

Activity 2.3 Writing Timelines

Performance Objectives The class will generate timelines of the development of communication technologies from writing systems to the Internet. A variety of writing systems, means of communicating, factors that brought about advances, and the resulting societal changes will be highlighted in this activity. These timelines offer the advantage of providing students with the opportunity to reflect their knowledge through various modalities in sequencing, writing, models, and oral interpretations of their work.

Grade Level 6–8

Variation Grade Level 9–12

Essential Questions What Chinese breakthroughs and innovations have made a significant impact on world culture?
How might one explain the similarities and differences between Chinese technological innovations and the significant contributions of other cultures?

Standards **Social Studies**

World History

- Developing timelines by placing important events and developments in world history in chronological order
- Measuring periods in terms of years, decades, centuries, and millennia
- Studying major turning points in world history by investigating the causes and other factors that brought them about as well as their results
- Investigating important events and developments in world history by posing analytical questions, selecting relevant data, distinguishing fact from opinion, hypothesizing cause-and-effect relationships, testing hypotheses, and forming conclusions

Language Arts

Language for Information and Understanding

- Following directions that involve a series of actions
- Locating and using information on a wide range of topics from general reference materials
- Independently selecting and applying strategies for collecting and synthesizing information

Activity 2.3 Writing Timelines

Time Required If completed in class, construction and research requires about a week. Homework time can be used for research or constructing models in order to reduce class time or to develop more detailed work.

Materials Photocopies of the **Writing Timelines Instruction Sheet** handout
Poster board or oak tag
Pencils
Rulers
Colored pencils, markers, crayons
Scissors
Illustrations, pictures, Web site addresses to download pictures
Scanner to duplicate pictures (optional)

Assessment Piece Timelines and oral presentation

Procedure

1. Assign groups of three to five students. Distribute the **Writing Timelines Instruction Sheet** and review project requirements with the class. Brainstorm ideas to be included as three-dimensional additions to the timelines. Review available classroom materials and encourage students to bring additional materials and resources from home.
2. Have students begin by deciding on a scale, stressing that periods of equal years must be of equal length. Since timelines will extend for several thousand years, a scale of 10 inches for each 1,000 years should be sufficient.
3. Students should then measure and cut oak tag or poster board into eight-inch-wide strips for each period. Carefully fold the strips in half along their length, so that when opened they can stand freely in an A-frame shape. Have students use pencil and ruler to mark the length of each strip to represent a period. Materials may be arranged along the timeline, connected by string to indicate specific dates, or placed on the timeline itself. This works well as a portable timeline frame, though ambitious students may choose to construct their timeline of other materials.
4. Allow students to research, write, and build models for required elements of the timeline. At the end of each workday, it is helpful to allow a few minutes for the groups to evaluate their progress and set goals for the following day.
5. On the last day of the project, groups should take turns in making an oral presentation of their timeline to the class.
6. Remind students that improving technology exposes greater numbers of people to ideas at a cost that is manageable. Ideas are shared in ways that change lives. Sharing or controlling ideas have been concerns of both religious groups and political leaders throughout history. China has been no

Activity 2.3 Writing Timelines

exception. Discuss the following points with students in ending the project. From your timelines, what were some of the reasons that writing was developed or what were some communications problems solved by technology? Who were usually the first people in a civilization to practice the skills of reading and writing? Why?

How does writing consolidate a culture or group of people?

How do governments or religious groups use and control communication for their benefit? Does this still occur?

How has the use of modern technology—phone, fax, and especially the Internet—changed the availability and our methods of getting information?

How can we test the accuracy of what we read?

Extension Make an oversized classroom timeline of poster board lengths that can accommodate students' contributions throughout the school year. Post communication entries on the timeline as students learn about a variety of civilizations. Add information in such categories as governance, belief systems, cultural developments, ways of living, transportation, defense, and technology. Post biographies of influential figures along the timeline and add depictions of art and artifacts as appropriate. At key points hold a class discussion noting global trends, periods of significant change, advancement and decline, and innovation.

Variation for Grades 9–12 Have students write a paper about one of the writing developments in the timeline. Students must show how the development directly affected another area of society, such as governance, belief systems, cultural developments, ways of living, transportation, or defense.

Handout Writing Timelines Instruction Sheet

The history of language and writing technologies is an important part of humankind's history. To understand the impact of writing on culture, you will be making a timeline, in groups of three to five students, that will show the diversity of writing systems and change that advances in communication bring to a culture. Team members will share research, writing, building models, and constructing the timeline to help you organize your knowledge. Begin by identifying four civilizations whose history of writing and communication you would like to highlight in your timeline. Each group should include the history of Chinese writing systems, as this is a central theme in our project.

For each civilization that will appear on your timeline, include the following elements.

- 1.** An example of the writing form. If possible, include examples of changes over time. Give a brief (one paragraph) description of the structure of the language.
- 2.** A map or written description of where the system originated.
- 3.** Reasons that a writing system developed when it did, who was responsible for its development, and its effects. This should be a brief paragraph included with your timeline.
- 4.** Identify other cultures that were influenced by this writing system.
- 5.** One person from each period must appear on the timeline. This could be an inventor, writer, publisher, or political figure. Briefly describe this individual's influence on and contribution to history as it relates to language and communication.

Include illustrations or models appropriate to the project. These visuals may be scanned photos, pictures from magazines, your own illustrations, or models of any appropriate artifacts from the period.

Include four inventions that have changed language and communication. Identify where they originated, who was responsible for their creation, and their impact.

Arrange the material on your timeline. Clearly label dates and be certain that you are consistent in your use of scale: equal distances on your timeline will always cover equal periods of time.

Use this sheet as a checklist for items. All timelines will be displayed and presented by the group to the class