

Transition to Advanced Level History

The beginning of your journey to becoming an
A Level Historian

Congratulations on choosing A Level History. The two-year course is a challenging one which will develop your ability to analyse events, assess primary sources and historians' interpretations, and present your own arguments supported with relevant subject knowledge. This booklet will give you an overview of the topics covered and the skills assessed. It will also give you some guidance on what you can do now and over the Summer months to prepare for the start of the course in September.

Paper 1: Tsarist and Communist Russia 1854-1964.

This paper is a breadth study looking at over a hundred years of Russian history. This means that you will look at themes in history such as society, for example the position of the peasantry in the countryside and the growth of the working class in the towns; the development of political ideas and the economy, and how they changed over time, and the importance of individuals. You will also study and evaluate historians' interpretations of the period. Within a century the Russian empire was transformed from a Medieval, feudal society ruled by an autocratic Tsar, into the world's first Communist state under Lenin and then into a global superpower after World War 2. To understand why these huge changes were able to happen it is important that you develop a feel of the unique nature of Russian History over the last 1000 years; the influence of both Asia and Europe on the formation and growth of the biggest country in the world and on the mindset of the Russian people.

Over the Summer, in order to develop this understanding please read:

Martin Sixsmith: Russia, a 1000 year Chronicle of the Wild East (at least the 2/3rds).

Also helpful is: Geoffrey Hoskins: Russian History A Very Short Introduction

You should also watch on YouTube all the episodes of:

Russia Land of the Tsars https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtIRJSmSm_Y.

Watch the documentary in sections and whilst you are reading and watching, you should think about and make a few notes on the following ideas and questions:

1. Why is Russia a hard country to govern?
2. When has Russia been weak over the last 1000 years - why was this?
3. When has Russia been strong over the last 1000 years - why was this?
4. Why do many Russian think they need a strong leader in order to be a strong country?
5. Why do you think Peter the Great and Catherine the Great are known as the "Great"; do you think they deserve these titles?
7. What does it mean to be Russian? What ideas are important to Russians?
8. By the 1850s how was Russia different to Britain - think about the people who lived there and how they lived and how the country was run.
9. Why have many Russians throughout History believed they are different to "the West"?
10. Do you think that to be successful Russia should be like the West or should the country do things their own way?

Finally write a mini essay answering the following question:

Over the last 1000 years Russia has only been powerful and successful when it has a strong autocratic leader who is willing to take on modern ideas from the West. How far do you agree with this view?

Bring this essay to your first lesson in September or submit it through google classrooms

The following novels will help develop your feel for Russia (ideally read but you can watch)

Doctor Zhivago by Boris Pasternak

Anna Karenina by Tolstoy

Ms J.Kingston

Mrs O.Georgiades

Paper 2: The English Revolution 1625-1660

Paper 2 is a depth study covering only 35 years of history of one of the most eventful periods in English History. You will look in detail at the events that encompassed three civil wars, the trial and execution of a king and the only period that England has been a republic. You will also study and evaluate primary sources from the period. It is particularly important that you develop a feel for the sense of transition from the Middle Ages with a rigid social order dominated by religion, to the emergence of a society that was beginning to resemble our own, in terms of political ideas like democracy and social equality.

Over the Summer, in order to develop this understanding please read:

Tristan Hunt: The English Civil War At First Hand

John Morrill: Stuart England A Very Short Introduction

You should also watch on YouTube:

Oliver Cromwell & The English Civil War <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxOh4NLaCmY>

Watch the documentary in sections, whilst you are reading and watching, you should think about and make a few notes on the following ideas and questions:

1. Why were Puritans and King Charles 1st on a collision course 1625-40?
2. How did the rebellion in Ireland in 1641 impact attitudes in England in 1641?
3. How did ordinary people start getting involved in politics in the years leading up to the outbreak of the civil war?
4. Why was the New Model Army such a treat to the existing social order?
5. What did most members of parliament actually want from Charles?
6. How far ahead of their time were the Levellers?
7. Why had Parliament lost patience with the King by 1649?
8. Why was it so difficult to find a stable system of government to replace the monarchy?
9. Was Cromwell's position as Lord Protector all but a king in name?
10. Would the monarchy have been restored if Cromwell had lived a little longer?

Once you have watched documentary and made notes under the question headings, write a mini essay answering the following question:

In reality there was no English Revolution; by 1660 things were the same as they had been in 1625. How far do you agree with this view?

Bring this essay to your first lesson in September or submit it through google classrooms

Also, the following essay will help develop an overview of the significance of the period
Christopher Hill: The English Revolution 1640

The following podcast will help you understand the controversies around Charles's execution:

BBC Radio 4 In Our Time; The Trial & Execution of Charles 1st

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00kpd6>

Mr C.Holmes

Coursework (NEA): The British Empire in Africa 1881-1981

The final part of the A level course is coursework consisting of a 4000 word essay covering the reasons for Britain's colonization of Africa, and for the dismantling of the empire in the 20th Century. You will work largely independently on this with some help and support from you teachers in covering the essential content and structuring your answer. As well as developing your argument and supporting it with detailed knowledge you will also use and evaluate both primary sources and historical interpretations. You will not study this until the start of Year 13, but to get a taste of what is included you can watch the documentary:

Niall Fergusson: *Empire – Maxim Force* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ru-CFjUbK9k>

Also worth reading is *African History : a very short introduction* by John Parker and Richard Rathbone (audiobook currently free on Amazon)

Historical skills for A Level

You will build and develop the skills you have learnt at GCSE, and you will be expected to demonstrate them in essays. The assessment objectives specified by AQA are:

A01 Argument and knowledge. To do this you will need to write convincing arguments making judgements about the topics you have studied supported with detailed knowledge. You will demonstrate your understanding of why events occur, what makes specific events and individuals significant, and how change and continuity is shown over time. The best way to develop these skills is having a really thorough knowledge of the topic and by practising your historical reading and writing.

A02 Using Primary Sources. To do this you will need to understand and evaluate the usefulness of sources from the period you are studying. This can be challenging when the language and cultural references in the sources is unfamiliar. The best way to develop this skill is of course practice to build confidence, but also having a good 'feel' and empathy for broader context of the period.

A03 Using historical interpretations. To do this will need to understand and evaluate how convincing extracts produced by historians are. The best way to do this is to have a very detailed understanding of the period yourself so that you can make judgements about other historians' arguments. Also, to understand the purposes of history and how historians develop their ideas.

We very much look forward to seeing you in September – it you would like to ask questions about the course please email us or contact us through Google Classrooms