

Timeline Building with PERSIA – Teaching Strategy

Quick Overview

Students gain a deep understanding of a big event and its causes and effects through an interactive, all-class activity. The analysis is built visually and interactively, with causes and effects placed around the central event, connected by arrows as students explain “why” and “how” each development led to the next. They learn the acronym “PERSIA” to recreate this analysis for other events and time periods.

Skill Objective

Students will...

- Practice using a standardized system for assessing causes and effects of an event in history
- Assess how and why one thing might lead to another
- Engage with a wide range of arguments and ideas related to one central topic

Content Objective

Students will...

- Engage with a big event in history and consider the factors that caused and came after it
- Recall events and factors learned previously to contribute to their understanding of what happened “next” on the historical timeline

Civics Skills Connection

Reasoning Skills:

- **evaluate evidence:** students identify a range of factors in a society or a time period that can be considered evidence or preconditions for later historical events
- **analytical/critical thinking:** students make causal statements about how and why one event could lead to another
- **critique of arguments:** students balance a wide range of factors that might have had the same or differing impacts on the main event

Prep ahead

- Prepare a set of 3-5 items in each of the PERSIA categories for both causes and effects of the main event.
- Not every event will have causes or effects in each category. Other events might have so many for each that it is hard to keep track. In either case, consider prepping students for that possibility:

- Say, “We are going to work through a system to see how this event might have been caused, and what it might have led to. For each question, there might be a lot of answers or it might not apply to this particular event. That’s partly because events in history are just like events in the present – complicated and they don’t follow the same pattern every time. We can start to untangle some of the causes and effects by using the PERSIA system to break it down.”

Strategy Steps

1. Write the name of the main event in the middle of the board and lead students through the acronym **PERSIA** to do their analysis of causes and effects:
 - **Political** – What was the system of politics before the event? Were there key people in office or political events that made the event more likely to happen?
 - **Economic** – How was the economy of the whole country? What about for individual groups of people? Were some groups better off than others?
 - **Religious** – What role did religion play in the lives of everyday people? Did most people practice the same faith the same way, or were there differences?
 - **Social** – Think about the lives of regular people during this time, not just the leaders, what were their lives like and could that have played a role in the event?
 - **Intellectual** – What were the “big ideas” of the day? Were those ideas visible in the main event we are looking at?
 - **Artistic** (cultural) – How might art, music, literature, or other expressions of culture play a role in the event taking place? Or did people process the event afterwards through expressions of culture?
2. Write each cause and effect on either side of the main event depending on when it happened. Add arrows to show the direction of influence. Arrows can go from cause to effect, or can connect causes, or show cyclical relationships.
3. As each line or arrow is added, encourage students to consider and articulate “why” and “how” one development led to another. Prompt them with questions such as
 - What about A made it more likely for B to happen?
 - Was there another step in the middle that needed to happen, too?
4. Conclude when students have come up with all of the factors you want them to know, adding any important points they may have missed. Taking a photo of the board and sending it to students could help visual learners or those who did not take clear notes during the activity.

Customizations

- **Option 1: Debate it**
 - Divide the room into groups and assign one “cause” to each group. Have students write an argument for why that cause was the most significant to the outcome. Students share their arguments in a debate-style format.
- **Option 2: Write about it**
 - Students pick one cause and one outcome as a focus for thesis statement writing. They write a clear argument and a paragraph with evidence outside of class for teacher assessment.