Historical Thinking Skills

Skill 1: Historical Causation
Historical thinking involves the ability to identify, analyze, and evaluate the relationships among multiple historical causes and effects, distinguishing between those that are long-term and proximate, and among coincidence, causation, and correlation.

**Proficient students should be able to ...**
- Compare causes and/or effects, including between short-term and long-term effects.
- Analyze and evaluate the interaction of multiple causes and/or effects.
- Assess historical contingency by distinguishing among coincidence, causation, and correlation, as well as critiquing existing interpretations of cause and effect.

Skill 2: Patterns of Continuity and Change Over Time
Historical thinking involves the ability to recognize, analyze, and evaluate the dynamics of historical continuity and change over periods of time of varying lengths, as well as relating these patterns to larger historical processes or themes.

**Proficient students should be able to ...**
- Analyze and evaluate historical patterns of continuity and change over time.
- Connect patterns of continuity and change over time to larger historical processes or themes.

Skill 3: Periodization
Historical thinking involves the ability to describe, analyze, evaluate, and construct models that historians use to organize history into discrete periods. To accomplish this periodization of history, historians identify turning points and recognize that the choice of specific dates gives a higher value to one narrative, region, or group than to other narratives, regions, or groups. How one defines historical periods depends on what one considers most significant — political, economic, social, cultural, or environmental factors. Changing periodization can change an historical narrative. Moreover, historical thinking involves being aware of how the circumstances and contexts of a historian’s work might shape his or her choices about periodization.

**Proficient students should be able to ...**
- Explain ways that historical events and processes can be organized within blocks of time.
- Analyze and evaluate competing models of periodization of United States history.

Skill 4: Comparison
Historical thinking involves the ability to describe, compare, and evaluate multiple historical developments within one society, one or more developments across or between different societies, and in various chronological and geographical contexts. It also involves the ability to identify, compare, and evaluate multiple perspectives on a given historical experience.

**Proficient students should be able to ...**
- Compare related historical developments and processes across place, time, and/or different societies, or within one society.
- Explain and evaluate multiple and differing perspectives on a given historical phenomenon.

Skill 5: Contextualization
Historical thinking involves the ability to connect historical events and processes to specific circumstances of time and place and to broader regional, national, or global processes.

**Proficient students should be able to ...**
- Explain and evaluate ways in which specific historical phenomena, events, or processes connect to broader regional, national, or global processes occurring at the same time.
- Explain and evaluate ways in which a phenomenon, event, or process connects to other, similar historical phenomena across time and place.
Skill 6: Historical Argumentation
Historical thinking involves the ability to define and frame a question about the past and to address that question through the construction of an argument. A plausible and persuasive argument requires a clear, comprehensive, and analytical thesis, supported by relevant historical evidence — not simply evidence that supports a preferred or preconceived position. In addition, argumentation involves the capacity to describe, analyze, and evaluate the arguments of others in light of available evidence.

Proficient students should be able to …
- Analyze commonly accepted historical arguments and explain how an argument has been constructed from historical evidence.
- Construct convincing interpretations through analysis of disparate, relevant historical evidence.
- Evaluate and synthesize conflicting historical evidence to construct persuasive historical arguments.

Skill 7: Appropriate Use of Relevant Historical Evidence
Historical thinking involves the ability to describe and evaluate evidence about the past from diverse sources (including written documents, works of art, archaeological artifacts, oral traditions, and other primary sources) and requires the students to pay attention to the content, authorship, purpose, format, and audience of such sources. It involves the capacity to extract useful information, make supportable inferences, and draw appropriate conclusions from historical evidence, while also noting the context in which the evidence was produced and used, recognizing its limitations and assessing the points of view it reflects.

Proficient students should be able to …
- Analyze features of historical evidence such as audience, purpose, point of view, format, argument, limitations, and context germane to the evidence considered.
- Based on analysis and evaluation of historical evidence, make supportable inferences and draw appropriate conclusions.

Skill 8: Interpretation
Historical thinking involves the ability to describe, analyze, evaluate, and construct diverse interpretations of the past, and being aware of how particular circumstances and contexts in which individual historians work and write also shape their interpretation of past events. Historical interpretation requires analyzing evidence, reasoning, determining the context, and evaluating points of view found in both primary and secondary sources.

Proficient students should be able to …
- Analyze diverse historical interpretations.
- Evaluate how historians’ perspectives influence their interpretations and how models of historical interpretation change over time.

Skill 9: Synthesis
Historical thinking involves the ability to develop meaningful and persuasive new understandings of the past by applying all of the other historical thinking skills, by drawing appropriately on ideas and methods from different fields of inquiry or disciplines, and by creatively fusing disparate, relevant, and sometimes contradictory evidence from primary sources and secondary works. Additionally, synthesis may involve applying insights about the past to other historical contexts or circumstances, including the present.

Proficient students should be able to …
- Draw appropriately on ideas and methods from different fields of inquiry or disciplines.
- Combine disparate, sometimes contradictory evidence from primary sources and secondary works in order to create a persuasive understanding of the past.
- Apply insights about the past to other historical contexts or circumstances, including the present.