

# Teaching History

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## **Introduction**

History has always been guaranteed in school curriculums since an early age. However, and despite its importance, many learners complain that the history subject relies on the accumulation of many information including several dates, names, numbers and incidents, often learnt by heart, and which they forget or get confused about very soon. Hence, history teachers need to check out their teaching methods as well as their tools of implementation. They need to make their objective specific, and the worth of what is taught need to be spelled. In an attempt to answer the question of whether history teachers can improve their teaching, this paper tries to answer sub-queries about what to teach in a history class, why to teach it, to whom to teach it, how to teach it, and which tool (s) are best to teach it. The paper relies on a descriptive argumentative analysis, and reckons on a number of primary and secondary resources: Museums and historical sites in Algiers, Algerian National Archives, history books, Phd and magister theses. This paper is divided into ten shortened parts; each tries to answer a sub-query asked above for the purpose of answering the main question relating to whether history teachers could ameliorate their way of teaching and make it prolific, interesting and delightful.

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## **What History Involves**

Apart from the divergence that might characterize individual opinions while going deeper into the core of things, most people will initially agree that history is a record of events and human life. However, such a definition turns that vibrant life which has made history into a mere dead rust-covered fabric depriving one from the slightest willingness to cross its threshold. History has been made by war and peace, treaties and conspiracies, despair and hope, failure and success; it was set by brave heroes and villain funks, the good and the bad, the friends and the foes. History has not been drafted only by kings and queens dwelling in fancy palaces and dressing up sumptuous costumes, nor was it transcribed only by knights holding swords and shields, crossing lands and conquering continents. History has, also, been written by the ordinary: peasants, traders, porters, and miners. It was, similarly, prescribed in humble roads and obsolete scrublands by men and women enduring challenges to get over strains. Anyone who might think history is a motionless record of past events has missed the invaluable vivid lessons every little tiny detail, hideaway among the folds of time, might teach one.

## **History Learners**

History teaching expands to encompass social studies, humanities and, obviously, history branch. In this way, It permeates several disciplines such as: History, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, archaeology, literature, civilization, religious and political sciences. Yet, apart from academic studies, outside schools and universities and away from courses consciously designed, taught and learnt, history connects with every single aspect of people' lives. We learn history when we watch TV, listen to the radio, visit museums and historical sites; we learn it through advertisements, songs, pictures and while surfing on the internet; when we pay attention to the elderly, keep one's ears to a discussion, read a book or pore over an artwork. So, even though history is more securely indoctrinated when taught by highly specialized scholars and through substantially established curriculums, it is, still, everywhere around us, smoothly finds a way into our perception, and makes of us, though often unconsciously, the most patient, heedful and receptive learners.

## **Why Teaching History is Important?**

History is not a plain, interesting and enjoyable expedition meant to discover the mysteries of the old days. The prominence of history lies in its

aptitude to tie the past up to the present and link the latter to the future. Understanding who we are gives us a sense of identity which encloses every episode our predecessors went through and every single cultural pattern they got into touch with. The perception of where we belong reinforces one's sense of belonging, gives one relief, confidence, attachment and credence. On the other hand, teaching history helps to understand past events and the way they evolved as the Greek philosopher and scientist Aristotle explains when he argues that "to comprehend anything we must "observe its beginnings and its developments".<sup>1</sup> Importantly, the journey is not intended only to spot the light on the life span and track the course of developments, but also to extract the best of lessons which will probably facilitate positioning and decision making either nationally or when interacting with this chaotic global system.

### **What History Teachers Should Teach**

Most educators, if not all, would agree that they are on a mission to impart an official syllabus to learners. Very rare are the cases where the teacher might be accorded freedom to digress from the formally designed curriculum. Nevertheless, the teacher remains the master and commander of his class, and within that little freedom mandated in relation to the adoption of suitable techniques, selection of activities and the leading of class discussions; a history teacher should be fit to bring about a major difference. Whilst we teach history, we doubtlessly teach names of people and places, dates, events, institutions and scripts. Still, history is about ideas, morals, human upgrowth and development.

Thence, in the selection of topics to deal with, teachers should pay attention to the elements and factors that brought about important significant transformations. Similarly, they need to cover all social, economical, political and cultural aspects of human experiences, led either by powerful or ordinary actors. In the course of lecture delivery the teacher, even though restricted to a tight syllabus, does have some freedom of choice in accordance to what exactly to teach. Shifting the emphasis horizontally or vertically may stir different points and issues to teach or to focus on. Thus when dealing with Ottoman Algeria, for example, moving flat will recall an account of names, dates and places displaying how Ottoman Algeria was established in 1525 after Hayreddin Barbarossa captured the city of Algiers

1 Aristotle quoted in Maryanne, Rhet, "Collective Memory and the Benefits of Studying History", *i-studentglobal.com*, 10 Feb, 2012. Web accessed 29 oct, 2016.

with the help of the Ottoman Empire. Moving underneath the shoal might unfold talks about various topics such as the effect of the establishment of the Regency of Algiers on the Ottoman Empire, on the people of the region and on others off the coastal lands of modern Algeria. So, teachers do have choices with regard to “which historical topics warrant more in-depth and which historical topics warrant less in-depth study”<sup>2</sup>; this brings us to talk about the second important point concerning the way history ought to be taught.

### Selecting and Evaluating Sources

Historical resources can be classified into two classes: Primary and secondary resources. Primary sources are the items that are described as original; they are classified into two types. The first includes the remains of an era such as: tools, buildings, coins, furniture and weapons whereas the second consists of the elements which had a direct physical contact with the incident in consideration like: a written or an oral testimony, participants in an event, manuscripts, letters, memoirs and charters. Secondary sources are those items which do not have a direct physical contact with the event under study. These include people who did not take part in the event under study but obtained their descriptions from another person, or any other form of reproduction of data that might be included in textbooks and encyclopedias, for instance, or communicated through prints of paintings or replicas of artworks.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, history sources have to be evaluated in relation to their quality and suitability as to provide the information needed. Hence, a two-stage historical criticism is undertaken to obtain historical evidence. External criticism deals with the authenticity and integrity of the item in order to check that the item is genuine and complete. The next step involves internal criticism which concerns the accuracy and credibility of the content of the document.<sup>4</sup> Whatever sources teachers might use, it is important to make sure that they will help attain the lessons’ particular objective.

2 Nikki Mandell - Bobbie Malone, *Thinking Like a Historian: Rethinking History Instruction Canada*, Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2007, p. 10.

3 Louis Cohen - Lawrence Manion - Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 5th Edition, RoutledgeFalmer, New York 2005, p. 161, 162.

4 Billy L. Turney - George P. Robb, *Research in Education: An Introduction*, Dryden Press Inc, United States 1971, p. 61.

## **How History Should Be Taught?**

For many years history has been taught improperly. Many teachers were contented with skimming surfaces, and transmitting the past in the form of names, dates and events to be memorized. Later, all the learners had to do was to rattle the information they had learnt by heart. The teaching of history needs to be improved with the application of innovative methods and techniques.

### **1 Linking the Past to the Present and the Future**

The desire to dive into the depths of the past, to explore and unfold its overlaps, often stems from human contact with current realities. The left lasting imprints of the Ottomans in Algeria, for instance, might raise the question: why did the Ottomans come to Algeria? a question whose answer will come only by deleting time barriers and bridging the present and the past. Furthermore, learners need to see the use or the worth of what they are being taught. Hence, the question: What was the influence of Ottomans on the Algerian society? is likely to make learners more engaged and motivated, driven back into the past by an ardent curiosity to find out components that stack up with their own identity.

Furthermore, history is very rich in experiences and lessons. A deep understanding of what happened, why it happened, the influencing factors, the results and eventual effects will contribute to the acquisition of an analytical capacity and reasoned judgment that will enable one not only to understand the past but also make decisions and choose trends as well. Yet, it must be emphasized that one should not only understand the past, but also all those factors and mechanisms which influenced its development. Such direction will not only enable one to learn about the past and understand the present but it will also allow one to better administer the present and plan for the future by sensing history upon its change and continuity perspectives.

### **2 Teaching History for Citizenship**

One of the most important goals of education is to build character and courage and bring up good individuals with an established set of morals and virtues. History offers a wide range of personalities, deeds and actions, and provides an invaluable array of patterns to ingrain integrity, compassion and good manners. Sailing through centuries, reincarnating diverse figures, experiencing different emotions, assisting times of war and peace, is likely to help learners bond intentions and actions to consequences; an evaluation

of which will help them to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong, what is a priority or a subservience in specific situations.

Studying national historical figures and examining their noble and brave actions probably will serve to sustain the spirit of pride in one's national identity, strengthen the sense of belonging and stirs the desire for distinction and leadership to serve the country; therewith, construct a harmonious and cohesive society. On the other hand, researching international history will, undoubtedly, stretch bridges between nations and promote tolerance towards other people's cultures.

### **3 History and Critical Thinking**

History is interestingly unstable and apt to change with time passing. For lack of evidence, apparition of new resources, falsified information, developments of events offering a new space for a different interpretation and other reasons, history can be constructed and reconstructed over and over. History should not be dealt with as only a simple sequenced collection of information. Rather, critical thinking ought to be strongly encouraged among both teachers and learners.

One needs to start with the evaluation of the resources; finding out answers to questions about the type of the document, who the author is, his/her morals and biases, the audience to whom the document was meant, the reason for which it was produced, the place and the time of its production will help understand its message and evaluate its accuracy. Then, it is crucial to underscore what is paramount and what seems less significant to the author. One needs to consider the topic and supplying sentences in the text, as well as the kind of words the author uses, the repetition of certain items, the tone of the text, the emotional impressions it emanates and the conclusions the author ends up with. More importantly, one needs to identify not only what is apparent, but also what might be underlying and kept unsaid between the lines.

When teaching history, it is advisable to dismantle the material to be studied into its small components for a more accurate examination. Efforts should be made, after that to detect the causal-effect relationships, one of the most important analyses to understand how different items relate. It is very useful, also, to disclose what changed and what continued, where the flow was natural and where it was earthshaking, marking the turning points in history. Change and continuity help us identify historical periods, and inform us of the factors that engender change or evanescence and those leading to continuity.

Further, when teaching history, educators will need to justify or set forth evidence to support stances. History, then, should be taught using strong and rational arguments which will lead to a boosted conclusion in a logical way. One needs to use clear relevant statements, well defined terms, and avoid generalizations, contradictory claims, emotional views, erroneous, reductive or circular reasoning and flimsy conclusions.<sup>5</sup>

### **Teaching History out of the Box**

**A Teaching Tools:** History can be taught via a variety of tools and means. Teachers preferences generally depend on the topic, the teacher's objective, the learner's level, the class size and the time allocated. Among the numerous tools and means that proved their efficiency, we have:

**A1 Printed Resources Books:** Magazines, newspapers, personal diaries, biographies and autobiographies offer a wide range of information about the past and help the disclosure of items' connections and the construction of rational narratives.

**A2 Theatrical Performance:** History encompasses the study of many events, struggles, characters and speeches. Encouraging learners to portray figures from the historical era they are studying will motivate them to read about those personalities and understand the kind of strife they went through and the different conditions and factors that influenced the course of events around them.

**A3 Teaching History Through Movies:** The success and popularity earned by the famous Turkish TV series 'MuhtesemYüzyil' throughout the Arab world, as well as similar successes realized by many other history movies amongst the elderly and the young, the literate and illiterate, invites us to consider seriously the utility of teaching history through movies. The latter provide visuals that attract the attention of learners and allow them to question, learn and reflect. However, teachers must be very careful about the accuracy of the materials they choose.

**A4 Teaching History with Museums:** A museum with guidance by well informed docents becomes one of the most exciting ways to bring back history to life through multiple channels; an idea well conveyed through *Night at the Museum*, an American comedy written by Robert Ben Garant, directed by Shawn Levy, and released by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox on 22 Decem-

<sup>5</sup> Michael Edmond - Jennifer A. Hull - Erika L., Janik - Keli Rylance, *History – Critical Thinking, Wisconsin Historical Society*, Madison 2005, p. 15.

ber 2006, with Ben Stiller as the principal actor (the museum's watchman). Displaying a number of rare and precious objects and artifacts, museums link learners to the historical periods they are studying. Paintings, historical photos, maps, specimens, statues, documents and other objects offer learners a journey through time to meet past figures, discover aspects of people's lives, and experience different war and peace times.

Museums offer the opportunity to examine and reflect on the design, purpose and value of diverse items. As a case in point, the Museum of khdaouadj El Amia located in Algiers brings about many memories and contemplation. The building in itself goes back to the Ottoman period in Algeria; it was offered by Khaznadji Hassan Pasha, treasurer of the Ottoman King in the era of Dey Mohamed Ben Othman, to his daughter khdaouadj El Amia. The building incloses many tools, potteries, weaving works, wood sculpture, and other items reflecting parts of people's life at that time (see appendices A, B, C, D).

**A5 Paintings:** In addition to the aesthetic pleasure they offer, paintings preserve and report a life style and recount stories emerging from war scenes, peace times, palaces and popular alleys (see appendix E).

**A6 Legal Contracts Represent:** Agreements between two or more persons or entities with specific terms. These include: marriage and divorce contracts, as well as real estate contracts and commercial contracts, family, crafts and incomes. The Department of the Ottoman Archives at the Algerian National Archives in Algiers contain, according to the archives office, about 12.000 document; many of which- real estate contracts- are affixed to each other in the form of rolls suggesting a far bigger number of the documents available when taken individually. These contracts constitute invaluable primary resources to learn about all aspects of life in Algeria during the Ottoman rule: social, economical, political and military. Thanks to these scripts we know about the duration of the Ottoman rule in Algeria and which is more than 3 centuries.<sup>6</sup>In addition, these scripts tell us about the various artisans and the taxation system in that time<sup>7</sup>.They also tell us about the different contracts and dealings between people relating to: buying, selling, marriage, divorce, wills, gifts, lending, inheritance, conflicts and many other things.<sup>8</sup>

6 خليفة حماش، الأسرة في مدينة الجزائر خلال العهد العثماني، رسالة مقدمة لنيل دكتوراه الدولة في التاريخ الحديث 1700 2006 مقارنة اجتماعية اقتصادية - 7

1830

8 أطروحة لنيل شهادة دكتوراه الدولة في التاريخ الحديث، جامعة الجزائر، كلية العلوم الانسانية، قسم التاريخ 2001



**A7 Teaching History with Architecture:** Historical buildings can bring many elements under examination: the construction style and material, the building purpose, the owners, political, social and economical tenure of the owners, how they lived, worked and connected with their neighbours; every building represents an important segment of the people of a city in that time. Al Casbah, an old city in Algiers, reached its pinnacle under the Ottomans; the way it was constructed tells a lot about its people and the way they lived. Buildings in Al Casbah are firmly taut, one to the other, on both sides of very narrow passages reflecting community cohesion (see appendix F). At the interior, a well admired civilization manifests in every angle of the houses: The heating and sewer systems were well calculated; the aeration of the houses relies on open ceilings linking one house to the other up till the terrace; lustres working with oil and water system are still hanging in many houses (see appendix G); the star and the hand imprints on the outside houses' doors remind us of how people used to distinguish a Jewish from a Muslim house; the windows style preventing the appearance of women (see appendix H); the *sgiffa*, that very small room at the entrance of the house where a man not allowed into the house can sit and wait, tells us about the Ottoman accustomed code of polite behavior among the people of that society ( see appendix I); warehouses tell us about how goods were stored; pictures of pirate ships on the walls' marble mirror the pride of powerful men who could, once, control the passage of world ships in the Mediterranean sea (see appendix J); those large courts with fountains in the middle, arcades, and well sculptured pillars and wooden porches, and a lot of other details, retrace the lives of many people and reflect a sense of a well esteemed civilization (see appendix K).

## **B Teaching Practices**

**B1 Story Telling:** the oldest form of teaching which still raises interest and eagerness to read books about events and figures, as it attracts students' full attention especially when managed using the right tone, gestures, words and pauses leaving space for learners interactivity.

**B2 Class Discussions and Essay Writing:** an important way to engage learners using guiding questions, or asking them to reflect on a picture or a video. Depending on the objective of the activity, learners might demonstrate their understanding of the facts through class discussions and essay writing, as they can learn to analyze synthesize and present their evaluation of the events through strong arguments and rational logic.

**B3 Teaching History Through Research:** research is one of the best ways to teach history. Learners understand better when they are turned into researchers working on subjects falling in their sphere of interest. Generating the sensation of responsibility to find the truth upon the learners, and provoking the spirit of competition amongst them and invoking their sense of challenge, will boost them to dive into the deep layers of history, look for the most significant details, analyze and synthesize them and make evaluations to reach a stand based on solid rational logic.

**B4 Activities with Maps:** maps provide a good deal of information including: historical locations, concentrations, routes and movements. Educators can encourage learners to locate the precedent items on blank maps either by labelling, colouring or using magnets and stickers which would create fun and facilitate memorization. Maps can be used, also, to infer and deduce conclusions. Using such technique to display the spread of the Ottomans in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries stretching across large parts of today's Asia, Europe, and Algeria, learners will be able to infer about the power of the Ottoman Empire and how long it took to draw its borders.

**B5 Teaching History Through Timelines:** timelines are used to display the events in a chronological order that helps them not only to memorize these events easily, but also, to understand how they developed and detect the causality relationship between different incidents.

**B6 Communicating Knowledge Through Technical Geography:** The usefulness of technical geography lies in the fact that it helps convey research information and clarifications founded upon empirical experiences in a very concise and accurate way using: bar charts, repetitive stands and relative departments (see appendices L , M).

**B7 Inferring From Pictures, Dates And Statistics:** learners can derive many information from presented pictures, statistics or days concerning, for instance, prosperity of nations during certain historical ages or atrocities of wars.

## **Conclusion**

History is an integral part of human existence, and teaching it is a necessity not an option. It is the memory of nations, a key to the present and a look at the future. However, transmitting it upon the traditional ways of teaching in the midst of all the transformations which affected even the smallest details in the way people think, feel and deal with the surrounding world, will be a waste of energy and time.

Under these circumstances, educators need to consider the new means provided by the recent technological evolution and the changes which the teaching methods have undergone placing, mainly, the learner at the center of teaching and learning process and giving him/her more responsibility upon his/her own learning. A variety of new teaching methods, techniques and tools are available and can be applied. All teachers need is to adapt to the changes for better practices and results, and the teaching of history will, certainly, blossom and drop fruit.

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الانسانية، قسم التاريخ، 2001

## Appendices

### Appendix 1



Potteries dating back to the Ottoman period in Algiers exhibited at  
Khdaouadj El Amia Museum

### Appendix 2



Device for drawing water dating back to the Ottoman period in  
Algiers exhibited at Khdaouadj El Amia Museum

**Appendix 3**

Bed dating back to the Ottoman period in Algiers exhibited at Khdaouadj El Amia Museum.

**Appendix 4**

Pirate wooden trunk dating back to the Ottoman period in Algiers exhibited at Khdaouadj El Amia Museum

**Appendix 5**

The Water Porter painting exhibited in the National Museum of Fine Arts in Algiers. (the painting recounts a story of a friendship between the famous painter Hippolyte Lazerges and the water porter named Aami Sebti. The disappearance of the latter pushed the artist to search for him. The news of the porter's death saddened Hippolyte immensely that he decided to pay tribute to him through this painting. He even afforded to bury him when he heard they would use his corpus in science if nobody would reclaim it).

**Appendix 6**

A passage in Al Casbah city

**Appendix 7**



Luster working with oil and water in a house in Al Casbah dating back to the Ottoman Period in Algiers

**Appendix 8**



A window of a house in Al Casbah dating back to the Ottoman period



### Appendix 9



Sgiffa in Khdaouadj Al Amia Museum

### Appendix 9



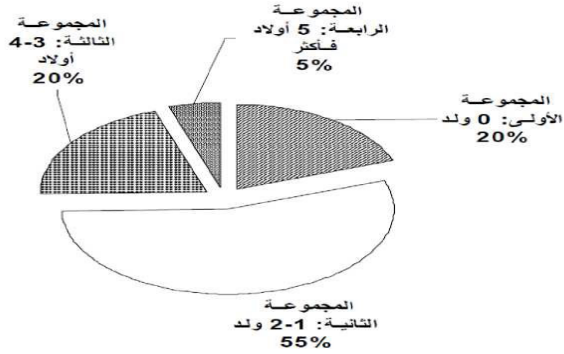
A wall in Mustapha Pacha Museums with pictures of pirate ships

### Appendix 10



Mustapha Pacha Museum in Al Casbah, Algiers

### Appendix 11

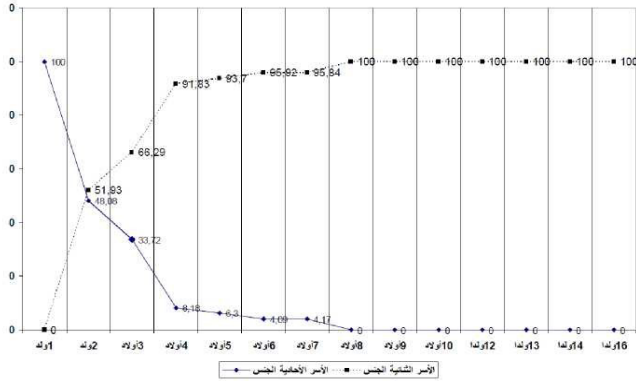


An illustration of reproduction distribution of women by numerical groups for children ( 4 groups) in Algiers during the Ottoman Period as it appears in :

خليفة حماش الأسرة في مدينة الجزائر خلال العهد العثماني, رسالة مقدمة لنيل دكتوراه الدولة في التاريخ الحديث, جامعة منتوري قسنطينة

كلية العلوم الانسانية و العلوم الاجتماعية, قسم التاريخ, 2006, ص 161

## Appendix 12



An illustration of the distribution of childbearing among women by numerical groups (two groups) in Algiers during the Ottoman Period as it appears in:

خليفة حماش الأسرة في مدينة الجزائر خلال العهد العثماني، رسالة مقدمة لنيل دكتوراه الدولة في التاريخ الحديث، جامعة منتوري قسنطينة، كلية العلوم الانسانية و العلوم الاجتماعية، قسم التاريخ، 2006

