which is based on research about how students learn history. Within each unit there is explicit reference to historical thinking concepts. These concepts underpin the treatment of key knowledge and are an explicit part of the key skills in each area of study.

The discipline of history consists of substantive and procedural knowledge. Substantive knowledge refers to an understanding of individuals, groups, events, ideas, practices and movements in specific places and times. Procedural knowledge deals with how meaning is constructed in history as a form of inquiry. These forms of knowledge are interdependent and promote depth of understanding.

Historical thinking means that students will:

*Ask historical questions:* Questions set historical inquiry in motion. Students develop lines of argument in response to questions about the past.

*Establish historical significance:* Historical inquiry necessitates the selection of subject matter. Significance is always ascribed – it is a judgment about the importance of an aspect of the past. The reasons supporting this judgment may include an understanding of the way in which that aspect of the past was perceived at the time, the profundity of its impact, the number of people it affected, its duration, what it reveals more generally about the period, and its relevance to the present.

*Use sources as evidence:* Primary and secondary sources must be evaluated before being used as evidence. This involves the identification, attribution, contextualisation, close analysis and corroboration of sources.

*Identify continuity and change*: Continuity and change are multifaceted. Changes can take place in one aspect of the past while other conditions remain unaltered. Turning points are a useful way for historians to mark continuity and change.

*Analyse cause and consequence:* The exploration of causes is central to history. Historical inquiry involves identification of chains of cause and consequence. There are many different kinds of causes, such as social, political, and economic, short term and long term, and immediate and underlying.

*Explore historical perspectives:* Comprehending the past involves consideration of how historical actors understood their world; the mindsets of people in the past may differ from those of the present.

*Examine ethical dimensions of history:* Historical inquiry involves engaging with the beliefs, values and attitudes of people in the past.

*Construct historical arguments:* The capacity to develop a well-supported argument about the past is central to historical thinking. Such arguments represent the outcome of historical inquiry.

Structure

The study is made up of thirteen units:

Unit 1 and 2: Global Empires

Unit 1: The making of empires 1400 –1775

Unit 2: Empires at work 1400–1775

Unit 1 and 2: Twentieth century history

Unit 1: Twentieth century history 1918 –1939

Unit 2: Twentieth century history 1945 –2000

Unit 1 and 2: Ancient History

Unit 1: Ancient Mesopotamia

Unit 2: Ancient Egypt

Unit 2: Early China

Unit 3 and 4: Ancient history

Unit 3 and 4: Australian history

Unit 3: Transformations: Colonial society to nation

Unit 4: Transformations: Old certainties and new visions

Unit 3 and 4: Revolutions

Each unit contains between two and four areas of study.

Entry

There are no prerequisites for entry to Units 1, 2 and 3. Students must undertake Unit 3 prior to undertaking Unit 4. Units 1 to 4 are designed to a standard equivalent to the final two years of secondary education.

Unit 1 and 2: Global Empires

Unit 1: The making of empires 1400 –1775

The Early Modern era, 1400 –1775, was a time of transition between medieval feudalism and the modern, secular nation-state. At the dawn of the era, international trade was dominated by three powerful empires – the Venetian Empire, China under the Ming dynasty and the Ottoman Empire – who between them controlled key industries, commodities and trade hubs including the Silk Road. Emerging powers Portugal, Spain, France, Britain and the Netherlands sought to circumvent the power of these established empires by gaining access to goods through alternative means and routes. By harnessing new knowledge and technology, they launched voyages of exploration to the Asia-Pacific, the Americas and Africa.

Around the same time, new ideas were emerging to disrupt traditional beliefs and institutions. The Ptolemaic model, which placed Earth at the centre of the universe, was challenged by Copernicus and taken up by Galileo and other scholars of the Scientific Revolution (c. 1550 –c. 1700). The Catholic Church was threatened by both new scientific knowledge and the Protestant Reformation (1517–c. 1648) which questioned Rome’s divine authority. The new paradigm of empiricism questioned assumptions and beliefs about godly intervention in the natural world. Gutenberg’s printing press (c. 1450) allowed ordinary people, for the first time in history, to circulate ideas without mediation by officials, leading the way for new debates about individualism, rights and liberties during the Enlightenment (c. 1650 –1790s).

The key idea, however, to give impetus to new global empires was mercantilism. As the feudal era gave way to the early stages of capitalism, European powers began to gain imperial control through monopolies, subsidies and East India companies, which extracted profit from new colonial possessions.

This unit examines how the Portuguese, Spanish, French, British and Dutch empires harnessed new ideas and technologies to usurp the power of the established empires of Venice, China and the Ottoman Empire, thus entrenching their ideas and influence across the globe.

Unit 2: Empires at work 1400–1775

In this unit students explore the operation of European colonies and the challenges they faced from within and without.

In the Early Modern period, 1400 –1775, new empires began to establish colonies and to trade on a global scale. Britain, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Russia and the Ottoman Empire gained colonial possessions in a number of continents. The Mughals in India and the Ming and Qing dynasties in China gained control over vast territories but these were regional rather than global in reach.

Through the ‘Columbian exchange’ that followed Christopher Columbus’ arrival in the New World, technologies, plants, animals, culture and diseases began to travel between continents. Gradually, humans began to be traded as commodities too, as the triangular slave trade across the Atlantic drew in nearly all of the major empires. This trafficking in human misery was not ended until the abolition movements of the Modern era.

Despite their profitability, colonies brought a number of difficulties. Indigenous peoples resisted colonisation, settler societies were complex and unpredictable and colonies were a drain on resources. Rival powers jostled for advantage, alliances and resources. The many wars waged between Early Modern empires culminated in all-out global warfare in the Seven Years’ War (1754– 63). Britain’s success in this war led to a period of dominance which lasted well into the twentieth century.

In each area of study, students should study in depth at least one European colony in the Americas, Africa or the Caribbean.

Unit 1 and 2: Twentieth century history

Unit 1: Twentieth century history 1918 –1939

In Unit 1 students explore the nature of political, social and cultural change in the period between the world wars.

World War One is regarded by many as marking the beginning of twentieth century history since it represented such a complete departure from the past and heralded changes that were to have an impact for decades to come. The post-war treaties ushered in a period where the world was, to a large degree, reshaped with new borders, movements, ideologies and power structures. These changes affected developments in Europe, the USA, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Economic instability caused by the Great Depression also contributed to the development of political movements. Despite ideals about future peace, reflected in the establishment of the League of Nations, the world was again overtaken by war in 1939.

The period after World War One was characterised by significant social and cultural change in the contrasting decades of the 1920s and 1930s. New fascist governments used the military, education and propaganda to impose controls on the way people lived, to exclude particular groups of people and to silence criticism. In Germany, the persecution of the Jewish people became intensified. In the USSR, millions of people were forced to work in state-owned factories and farms and had limited personal freedom. Japan became increasingly militarised and anti-western. In the USA, the consumerism and material progress of the 1920s was tempered by the Great Crash of 1929. Writers, artists, musicians, choreographers and filmmakers reflected, promoted or resisted political, economic and social changes.

Unit 2: Twentieth century history 1945 –2000

In Unit 2 students explore the nature and impact of the Cold War and challenges and changes to existing political, economic and social arrangements in the second half of the twentieth century.

The establishment of the United Nations in 1945 was intended to take an internationalist approach to avoiding warfare, resolving political tensions and addressing threats to human life and safety. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 was the first global expression of human rights.

Despite internationalist moves, the second half of the twentieth century was dominated by the competing ideologies of democracy and communism, setting the backdrop for the Cold War.

The period also saw challenge and change to the established order in many countries. The continuation of moves towards decolonisation led to independence movements in former colonies in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific. New countries were created and independence was achieved through both military and diplomatic means. Old conflicts also continued and terrorism became increasingly global. The second half of the twentieth century also saw the rise of social movements that challenged existing values and traditions, such as the civil rights movement, feminism and environmental movements.

Unit 1 - 4: Ancient History

Unit 1: Ancient Mesopotamia

In this unit, students explore Ancient Mesopotamia. The lands between the rivers Tigris and the Euphrates have been described as the ‘cradle of civilisation’. Although this view is now contested in ancient history and archaeology, the study of Ancient Mesopotamia provides important insights about the growth of cities. Students investigate the creation of city-states and empires. They examine the invention of writing – a pivotal development in human history. This unit highlights the importance of primary sources (the material record and written sources) to historical inquiry about the origins of civilisation.

Unit 2: Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egypt gave rise to a civilisation that endured for approximately three thousand years. Unlike Mesopotamia, Egypt was not threatened by its neighbours for the greater part of its history. The Nile served as the lifeblood of urban settlements in Upper and Lower Egypt. Kingdoms rose, flourished and fell around the banks of this great river. This unit highlights the importance of primary sources (the material record and written sources) to historical inquiry about Old and Middle Kingdom Egypt.

Unit 2: Early China

The foundations of civilisation in China have traditionally been located in the Yellow River Valley, but archaeological evidence now suggests that early settlement was not confined to this area. Life in small agricultural communities, with distinct regional identities, marks the beginnings of civilisation in China. Interactions between these small and diverse settlements led to the formation of rival states, and then to the growth of an enduring civilisation. The development of a series of empires was central to Chinese civilisation.

Early China refers to what is known as the pre-imperial and early imperial periods. Historians and archaeologists refer to the pre-imperial period (up to 221 BC) as Ancient China. This unit begins with Ancient China and concludes with the end of the Han Empire in AD 220. It highlights the importance of primary sources (the material record and written sources) to historical inquiry about Early China.

Unit 3 and 4: Ancient history

Egypt, Greece and Rome were major civilisations of the ancient Mediterranean. They have bestowed a powerful legacy on the contemporary world. In each of Units 3 and 4, students explore the structures of one of these societies and a period of crisis in its history. Life in these ancient societies was shaped by the complex interplay of social, political and economic factors. Trade, warfare and the exchange of ideas between societies also influenced the way people lived. Furthermore, all three societies experienced dramatic crises which caused massive disruption. During these times of upheaval, individuals acted in ways that held profound consequences for themselves and for their society.

These units highlight the importance of primary sources to historical inquiry about ancient civilisations.

In developing a course, teachers select two societies to be studied from Egypt, Greece and Rome, one for

Unit 3 and one for Unit 4. For the two selected societies, both areas of study must be undertaken. Students are expected to demonstrate a progression from Unit 3 to Unit 4 in historical understanding and skills.

Unit 3 and 4: Australian history

Over the last two hundred years the history of European settlement in Australia has brought radical changes for the descendants of both the original Aboriginal inhabitants and the incoming colonists. From 1788 onwards people, ideas and events created colonial societies and eventually a new nation that confronted significant challenges and changes in its first century of existence.

Transformations in Australia’s history have occurred sometimes chaotically in response to a sudden rush for land or gold and at other times in a debated and planned fashion, as in the creation of what was, in the early twentieth century, an advanced democracy. Over this time, crises and movements have also led governments and people to modify the status quo to confront critical challenges to the stability and defence of the nation.

In VCE Australian History students explore four periods of time which span some of the transformative events and processes that developed and changed the nature of Australian society and created modern Australia. The first slice of time begins in the 1830s with the expansion of European control over much of southern Australia as squatters appropriated country inhabited by Aboriginal peoples. The remaining three time periods consider transformations undergone by the new Australian nation in the twentieth century.

Unit 3: Transformations: Colonial society to nation

In this unit students explore the transformation of the Port Phillip District (later Victoria) from the 1830s through to the end of the tumultuous gold rush decade in 1860. They consider the dramatic changes introduced as the British colonisers swiftly established themselves, taking possession of the land and then its newly discovered mineral riches.

Students examine transformations in the way of life of the Aboriginal peoples and to the environment as the European society consolidated itself. They also consider how new visions for the future created by the gold rush and the Eureka rebellion further transformed the new colony.

Students explore the type of society Australians attempted to create in the early years of the newly federated nation. Much of the legislation debated and passed by the Commonwealth Parliament was relatively advanced and Australia was seen as a social laboratory exploring new forms of rights and benefits for its citizens. Students evaluate the effect that Australian involvement in World War One had on the country’s egalitarian and socially progressive aspirations.

Unit 4: Transformations: Old certainties and new visions

In this unit students investigate the continuing development of the nation in the early part of the twentieth century and the dramatic changes that occurred in the latter part of the century. After World War One the process of nation building was renewed. However, world events soon intruded again into the lives of all Australians. The economic crisis of the 1930s followed by another world war redirected the nation’s priorities for a time as it struggled to regain economic stability and defeat its military enemies. The experience of both the Depression and World War Two gave rise to renewed thinking by Australians about how to achieve the type of society envisaged at the time of Federation. In Area of Study 1 students focus on one of the crises faced by the nation: The Great Depression 1929 –1939 or World War Two 1939 –1945.

In Area of Study 2 students explore social, economic and political changes in the latter part of the twentieth century that collectively challenged and/or overturned much of Australia’s earlier carefully constructed social and economic fabric. Students examine two changes drawn from: Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War, Aboriginal land rights, equality for women, new patterns of immigration and/or a global economy.

Unit 3 and 4: Revolutions

In Units 3 and 4 Revolutions students investigate the significant historical causes and consequences of political revolution. Revolutions represent great ruptures in time and are a major turning point which brings about the collapse and destruction of an existing political order resulting in a pervasive change to society. Revolutions are caused by the interplay of ideas, events, individuals and popular movements. Their consequences have a profound effect on the political and social structures of the post-revolutionary society. Revolution is a dramatically accelerated process whereby the new order attempts to create political and social change and transformation based on a new ideology. Progress in a post-revolutionary society is not guaranteed or inevitable. Post-revolutionary regimes are often threatened internally by civil war and externally by foreign threats. These challenges can result in a compromise of revolutionary ideals and extreme measures of violence, oppression and terror.

In these units students develop an understanding of the complexity and multiplicity of causes and consequences in the revolutionary narrative. They construct an argument about the past using primary sources as evidence and evaluate the extent to which the revolution brought change to the lives of people. They consider how perspectives of the revolution give an insight into the continuity and change experienced by those who lived through dramatic revolutionary moments. Students evaluate historical interpretations about the causes and consequences of revolution and the effects of change instigated by the new order.

In developing a course, teachers select two revolutions to be studied from the following, one for Unit 3 and one for Unit 4:

* The American Revolution of 1776.
* The French Revolution of 1789.
* The Russian Revolution of October 1917.
* The Chinese Revolution of 1949.

For the two selected revolutions, both areas of study must be undertaken. Students are expected to demonstrate a progression from Unit 3 to Unit 4 in historical understanding and skills.

Assessment

Satisfactory completion

The award of satisfactory completion for a unit is based on a decision that the student has demonstrated achievement of the set of outcomes specified for the unit. This decision will be based on the teacher’s assessment of the student’s performance on assessment tasks designated for the unit.

Levels of achievement

*Units 1 and 2*

Procedures for the assessment of levels of achievement in Units 1 and 2 are a matter for school decision.

*Units 3 and 4*

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority will supervise the assessment of all students undertaking Units 3 and 4. In the study of Ancient History, Australian History and Revolutions students’ level of achievement will be determined by a historical inquiry, an analysis of primary sources, an evaluation of historical interpretations and an essay.

Percentage contributions to the study score in Ancient History, Australian History and Revolutions are as follows:

* Ancient History, Australian History and Revolutions
* Unit 3 School-assessed Coursework: 25%
* Unit 4 School-assessed Coursework: 25%
* End-of-year examination: 50%