Welcome

100 years on from one of the bloodiest and most controversial military battles in history, our cover story for this term takes inspiration from the Battle of the Somme. Are you a Somme expert? Enter our competition on the back page, and find out!

With a brand new year, comes a brand new look: for the first time, we’re incorporating all of our Secondary History news and useful information into this newsletter. To start things off, Michael Maddison considers the specification change for history at GCSE, and offers his top ten tips on choosing the right exam board and specification for your students.

Have you already made the decision about which specification you will teach for the 2016 GCSEs? We’d love to hear what has swayed you. Get in touch by emailing me directly at camilla.rock@oup.com.

Best wishes

Camilla

History team

The 100 year anniversary of the Battle of the Somme

‘Bloody’ battles are what people remember most about the First World War. One such battle is the Battle of the Somme, perhaps the bloodiest battle of the whole war, and this year marks its 100 year anniversary.

At 7:30am on 1 July 1916, the Allies began an attack on enemy trenches that were positioned near the River Somme in France. The following battle lasted for 140 days. The purpose of the battle was to completely capture the German trenches at Beaumont Hamel. Before they started, the British and French spent a week heavily firing shells and detonating mines to destroy the German line. The idea was that, when it came to the start of the battle, the Germans would already be vastly weakened.

The reality was that the German trenches were well designed and had numerous deep shelters. The German forces had also learned from previous attacks: major bombardments usually ended just before the British troops went over the top. So, when the week-long shelling stopped, the Germans rushed from their shelters, put machine guns in position, and were ready and waiting. On the first day, the British Army suffered 60,000 casualties, a figure which rose to 415,000 by the end of the battle, alongside 200,000 French casualties. 600,000 German troops were killed or wounded. Beaumont Hamel was successfully captured in November 1916.

Taken from Oxford’s depth study: Why Remember the First World War?

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An open letter to all history subject leaders

Dear subject leader

As we approach half term, you and your colleagues will be contemplating a number of issues not least of which will be which GCSE specification to adopt. Those who lead departments in schools which have a three year GCSE will already have had to start with one of the draft specifications. At the time of writing (end of January 2016), all but one of the draft history specifications have been approved by Ofqual. As a result, you will now know whether much has changed in the final specification as opposed to the draft. The specification that remains a draft is OCR’s specification B. So if you are teaching this course you will have to wait a little longer until the approved specification is released.

As you compare the various specifications on offer and come to a decision as to which one to adopt, it is worth considering how and why we have come to this position. Read on for my background to the changes and checklist of the points I think you should consider before you make your final choice of specification.

It’s going to be a busy year and I hope it goes well. Good luck!

Yours faithfully

Michael Maddison

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He was an HMI from 2006 to 2015, and National Lead for History for Ofsted from 2008 to 2015.

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How did we end up with such fundamental change?

The background to explain how we have come to have such fundamental specification change for history at GCSE is a complex one. All I want to do here though is to provide you with the big picture. Essentially there are three major pieces in the jigsaw:

- The first piece of the jigsaw is the long-standing concern in England at the narrow range of topics studied at GCSE and the increasing concern that more and more students were studying little else than twentieth century history during and beyond the last year of their Key Stage 3 course, whether that be Year 8 or Year 9. In the latter years of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century, such criticisms had become increasingly common in the media.

- To this must be added a second jigsaw piece, namely the evidence from Ofsted’s subject inspections. Amongst many things, this showed that most students who take history at GCSE and most who take history at A level study modern world history. Following the report History for all (2011), the inspectorate argued for a broader history curriculum for all students and especially at GCSE level. In addition, many teachers also commented that there was too much modern history.

- The third piece of the jigsaw was the arrival of Michael Gove as Secretary of State for Education in 2010. The new Education Secretary was determined that more students would study history at GCSE and that a review of the criteria was required to ensure a greater emphasis upon developing breadth in historical knowledge. The review started in 2012 and the new GCSE subject criteria were published in 2014. It is these criteria that the Awarding Bodies have used to devise their new specifications. If you have not looked at them, they are worth a read as they help to explain what underpins the specifications that have been developed.

Visit: www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-history
Preparing for the new GCSEs in history
by Michael Maddison

Top Ten Tips

- Of immediate concern for you though is that final decision as to which specification to adopt. Here are my top ten tips to consider before you make that final decision.

1. Do not assume that familiar themes in the specifications have the same emphasis. The differences between the new and the old specifications are profound; the similarities are limited.

2. Compare the specifications carefully. Consider which depth, period and thematic studies produce the best course for you and your students. Think about which historic environment proposal is most appropriate and weigh up the assessment structures so that you choose the course that will suit your students best.

3. Consider the relationship with Key Stage 3: the impact upon what is studied and how it is studied. Whatever specification you adopt, you will have to review your Key Stage 3 schemes of work so that you can ensure that Key Stage 3 is an effective foundation. Perhaps it’s time to think in terms of a five year course for every student entering Year 7.

4. If you work in an 11-18 school, consider the impact of your choices at GCSE on your A level courses that you started teaching last year – would it help to make your GCSE courses a foundation for A level?

5. If you teach a two-year GCSE, don’t rush your decision. Consider all your options carefully – there is still time.

6. If you teach a three-year GCSE – with not all specifications fully approved, tread carefully.


8. Consider your context – what is best for your students?

9. Take into consideration government policy: how might Progress 8 impact on your choice of course and what will be the impact of a large majority of students taking History or Geography at GCSE?

10. Consider how what you teach at GCSE in history will contribute to highly significant whole school issues such as students’ social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, the promotion of British values, and the prevention of radicalisation and extremism.

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**Oxford AQA GCSE History**

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For your chance to win, simply email me at camilla.rock@oup.com with your answer to the question below:

From the start of the Battle of the Somme in July 1916 to the end in the following November, how many kilometres did the Allied trench lines manage to advance?

a. 8km  b. 12km  c. 22km

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Congratulations...

...to Michelle Davidson, who teaches History at Giggleswick School in North Yorkshire. She is the winner of two great History books, having correctly answered our previous competition question: ‘What is the meaning of Senlac Hill in Norman?’, with ‘Lake of Blood’.

We hope you enjoy them!

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Collect all four!

We are pleased to be able to give away all four timeline posters, one to accompany each book in our KS3 History by Aaron Wilkes series. Designed to fit together for your classroom wall, these posters will help your KS3 students understand chronology. Simply email me at camilla.rock@oup.com to request your copies, while stock lasts!