

Forces of History



By David Bernier

Bill Williams, Editor
Dr. Aaron Willis, Project Coordinator
Amanda Harter, Graphic Designer

Social Studies School Service
10200 Jefferson Blvd., P.O. Box 802
Culver City, CA 90232
<http://socialstudies.com>
access@socialstudies.com
(800) 421-4246

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10200 Jefferson Blvd., P.O. Box 802
Culver City, CA 90232
United States of America

(310) 839-2436
(800) 421-4246

Fax: (800) 944-5432
Fax: (310) 839-2249

<http://socialstudies.com>
access@socialstudies.com

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Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN: 978-1-56004-544-1

Product Code: ZP113

Forces of History

*Life is not simple, and therefore history,
which is past life, is not simple.*

David Shannon

*History is a guide to navigation in perilous times.
History is who we are and why we are the way we are.*

David C. McCullough

Introduction and Conceptual Background

As educators, we constantly strive to help students make sense of the complicated mass of information known as history in a way that is coherent yet accessible and useful. Essential questions or guiding inquiries (e.g. What does it mean to be human [or an American]? Why do wars happen? What is power? What is history?) definitely help to engage students and provide some sort of framework, yet they may be limited to a particular event or topic. As such an overarching construct is greatly needed to help students organize and connect their acquisition, of historical content while also enhancing their analytical skills. *Forces of History* attempts to provide one of the missing yet necessary pieces to make this happen.

One of the definitions of the word “force” is the power to influence, affect or control (Dictionary.com). This definition directly links to the concept of causation in history. Why do things happen? What led up to a given event? Was it inevitable? Just as gravity is a force in the natural universe, there are factors that influence and contribute to historical events, change, turning points, and continuity. Most historians as well as documents such as standards and frameworks related to the subject of history produced by State Departments of Education focus on the role of a number of common elements in influencing, contributing to, and shaping historical outcomes over time. For ease of understanding the term “forces” has been selected to help characterize the role of these elements in “making history.” By considering these forces, students can gain a broader sense of history while also seeing the interrelationship and complexity of determining how and why things are the way they are.

Forces of History, in short, is a conceptual framework to help students organize and make sense of history in a manner that is accessible yet not overly simplistic. This framework serves as both a powerful tool to aid in teacher planning and assessment as well as a lens for students to make sense of the mountains of content that they will encounter in a given history course. In the end the overarching concepts involved with the forces will help students to have a way of looking at and understanding history that will carry on as they go from history course to course, thereby providing a powerful tool for articulation among teachers at a given school or district. Furthermore the conceptual elements of the forces and the skills of interpretation that develop as one examines and uses them across different sources and genres serves as an aid to help students make sense of and interpret content found in their English Language Arts and other Social Science courses.

In sum, exploring the forces of history deepens the skills of interpreting, comparing and contrasting, determining cause and effect, and categorizing. Furthermore, the forces help students to examine the big ideas of history while also helping to promote their own investigations and inquiry. When students put the pieces together in the form of a presentation, they can practice the skills of evidentiary reasoning and historical explanation and argument. As such, the *Forces of History* provide a powerful learning tool for students, which will ultimately serve and benefit them for the rest of their lives.

The Forces

So what are forces of history? The seven key items below have been selected for their frequency of use across historical texts and state and national standards. Certainly others could be added or substituted. To help simplify the concepts embodied in the forces and to facilitate the memorization and internalization of them, the acronym I.N.S.P.E.C.T. has been crafted.

- I = Ideas
- N = Natural/Geographic
- S = Social
- P = Political
- E = Economic
- C = Cultural
- T = Technological/Scientific

Acronyms provide a simple yet useful tool to package deeper concepts in a way that students can quickly remember and practice. The Forces of History presented here are similar to other acronyms and categorizing tools like GRAPES, PERSIA, and SPRITE. However the forces are broader in scope, covering a larger amount of concepts and related content. The elements of I.N.S.P.E.C.T. also lend themselves to more recent history (18th–21st century) in ways that some of the others may not.

Summary of Each of the Forces

Each of the selected forces is hard to tightly compartmentalize and define. Buying a hamburger at a fastfood restaurant could easily link to economics and questions of sales and consumption. The notion of fastfood and hamburgers, however, links to social and cultural issues as one considers the location of the restaurant, who the consumers are, and why they are buying fast food. Certainly links could be made to natural and political elements as well as considering where the food is coming from and the bureaucratic processes for opening and operating a restaurant. As such, the interrelationship among each of the forces is something to sift through and analyze.

The following short paragraphs provide some examples for each of the forces as well as some ways in which each of these items has been a force in history.

The force of “Ideas” relates to beliefs, ideologies, philosophies, and the intellectual realm. Ethical questions and the questions related to the purpose of human life are also found in this realm. The force of ideas strongly relates to religious, political, economic, and social factors as ideas tend to focus on improving or challenging these larger areas. A few examples of ways in which the force of ideas has shaped history include the ideas of natural rights and equality. These ideas embodied in the writings of John Locke and the Declaration of Independence have inspired and motivated peoples in different countries across the world as well as groups such as African Americans and women (see the Declaration of Sentiments) in the United States to seek the attainment of these ideals. Religious ideas such as Martin Luther’s recovery of justification by faith found in the Book of Romans played a significant role in the Protestant Reformation, which irrevocably altered the Christian church while the belief in one God serves as a fundamental belief in three of the world’s major religions. As the old adage goes, “the pen is mightier than the sword” so goes the power of ideas as a means for inspiring revolution, religious fervor, and the pursuit of rights.

“Natural/Geographic” forces connect to the role of the environment, ecology, resources, natural disasters, regions, and climate in shaping history. The ways in which people interact with their environments plays a major role throughout world history. Events such as the California gold rush in which the pursuit of riches drove thousands of people across the world to California to the volcanic activity which over time produced the islands of Hawaii, relate to the natural/geographic force. The global connections related to the development and exchange of plants/food such as some of the items of the Columbian exchange like corn, potatoes, and tomatoes resulted in wide-scale changes both to diets, populations, and economies. Natural/geographic forces continue to shape world history as issues of global warming, pollution, and the pursuit of water and other resources are increasingly shaping political and economic considerations in our world today. Geographic and natural forces have and will continue to be a force that generates and shapes history.

The category connected with the “Social” force links to society in the sense of social structures (arrangements and hierarchies), family, slavery, gender roles, class and class conflict, the individual and groups, as well as the quest for social justice. The examples of slavery and segregation are a major part of the narrative of American and world history influencing political, economic, social, even geographic developments. The role and rights of women is an issue that has been contested with respect to the right to vote in the 19th and 20th centuries in the United States. Notions of acceptable attire and the social roles for women play a role in Islamic countries to this day. These examples link to the forces of ideas, and political and cultural forces as well as showing how the social force is very much related to other items. Debates over public education, healthcare for all, and marriage are a few of the items in the social arena which continue to challenge citizens and leaders alike.

“Political” forces include government, laws, political parties, the military, courts, foreign policies, wars, voting, and political systems. The challenge of finding the balance between rights, order, power, prosperity and safety play out in the political sphere. This has resulted in various systems of governance from republics to police states from parliaments to benign dictators. In the U.S., the separation of powers and the system of federalism greatly shape the decisions that

are made and the limitations on political leaders. The evolution of democracy from the Magna Carta to the English Bill of Rights and the U.S. Bill of Rights, as well as the quest for ideals such as universal health care and education play out in the political sphere. As such, political forces greatly influence world history as leaders and citizens work in collaboration and conflict to achieve desired results.

Trade, the production of goods and services, with questions of what, why, and for whom, financial systems, consumption, networks of exchange, taxes, and of course money are involved with the economic forces of history. From the issues of taxation involved with the American Revolution to the causes of the Great Depression and spending involved with the New Deal, “Economic” factors have played a significant role in shaping events. In more recent history, issues of free and fair trade, energy concerns (oil), and global recessions have manifested themselves in the economic sphere impacting social and political structures, and decision making from Wall Street to Main Street. The economic force touches everything from employment to the purchasing of textbooks and toilet paper for schools and is therefore an inescapable force.

“Culture” includes the elements of the practice of religion, arts, music and clothing styles, architecture, literature, high culture and pop culture, and forms of entertainment. The term “culture” can refer to certain genres found in the arts, the characteristics of a particular group, or regional or national sets of characteristics. The force of culture in history has manifested itself in U.S. history from the nativists to the multi-culturalists with their diverging notions of what it means to be an American. Ethnic issues from the clashes in the Balkans to the pursuit of La Raza Unida and Black Power in the 1960s and 1970s touch on the force of culture. In the arts, culture has influenced society from highbrow culture in the fine arts and music to the influence of punk and hip hop culture on styles of taste and interpersonal relationships. Other examples include the hippy culture of the 60s and 70s with its challenge to social and political standards and mores. Culture continues to play a powerful force in history and society as the clash between progressive and conservative belief systems play themselves out across the world.

The “Technological/Scientific” force involves the development of inventions, and products from vaccines to pesticides to the iPod and machine gun with the view to doings more effectively, appealingly, and efficiently. Technology and science often are seen as tools of progress and modernity, but can also be agents of death and destruction. Examining the role of technology and science in history lends itself to examining change and continuity over time within the context of the quest to improve life. Inventions in transportation, such as the car and airplane, greatly expedited commerce and interpersonal exchange. Communication devices, such as the phone and computer, have broken down barriers and facilitated the rapid spread of information. Innovations in entertainment from the motion picture to television contributed to changing values and mores. Who can deny the impact of the cotton gin on the spread of the Cotton Kingdom and slavery? Last but not least, military inventions from mustard gas to the atomic bomb have contributed to massive destruction and loss of life. The force of technology continues to reshape our world socially, economically, and culturally, bringing with it positive and negative consequences alike.

Link to Standards

The strands involved with the forces of history weave throughout all of world and U.S. history. One of the major ideas in the study of ancient civilizations is the notion of economic, political, religious, cultural, technological, and social development. Modern world history focuses on political theories, economic, industrial, and technological developments as well as interactions and conflicts between nations. Early U.S. history highlights the themes of growth and conflict—politically, socially, economically, and geographically. U.S. history from Reconstruction onwards highlights the evolution of democracy and the quest for social justice as well as technological development, war and diplomacy, and the conflicts between progressive and conservative values and politics.

Nearly every History Content Standard crafted by the National Center for History in the Schools lends itself to one or more of the forces.

A few examples from the U.S. History standards include:

- “How early European exploration and colonization resulted in cultural and ecological interactions”
- “The causes of the American Revolution”
- “The causes of the Great Depression and how it affected American society”
- “The economic boom and social transformation of postwar United States”

The World History Content Standards also strongly lend themselves to using the forces as an organizational framework with standards such as:

- “Innovation and change from 1000–600 BCE horses, ships, iron, and monotheistic faith”
- “Growth of states, towns, and trade in Sub-Saharan Africa between the 11th and 15th centuries”
- Economic, political, and cultural interrelations among peoples of Africa, Europe, and the Americas”
- “The causes and global consequences of World War I”

All of these items touch on numerous forces, thereby showing their usefulness as a tool for making history coherent while also showing the complexity and interconnectedness of these elements. State content standards tend to also have similar content and language which links to the concepts involved with the forces.

In addition, historical and social sciences analysis skills nicely link to the content and thinking involved with the forces. For example, Historical Interpretation 1 from the state of California for Grades 9–12 History reads, “Students show the connections, causal and otherwise, between particular historical events and larger social, economic, and political trends and developments.” Historical Interpretation 2 focuses on “the complexity of historical causes and effects, including the limitation on determining cause and effect.” As such, the merging of the acquisition of historical content and skills can be accomplished with and through the use of the forces of history.

How to Use the Forces

Mini-Lesson

To introduce the forces, have students think about different items that shape or influence history. In pairs have students think of a response to the following question: “What makes history happen?” Or, “Why do historical events happen?” Students will talk to an elbow partner after they have considered a response. Call on a few pairs to share what they discussed with the whole class.

Following the pair dialogue, move students into groups. Consider breaking students into seven groups with each group taking one of the seven forces to focus on (this may also be done as a whole class, if needed). Have each group create a brainstorm map of their assigned force using poster paper. Each group should write their force in the center of the page and then write out examples and ideas of items from their world and beyond that relate to that particular force. For example, the group assigned to “Political” can write words like elections, mayor, laws, etc., on their poster. Students can also create visual examples to their respective force, such as the picture of a cell phone as an example under the category of technology.

After students have had 5–10 minutes to brainstorm, have them create a working definition of their topic and explanation of how that force might influence history. For example: The natural/geographic force relates to the natural world and the way people are affected by it and use its resources. This force has shaped history through natural disasters as well as by the pursuit of resources like gold and food such as spices.

After each group completes their brainstorm and definition, have each group briefly present their examples and definition to the whole class. Clarify definitions realizing that these are more of an introduction and that these concepts will develop through additional exposure. The posters may be utilized at this point to bring out additional visual examples of the forces as well as to show the interrelatedness of the different forces. The definitions created by the students can be refined over the course of the year and posted under the poster as a tool to build academic vocabulary and analysis skills. As students utilize the language and concepts of the forces, their ability to practice thinking and speaking as historians will also develop.

Additional ways the forces and posters can be used include but are not limited to:

- As a preview of the content to be taught—breaking down a content standard and identifying the elements of the forces that can be found in that standard. For example, standard 11.6.3 from the California Content Standards for 11th Grade United States History reads: “Discuss the human toll of the Depression, natural disasters, and unwise agricultural practices and their effects on the depopulation of rural regions and on political movements of the left and right, with particular attention to the Dust Bowl refugees and their social and economic impacts in California.” Students would underline or circle key items from the standard and make links to the respective forces verbally or in writing as a way to help them gain a sense of what they will be learning about.

- While reading a textbook—the forces serve as a frame to support note-taking by helping students to organize the information they read. To do so, students should be encouraged to create their own visual representations and graphic organizers to represent the information that they gather. This will encourage them to take ownership of their learning and to use tools that are conducive to their individual thinking style.
- When doing a DBQ or working with document sets—students organize or group the documents according to their respective force(s), considering the best arrangement as well as potential overlap between categorizations. This organization serves as a pre-writing tool as well as student categorization that helps to set up the key ideas for body paragraphs and thesis construction.
- When analyzing visual sources or watching a DVD—students use the forces to help them analyze the key ideas and meaning of a given visual.
- As a presentation—using a presentation board students capture with text and visuals the role of the forces on a major historical event in a way that is similar to the History Day presentation board format. See the National History Day Web site for additional information.
- As a dramatization—students can creatively come up with a short skit to personify the forces in relation to a historical event.
- As a debate—students are presented with a question that forces them to take a stand on an issue related to the role of the forces on a given historical topic or event. Students will engage in a structured debate using historical reasoning and evidence to support their ideas.
- As a newscast—students take the role of newscasters to report on the role of the forces in a historical event. This can be done in a variety of formats—interview, press conference, debate, investigative reporting, etc.
- As a research project—students can be assigned a force to examine in relation to a topic. They would pose research questions and gather materials to attempt to respond to their queries. Students would then present their findings to other students. This can be done as a preview of a unit or as a culminating task.
- As an assessment—students explain and evaluate the role of one or a number of the forces with respect to a historical event or problem. This can be done with a written paper, creative writing assignment, a Web site or PowerPoint®, an oral presentation, or by creating or responding to a DBQ. Students support their assertions with evidence from multiple sources.

Big Idea and Essential Questions for Use with the Forces

The following questions were crafted to support student consideration of the forces of history. They should be used as a warm-up or activator question for a journal/quick write or think-pair-share at the beginning of a unit or period. They can be used as part of a lecture or as an exit pass activity at the end of the period as well. Some of the questions lend themselves to an essay or short answer question as part of a test or paper. These questions get at some of the more philosophical or arguable aspects of the different forces and are not meant to lead students to a single or “correct” answer. Like history itself, they are meant to be analyzed and interpreted, then supported with evidence. Consider selecting a few questions to use repeatedly throughout the

course of the year as a way to help students compare the change and continuity over time of the role of a given force.

Ideas: What ideas have had the biggest impact on history? What factors lead to the emergence of new ideas? How do ideas shape social change? What causes people to accept new ideas? What ideas form the core of the society of _____? What ideas contributed to _____?

Natural/Geographic: How did environmental factors shape _____? What natural resources are valued and why? How do people interact with the natural world? How does geography shape history? How does geography differ among the societies of _____ and _____? How do environmental forces interact with economic and political forces? How do natural forces impact migration?

Social: How do societies arrange themselves? What is the best way to organize society? What roles do men and women play and why? How come people have had slaves? What influences society more, individuals or groups? Are people entitled to social services (education, health care, etc.)? What causes people to try to change society? How do people pursue social justice? Is equality for all attainable? Why do people discriminate against others?

Political: What is the purpose of government? What is the best form of government? Why do we have laws? How do economic and social forces influence politics? What role does culture play in politics? How can we influence political forces? Why do so few people participate in the political process? What is an effective leader? What is power? How have political forces been both a source of good and evil?

Economic: Does money drive the world? Is the love of money the root of all evil? How have economic factors influenced political decisions? Why do we have money? What is worth having? How is the world connected economically? How do natural forces influence economics? Why does economic inequality exist? What factors are needed to produce economic power? Who are the haves and have-nots in our society and world and why?

Cultural: How does religion impact history? What role do the arts play in shaping history? Are the arts a reflection of society or shapers of society? Is it possible for different ethnic groups to be one? What does it mean to be an American? What does it mean to be a global citizen? Does culture matter? How does pop culture influence economic, social, and political forces? How have notions of being cultured changed over time? Are we what we eat? What is globalization doing to culture?

Technological/Scientific: Why do people seek to create new products? How does technology impact our lives? Does technological progress always lead to social progress? How does technology impact the natural world? What causes people to be attracted to technology? Is technology causing us to be closer to each other or farther from each other? What are the positives and negatives of technology? What motivates people to pursue scientific knowledge?

Organizers

Organizers have been created to facilitate student learning. One is designed for use with secondary sources/textbooks another for primary sources, one for compare and contrast and another one for use with visuals. Teachers and students are encouraged to design additional organizers which may fit with student learning styles or formats that are more familiar. The organizers are designed to provide a structure to support student analysis of texts as well as a tool to gather and organize information in preparation for some form of processing and/or assessment. Graphic organizers and other visual tools have been shown to be very useful in supporting English learners and other student populations who may need additional tools to enrich their learning.

**Forces of History
Visual Analysis Organizer**

Title of the visual: _____

Details: List the main objects from the visual. Use one box below for each item.	Force: Which of the forces of history does that object relate to? How?	Conclusions: What does it mean? Why is that item important or significant?

How does your information/notes relate to the title of the visual? Explain.

Forces of History
Compare and Contrast Organizer

Directions: Complete the following chart using information found in your textbook, notes, and/or primary sources. Write key ideas and details. This will help you to compare and contrast the two topics/events.

Force	Topic/Event:	Topic/Event:
Ideas		
Natural/Geographic		
Social		
Political		
Economic		
Cultural		
Technological/Scientific		

Summary/Conclusions, etc. _____

**Forces of History
Secondary Source/Textbook Organizer**

Directions: Identify examples of each of the forces of history from the text and record the key points in the organizer below. Include page numbers and short quotes to support your analysis. Some ideas may fall into multiple categories.

Topic _____ Pages _____

Ideas	Natural/ Geographic	Social	Political	Economic	Cultural	Technological/ Scientific

Summary (What conclusions can you make from your completed chart above?) _____

**Forces of History
Primary Source Analysis Organizer**

Directions: Complete the following organizer as you analyze the primary source.

Source Title _____ Author/Creator _____

Date Created _____ Location _____ Type of Document _____

Context (what do you know about the author and time period?) _____

Big Ideas (What are the key points and messages of the source?)	Evidence (What is your proof? How do you know?)	Categorization (What force does this source relate to most? Why?)	Additional Information (Questions, other related forces, etc.)

Conclusions _____