The Big 6 Historical Thinking Group Workshop

This is a **group-based, interactive workshop for The Big 6 Historical Thinking Skills** — fully aligned with **Stanford History Education Group (SHEG), NCSS C3 Framework, and AP History skills** (APUSH, AP World, AP Euro) and all other history classes with modifications.

Objective:
Students collaboratively analyze historical sources and events through the six disciplinary thinking skills essential for historical reasoning:
Contextualization, Sourcing, Close Reading, Corroboration, Causation, and Continuity/Change Over Time (CCOT).

Time: 60–75 minutes
Group Size: 4–6 students

Suggested Readings / Primary Sources (Public Domain and Free Access)

Theme	Documents	Source URLs
American Revolution	Thomas Paine – *Common Sense* (1776)	https://www.gutenberg.org/files/147/147-h/147-h.htm
Abolition & Slavery	Frederick Douglass – *What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?* (1852)	https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbc0001.2019fdl0001/?sp=1
Industrialization & Reform	Andrew Carnegie – *The Gospel of Wealth* (1889)	https://www.gutenberg.org/files/53415/53415-h/53415-h.htm

Theme	Documents	Source URLs
Civil Rights	Martin Luther King Jr. – *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (1963)	https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html
Imperialism	Rudyard Kipling – *The White Man's Burden* (1899)	https://www.gutenberg.org/files/167/167-h/167-h.htm
Global Conflict	Woodrow Wilson – *Fourteen Points* (1918)	https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp

Assign one text per group or rotate excerpts among stations.

The Big 6 Thinking Skills Overview

Skill	Historical Focus
Contextualization	Situating a document within time, place, and circumstances
Sourcing	Evaluating who created a document, when, and why
Close Reading	Analyzing language, claims, and evidence within the document
Corroboration	Comparing across sources to identify agreement or contradiction
Causation	Analyzing causes and effects of an event or development
Continuity/Change Over Time (CCOT)	Tracing what has persisted and what has evolved across eras

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Group Roles

Role	Responsibility
Contextualizer	Researches time period, location, and setting
Source Critic	Evaluates author perspective and reliability
Text Analyst	Performs close reading and annotation
Evidence Comparator	Finds connections or contradictions among texts
Cause/Effect Mapper	Identifies key triggers and outcomes
Change Tracker	Notes patterns of continuity and transformation
Recorder / Presenter	Compiles and presents final analysis

If fewer students, combine Cause/Effect + Change Tracker.

Station Rotation Structure (One Skill per Station)

Station	Focus	Task	Product
1	**Contextualization**	Place the document within its historical era. Identify 3 related events or conditions shaping it.	Context summary + timeline
2	**Sourcing**	Examine author, date, purpose, and reliability.	Sourcing chart
3	**Close Reading**	Annotate for word choice, claims, and evidence.	Text annotations + short quote analysis
4	**Corroboration**	Compare 2 documents for alignment or disagreement.	Comparison chart
5	**Causation**	Identify major causes and effects tied to the document's topic.	Cause-and-effect map
6	**Continuity/Change Over Time**	Note what ideas, practices, or policies persisted or evolved over time.	CCOT timeline or chart

Each group rotates every 8–10 minutes and adds to prior group's analysis notes.

Interactive Group Activities

A. "Context Dominoes"

Each group draws one "context clue" card (event, person, or policy).
They must connect it to their assigned document and explain:

- How does this event shape the text's meaning or urgency?

- What does the document reveal about its moment in history?
  Example: connect *Common Sense* to the Continental Congress or *Letter from Birmingham Jail* to the Freedom Rides.

B. "Source Detective"

Each group investigates the **author's motivation** by asking:

- Who wrote this, and what was their position in society?
- What bias or limitation might they have?
  Groups then stage a mini "press conference," answering classmates' questions as the author.

C. "Text Under the Microscope" (Close Reading)

Each student highlights or underlines:

- Key verbs and adjectives (revealing tone and purpose)
- Repeated ideas or phrases
- Emotional or persuasive language
  Then the group decides: What claim is the author making, and how do they prove it?

D. "Corroboration Wall"

Each group reads two different documents from the same era.
They create a T-chart:

- Left column: Points of agreement
- Right column: Contradictions or opposing perspectives
  Then, groups summarize how the evidence collectively supports or complicates historical interpretation.

E. "Cause/Effect Chain Relay"

Groups write a chain showing how one event or condition led to another.
For example:
Industrialization → Urbanization → Labor Conflicts → Progressive Reforms.
Each student adds one link to the chain, explaining the connection in one sentence.

F. "Continuity and Change Timeline"

Groups build a timeline on chart paper or a digital slide showing:

- One idea or theme (e.g., civil rights, economic inequality)
- At least 3 points of continuity
- At least 3 major changes
  They label each shift with a short explanation and supporting evidence.

Whole-Class Synthesis

After all rotations:

- Each group presents one "Big 6 Insight" about their document.
- The class discusses: Which of the Big 6 skills most improved understanding of the document's meaning or reliability?

Example discussion prompt:

How does context help explain both Paine's radical tone and Carnegie's moderate one?

Sentence Frames for Each Skill

Contextualization:
This document was written in _____, when _____. This context shaped its message because _____.

Sourcing:
The author, _____, wrote this in _____ for _____. This influences the document's reliability because _____.

Close Reading:
The author uses words such as "**" and "**" to emphasize _____.

Corroboration:
While _____ argues that _____, another source _____ supports/contradicts this by _____.

Causation:
One cause of this event was _____, which led to _____.

Continuity/Change:
Although _____ remained the same, _____ changed due to _____.

Exit Ticket Choices

1. Write a short paragraph applying one Big 6 skill to your group's document.
2. Identify which Big 6 skill was most difficult and explain why.
3. Create a thesis statement incorporating at least two Big 6 elements (e.g., context and causation).
4. List two modern examples that reflect continuity or change from your document's theme.

Optional Extensions

A. Mini-DBQ Practice

Groups receive 3–5 short documents. Each student applies one Big 6 skill, then the group synthesizes evidence into a short written argument.

B. Cross-Time Debate

Groups argue whether their historical issue (e.g., equality, industrialization, imperialism) shows **more change or more continuity** across time.
They use evidence from their document and one modern source.

C. Comparative Analysis

Groups compare two documents from different eras using **corroboration, continuity, and causation** to discuss how ideas evolved (e.g., Douglass vs. King).
