

My region: what if?

Secondary: (ages 11 – 14)

Interdisciplinary (history, visual arts, science)

This activity uses history as a way to investigate artistic and/or scientific phenomena. Students explore a past historical period in their region and study the art and/or technology of the time, focusing then on a particular historical event from the period which led to changes in the arts and/or technology. Students are invited to question these ideas by imagining alternative histories for their region (i.e. ‘counterfactuals’: what if this event not happened?) and imagining artworks or technology that could have existed in these alternative courses of history. This leads to a projection into the future, with students proposing ideas and solutions to promote desired changes in their region.

Time allocation 5 lesson periods

Subject content This activity is designed to be interdisciplinary; teachers have flexibility to decide on the specific content and skills it addresses in addition to:

- Learn about the evolution of a region, from historical and cultural perspectives
- Understand how a past historical period or episode shapes the present time
- Understand artistic manifestations and/or scientific phenomena in their historical context

Creativity and critical thinking This unit has a **creativity** and **critical thinking** focus:

- Generate, play with, and stretch unusual ideas
- Make connections and imagine alternative courses of history
- Appraise and justify opinions and arguments

Other skills Collaboration, Communication

Key words counterfactuals; speculative history; local area; arts; architecture; inventions; wars; historical events; revolutions; discoveries

Products and processes to assess

The unit of work challenges students to create and modify artwork and give presentations or staged performances, as well as taking part in discussions, team-work, and appraisal of the work of other students. At the highest levels of achievement, the outputs are imaginative and of high technical and conceptual quality. During the work process, students demonstrate they are able to make connections across disciplinary subjects, explain historical events and related changes in artwork/technology in an articulate manner, reflect on how things could have been different, and provide one or more examples and hypotheses about possible alternative historical/artistic/technological paths.

Teaching and Learning plan

This plan suggests potential steps for implementing the activity. Teachers can introduce as many modifications as they see fit to adapt the activity to their teaching context.

Step	Duration	Teacher and student roles	Subject content	Creativity and critical thinking
1	Preparatory phase	Select a period of history of particular relevance for the region or country of the students. The teacher may select the period based on the possibilities it offers to develop the activity and the availability of teaching resources, or alternatively have students propose periods based on their own interests and submit choices to a class vote.		
2	Lesson period 1	Divide the class into teams representing classes or groups of society at that time (e.g. different guilds, nobility and peasants, etc.). Students do some initial research in the school library or computer lab on their assigned group of society, for instance on topics such as eating habits, clothing, crafts, leisure activities, art etc. Students to present their initial findings to the class, possibly through a staged performance (e.g. a short role-play, film scene, or news report).	Investigating a historical period, empathising with the assigned social groups and identifying some defining features	Understanding the context, analysing and addressing gaps in their knowledge through research and creating a performance
3	Lesson periods 2 and 3 with research assignment in between	Select one particular and relevant episode within the chosen historical period, ideally one that led to important changes, for instance a war, a revolution or a discovery. Students to identify consequences or ramifications of the episode on a chosen dimension i.e. visual arts, music, scientific vision of the world, technology. (e.g. how did the Spanish Civil War impact art? What was happening in the Spanish art world before, during, and after the Civil War?) Students to present their findings to the class.	Learning about a historical episode and its impact	Making connections between historical events and arts or technology Justifying arguments about causes and consequences
4	Lesson period 4	Students then to imagine a different course of history in the absence of the event, or supposing its results had been different: How would the region and the people living in it look? What differences might we find in the visual arts, and in science or technology? (e.g. What if the Spanish Civil War had not happened? What might have continued or changed in Spanish art? Further examples can be found in the appendix) Students here can be supported to look at artistic/technological etc. trends taking place before the event and what might have happened if these had continued rather than being disrupted by the event. Students then choose a particular artwork/invention/piece of architecture etc. from the period and re-imagine and re-create it as if the event had not happened or had an alternative outcome (e.g. what might be different about the 1937 Picasso piece, <i>The Weeping Woman</i> , if there had been no Spanish Civil War?). They will need to draw on their previous research about art/technology etc. in the period before the event to help them hypothesize about this. They can be encouraged to consider possible changes not just in the content of the artwork but also, for example, in style or techniques used. The teacher may also choose to discuss with students the value of such speculation and what	Thinking counterfactually: speculating what characterised arts/architecture etc. before a historical event and how that might have continued in the absence of the event Learning about a particular artwork, invention, building etc. from the time period in question	Playing with alternative scenarios Generating new ideas from a different point of departure Envisioning or prototyping new solutions

		<p>we might learn from it despite its uncertainty.</p> <p>The teacher can then ask teams to reflect on and appraise or assess each others' scenarios and products/solutions according to either the creativity/critical thinking rubric or criteria developed by the teacher or by students and the teacher together</p>		<p>Acknowledging uncertainty, appreciating novelty, appraising products based on logical, ethical and aesthetical criteria</p>
5	Lesson period 5	<p>Students can then be asked to identify more recent changes in the fields of visual arts and or science/technology, and how they are related to recent historical events. (e.g. changes in art/science/technology related to climate change, the global financial crisis, or the development of digital technologies)</p> <p>The teacher can then facilitate discussion on what changes might be desirable in the region and how to promote them: What would be needed for these to happen? How might those changes impact arts and technology look like in that desired future?</p> <p>Finally, teams can mutually assess each others' scenarios and products/solutions and reflect either in discussion or in writing on what they have learned about their region and about art/science/technology as appropriate</p>	<p>Thinking about contemporary society, arts, science etc. and how to promote changes</p>	<p>Making connections and integrating disciplinary perspectives</p> <p>Generating ideas for changes</p> <p>Justifying opinions on how to create desired changes</p>

Resources and examples for inspiration

Web and print

- *Visual Encyclopaedia* and *Illustrated History* works on the chosen historical period
- Digital image archives (e.g. The French Revolution Digital Archive: <http://frda.stanford.edu/>)

Other

- Visual Arts: materials for sketching and painting, clothing for making costumes
- Science: lab facilities to replicate basic experiments or technology solutions

Opportunities to adapt, extend, and enrich

- Visits to local history museums, architectural tours, or cultural visits could be incorporated into this activity as appropriate
- This activity could be extended to look at futures thinking with students creating possible, probable and preferable scenarios for the future of their region or completing some of the activities here <https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/2438-teaching-futures-thinking>

**Creativity and
critical thinking rubric**

- Mapping of the different steps of the lesson plan against the OECD rubric to identify the creative and/or critical thinking skills the different parts of the lesson aim to develop

	CREATIVITY Coming up with new ideas and solutions	Steps	CRITICAL THINKING Questioning and evaluating ideas and solutions	Steps
INQUIRING	Make connections to other concepts and knowledge from the same or from other disciplines	3-5	Identify and question assumptions and generally accepted ideas or practices	2,4,5
IMAGINING	Generate and play with unusual and radical ideas	4-5	Consider several perspectives on a problem based on different assumptions	4-5
DOING	Produce, perform or envision a meaningful output that is personally novel	2,4	Explain both strengths and limitations of a product, a solution or a theory justified on logical, ethical or aesthetic criteria	3-5
REFLECTING	Reflect on the novelty of solution and of its possible consequences	4-5	Reflect on the chosen solution/position relative to possible alternatives	2-5

Some possible What ifs...

These ideas are simply for inspiration. Ideally, this activity should be targeted to the particular local area of the teaching context

What if America had won the Vietnam war? What if the Vietnam war had not happened?

(this provides opportunities to look at the Vietnam war and how it impacted arts and popular culture in the US and around the world.)

What if Archduke Franz Ferdinand had survived?

(this provides opportunities to look at World War 1 and its impact on arts, literature, or society in general.)

What if someone had managed to put out the Great Fire of London/Great Chicago Fire before it spread?

(this provides opportunities to look at the Great Fire of London/Great Chicago Fire and how it impacted architecture in London/Chicago.)

What if the Nika riots had not happened?

(this provides opportunities to look at the Byzantine Empire and architecture in current-day Istanbul.)

What if the printing press was never invented?

(this provides opportunities to look at the invention of the printing press as well as the Renaissance, and its impact on philosophy, science, arts, architecture, literature etc.)

What if Martin Luther had never been born?

(this provides opportunities to look at the Protestant Reformation and how it impacted history and art)

What if the French Revolution had not happened?

(this provides opportunities to look at the French Revolution and its impact on, for example, Romanticism)

What if Boudicca had decided not to rise up against the Romans?

(this provides opportunities to look at Boudicca and can be focussed, for example, on the local history of Colchester in the UK)