

Additional Ideas/Aspects of Historical Significance



Aspects of historical significance:

a) Resulting in change (The event/person/development had **deep** consequences, for many people, over a long period of time.)

Examples: Edison inventing the **light bulb**, Alexander Graham Bell creating the **telephone**; Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton leading **women's rights**; Samuel F. B. Morse creating a **code for the telegraph**; Eli Whitney inventing the **cotton gin**; Robert Fulton building the **steamboat**; Florence Nightingale improving the profession of **nursing**; Secession of 11 southern states and the Civil War causing the **deaths of around 600,000 people**.

b) Revealing (The event/person/development sheds light on **enduring or emerging issues in history** and contemporary life or was **important** at some stage in history within the collective memory of a group or groups.)

Women's Rights Leaders: Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Benjamin Franklin: statesman, inventor, scientist, publisher, diplomat.

Thomas Jefferson: author of the Declaration of Independence

The Beatles, Elvis Presley, The Rolling Stones: music and cultural shifts

Inventions of radio, television, personal computers, iPhones

Note: for either of these, students can **establish the historical significance** of an event or person by linking it to other events in a historical narrative or argument. "It is significant because it is in the history book," and "It is significant because I am interested in it," are **both inadequate explanations** of historical significance

At the most sophisticated level, students will be able to:

- a) Demonstrate how an event, person or development is significant either by showing how it is embedded in a larger, meaningful narrative OR by showing how it sheds light on an enduring or emerging issue. Examples:**

The importance of the French Alliance brokered by Benjamin Franklin which gained the support of the French government against England in the American Revolution. The French military proved vital in obtaining the surrender of Gen. Cornwallis in Oct. 1781.

After World War II, the Marshall Plan funded by the United States helped restore the destroyed nations in Europe. This food and economic aid helped improve relations between our former enemies which was unique in promoting a better future.

- b) Explain how and why historical significance varies over time and from group to group.**

To the American frontier settlers in the 1600s and 1700s, the relationships with the Native Americans proved extremely important to their survival. Because they were eventually displaced, land opened up for continued settlement. Over time, problems dealing with the Native Americans would end by the 1890s, and for the most part, became placed in the backwater of the government's care.

The invention of the atom bomb caused nations to spend trillions on weapons so they might become members of the "atomic club." Although test-ban treaties were adopted in the 1960s, some nations continue to test the limits of current U. S. interests.

Potential student tasks when writing about historical significance:



a) Explain what made [X] significant. Examples:

George Washington was significant due to: **leadership skills**, desire to improve one's station in life, experiences in helping start the **French and Indian War**, persisting during the **American Revolution**, presiding at the **1787 Constitutional Convention**, setting **lasting precedents** as the first U. S. president, plus obviously so **well respected** that our nation's capital and a western state was named in his honor, plus a 555' tall **monument** is dedicated to his life's work.

b) Choose the "most significant events" and explain your choices.

The most significant event of the American Civil War was the **Battle of Gettysburg** because after that horrendous struggle the **South was not able to exert as much force** as before, **a definite turning point** and Appomattox was an important finish.

The use of the **atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki** in 1945 ended World War II in the Pacific. Those two weapons killed around 200,000 people yet are seen as having saved lives from an expected land invasion by American forces had the bomb not been ready for use by President Truman.

c) Identify and explain differences in significance over time or from group to group.

It **used to be** in this nation, government leaders **believed in "pay as you go"** in relation to spending public money, raising tax money for projects. Since the 1980s, budget deficits became acceptable in the tune of hundreds of billions each year as **budgets lowered taxes but did not lower spending.** The recent arrival of the \$20 trillion debt by the Federal government, if permitted to grow, will be a **massive problem** in years ahead.