# Historical Significance

## Suggested Subject Levels: 9 and 10

## Subject: History

## Suggested Ontario Curriculum Expectations:

* **Communities, Local, National, and Global**
  + Identify contributions to Canada’s multicultural society by regional, linguistic, ethnocultural, and religious communities (e.g., Aboriginal peoples, Franco-Ontarians, Métis, Black Canadians, Doukhobors, Mennonites, local immigrant communities);
* **Citizenship and Heritage**
  + Assess how individual Canadians have contributed to the development of Canada and the country’s emerging sense of identity;
* **Methods of Historical Inquiry and Communication**
  + Formulate questions on topics and issues in the history of Canada since 1914, and use appropriate methods of historical research to locate, gather, evaluate, and organize relevant information from a variety of sources;

## Topic: Benchmarks of Historical Thinking

## Content: Historical Significance

## Working Definition:

“Significance depends upon one’s perspective and purpose. A historical person or event can acquire significance if we, the historians, can link it to larger trends and stories that reveal something important for us today.”[[1]](#footnote-0)

## Goals (Aims and Outcomes):

Students should be expected to develop understanding of the term “historical significance” through scaffolding and independent tasks.

## Objectives (Performance and Behavioural Indicators):

Student should also be able to demonstrate how an event, person or development is significant by showing how it is embedded in a larger, meaningful narrative.

## Materials (Aids/AV/Technology):

Computers with Internet Access

## Introductory Activity (Focusing Event):

The teacher can introduce the concept of Historical Significance to build on students’ prior knowledge and guide their thinking.[[2]](#footnote-1)

To explain this topic clearer ask the students to look up well-known figures whom the teacher is certain has been included in the learning resources available (typically, figures such as Champlain or Wolfe) in their textbooks. Following the search, students should be asked to look for himself or herself, or a family member in that same textbook.

In discussion with peers, or in conference with the teacher, students can be asked to brainstorm reasons why the author of their textbook included certain topics and not their relatives. Look at the topics in the table of contents or index and ask them to decide why these were included.

## Development Activity (Modeling/Explanation/Demonstration):

The purpose of this activity should be to develop students’ understanding that, despite history, despite being a record of our past, cannot include aspect and all things. Certain events are recalled and retold because they are deemed more significant than others. A historian must make judgments regarding what to include and what not to include in a historical text.

Each student should be asked to create a timeline of the learning experiences and memories within the classroom since the beginning of the school year. This activity can also work happily in small groups. Timelines can include significant events, people, or ideas.

Following completion of the reflective activity, a class timeline can be created. Certain events included by some will inevitably be excluded by others in this activity. Other events will be common to many timelines. The students can discuss or journal their understandings of the implications of this selective process for thinking about history.

### Follow-up Activity:

Students can form different groups, or join partners, and share their timelines in a more intimate settings. Where one student has excluded an event that the other thinks should have been included, the latter student must attempt to persuade his or her peer that the excluded event was historically significant in the context of the classroom. The former student can make an argument explaining his or her choice to exclude an event on the basis of its historical insignificance in the classroom.

## Practice (Guided/Monitored Activity):

Students can be asked to write a short description and explanation of the concept of historical significance. The audience for this written explanation will be students in a middle school history class or younger students in an elementary or primary social studies course.

As a class, the Benchmarks criteria for historical significance can be reviewed and a list compiled for easy reference.

Key ideas include the understanding that historically significant phenomena:

1) Result in deep, long lasting change that influences many people.

2) Reveal something important about the past.

3) Shed light on contemporary issues or is relevant to us today.

4) Or is part of a larger, meaningful narrative.

For further information, or as an extension students can be asked to read and reflect on the text: “What is Historical Significance?” by Stephane Levesque. Levesque breaks down the concept of significance in terms of other concepts: profundity, quantity, durability, and relevance. (In folder, titled: “What is Historical Significance”)

## Independent Practice (Relation to STONES social history research):

Students can be asked to read the text on the Black Community in Kingston.[[3]](#footnote-2) Take the tour online or, if possible, in person. A class trip to the sites might be possible.

Students should be asked to jot down, as they emerge, thoughts or feelings provoked by the tour text or sites. They should be asking themselves what the events, individuals, concepts, artifacts and places depicted in the text/tour meant in relation to the past activities on continuity and change in history.

Students can be asked to respond to and present an oral response to the following query: Out of all the events (i.e. American Revolution, Peace Treaty of 1783) described in the “Origins of the Early Blacks in Kingston” which one had the greatest historical significance for the development of the Black Community in Kingston?

The students could also identify events in the history of the city, province, or country that they were surprised not to see included in the social history text.

Alternatively, students could be asked to make an argument explaining which individual person, of all those people described in the Kingston Black History Tour, which one was the most historically significant?

A model assessment tool for such an activity is included in the folder under the title “Rubric for Historical Significance.”

## Accommodations (Differentiated Instruction)

Extra time can be afforded to students.

## Checking for Ongoing Understanding (Formative Assessment/Feedback Opportunities)

Students can journal, following each activity within the units of study, a reflective entry considering their ongoing understanding of the benchmark for historical thinking, as well as its implications for active, participatory citizenship in contemporary contexts.

Teachers can take the opportunity to read these journals and adjust the lessons / course of study to the pace, concerns, and questions raised in the entries.

Student and teacher journals can be shared in online space using a blogging tool such as blogger.com

## Closure (Wrapping up Activities):

Students can be asked to select an event or individual from the Kingston Black History tour and create a concept web to link this person or events to other significant people and happenings at the time, locally or globally. How, in other words, do historically significant event connect—conceptually, thematically, or chronologically—with each other? A model template included in the folder titled “Historical Significance Activity Sheet” might be a useful tool for this activity.

1. Definition from: http://www.histori.ca/benchmarks/concepts/establish.php [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. A very appropriate model lesson, including supplementary materials particular to the subject, written by Scott Anderson and Christina Lanteigne is available at: http://www.histori.ca/benchmarks/tasks/view.php?taskId=69 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Downloaded, or viewed online, at http://stoneskingston.ca/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)