

# Historical Concepts and National Examinations: Have O-Level Structured-Essay Questions Encouraged the Teaching of Historical Concepts?

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## Introduction

Broad changes are afoot in recent years for Singapore's history education community. Over the past three years, the Humanities Branch of the Curriculum Planning and Development Division (CPDD) at the Ministry of Education (MOE) has gradually prepared teachers for the implementation of the new inquiry-driven Upper Secondary O- and N-Level History syllabus. As the main recommended pedagogy in the 2013 syllabus, historical inquiry promotes active student involvement and provides opportunities for students to cultivate the knowledge, skills and dispositions that are essential to historical thinking and understanding (Singapore Ministry of Education [MOE], 2012, p. 12). Continuing work begun as early as 2005 by the Humanities and Social Sciences Education (HSSE) group at the National Institute of Education (NIE), CPDD officers and their local and external education consultants have endeavoured to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge to carry out historical inquiry in their classrooms.

In conjunction with an emphasis on historical inquiry, CPDD has also made explicit the teaching of historical concepts in order to bolster students' historical thinking and understanding. Historical concepts are

essentially those concepts that "provide the basis of historical thinking" (Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness, 2013). Distilled from the works of noted Western history education scholars such as Peter Lee, these concepts "help students understand how historians work and how historical knowledge is constructed" (MOE, 2012, p. 35). As Singapore's history education community mobilises to raise the standards of history education at all levels, different parts of the conversation are currently taking place at NIE, MOE, and many schools that offer History as an elective or full subject to their students. The conversations may differ, but almost all are focused on at least one of several key questions:

1. Why is it important for teachers to help their students understand historical concepts?
2. What are the historical concepts students should grasp to understand History as a discipline?
3. How do teachers facilitate the development of these historical concepts in the history classroom?
4. How do teachers assess students' understanding of these historical concepts?

5. Are students with a strong grasp of these historical concepts likely to perform better for summative examinations such as the O-Level examination?

Each of these questions warrants real discussion and deliberation, but this article intends to add to a meaningful discussion of question number 5 above. While it is beyond the scope of this article to link classroom practices that develop second-order concepts in history to student results on the O-Level examinations, an analysis of the Structured Essay Questions (SEQs) in Section B may be useful in suggesting which of the second-order historical concepts have traditionally been assessed in Elective History examinations at O-Level between 2002-2012<sup>1</sup>.

In order to carry out the analysis described above, the three question-set options that appeared on each of the examinations were examined, and each question was classified according to the specific second-order historical concept implicit in the question. The classification system framing the analysis was based on the eight historical concepts detailed in the Upper Secondary History Teaching and Learning Guide (TLG) (the detailed classification of the individual questions appears in Appendix A). Building on the preliminary analysis of individual questions, the Assessment Objectives from the O-Level History syllabi from 2001, 2007, and 2013 were examined to explain past changes in the types of questions asked, as well as to suggest ways teachers could use questions to encourage the teaching and learning of second-order historical concepts.

There are two main goals for this article:

1. To contribute to the conversation on the extent to which SEQs in the national examinations may point to the importance of students understanding second-order historical concepts.

2. To propose ways to construct SEQs with historical concepts in mind, so that students are given the opportunity to respond to a variety of questions that focus on different historical concepts.

### What are the Historical Concepts?

The new Upper Secondary TLG published by CPDD articulated “eight historical concepts that underpin the study of History” (MOE, 2012, p. 35). These eight historical concepts, drawn primarily from the works of British history education researchers such as Peter Lee, Rosalyn Ashby, and Alaric Dickinson, “help students understand how historians work and how historical knowledge is constructed” (MOE, 2012, p. 35). It is noted that a strong understanding of these concepts enables students to “develop good disciplinary understanding that exemplifies the Qualities of a History Learner” introduced in the O-Level History syllabus implemented in 2013 (MOE, 2012, p. 35).

The eight historical concepts described in the TLG are listed below with a brief explanation of each. These definitions were summarised from the TLG, and more complete definitions can be found in the TLG<sup>ii</sup>:

#### 1. Chronology

- a. *Chronology* is fundamentally an overview of events over time.
- b. A strong grasp of the concept of chronology enables students to identify and understand timeframes, changes and continuities, and causal links of factors and events.

#### 2. Evidence

- a. Sources are traces of the past that can provide potential *evidence* to explain events that happened; these sources and

traces only become evidence when questioned and evaluated by historians.

- b. A strong grasp of the concept of evidence enables students to understand how sources are analysed, evaluated and used to answer historical questions.

### 3. Accounts

- a. *Accounts* are essentially historians' reconstructions of events that happened in the past.
- b. A strong grasp of the concept of accounts enables students to understand that different accounts of the same historical event naturally exist because different accounts address different questions about the past.

### 4. Cause and Effect

- a. 'Cause and effect' or *causation* is basically an understanding of why events happened, and why they happened the way they did.
- b. A strong grasp of the concept of causation enables students to identify the factors/reasons that led to an event or action, and it also enables students to assess the relative importance of these factors/reasons in leading to that event or action.

### 5. Change and Continuity

- a. *Change and continuity* refers to the description or evaluation of developments in human societies across historical periods.
- b. A strong grasp of the concept of change and continuity enables students to assess the things that change and the

things that stay the same for human societies across time.

### 6. Significance

- a. Historical *significance* refers to the assessment of why an event/person/idea/issue mattered in that it had major consequences throughout history.
- b. A strong grasp of the concept of significance enables students to understand that historical events themselves are not significant, but rather, significance is assigned based on criteria (usually related to the consequences of the event) chosen by different historians.

### 7. Empathy

- a. *Historical Empathy* refers to the ability of students to take on the perspective of historical actors in order to understand the way these actors viewed their world at that point in time.
- b. A strong grasp of historical empathy allows students to understand why historical actors made the decisions they did.

### 8. Diversity

- a. Among other things, *diversity* in history refers to the diverse interpretations of the past that exist because people's experiences differed based on their individual or group circumstances.
- b. A strong grasp of diversity in history enables students to understand that many different perspectives, experiences, and interpretations exist – this is what makes the study of the past so complex.

The teaching, learning, and assessment of these historical concepts are currently prominent topics in education systems all over the world. For example, The Historical Thinking Project (HTP) based in Canada hopes to “foster a new approach to history education – with the potential to shift how teachers teach and how students learn, in line with recent international research on history learning” (Seixas & Colyer, 2013, p. 2). Underlying this shift in Canadian history education are six main historical concepts based on work by Peter Seixas and others that have significant overlap with the eight listed in the TLG (historical significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspective-taking, and the ethical dimension of history). While the exact terminology may differ, history education researchers and scholars worldwide generally focus on some close variation of these as the basis for historical thinking and understanding.

While many history educators would probably agree that developing students’ understanding of these concepts is beneficial for understanding the discipline, the question remains as to how such an understanding would improve students’ performance when responding to questions in summative examinations. As noted on page 217 of the TLG, History assessment is “integral to the learning process and must be closely aligned with curricular objectives, content and pedagogy” and that the “assessment should facilitate meaningful learning anchored in the discipline” (MOE, 2012, p. 217). Assessment as referenced in the TLG was conceived in much broader terms, but it certainly included both summative assessment as well as those that are formative in design or intent. Peck and Sexias (2008) note that “assessment sends powerful messages about what learning is valued” (p. 1018). Therefore, if assessment is frequently the tail that wags the dog in education, do Singapore national examinations require a strong grasp of second-order historical concepts?

### **Analysis of O-Level SEQs**

My examination of the SEQs of the History Elective of Combined Humanities from the O-Level examinations in the years 2002-2012 revealed that almost all of the questions assessed “cause and effect” or causation, in some way. Approximately 91% of the questions – sub-questions (a) and (b) – dealt with cause and effect or consequence<sup>iii</sup>. It is important to note that even if a specific question seemed to deal with aspects of consequence, effect, outcomes, results, agency, etc., almost all still used causation as a reference point.

This should perhaps not be surprising considering the Assessment Objectives articulated in the various syllabi pointed to the fact that students were supposed to be able to demonstrate the ability to explain causal links for historical events. For example, the assessment section of the 2001 O-Level History syllabus made it clear that the candidate, in answering the structured-essay questions, “will be asked to give some interpretation and/or assessment of events or to provide some connection between these events and a wider context” (MOE, 2001, p. 3). This requirement that students interpret, assess, and connect events to a wider context pointed to the idea that students were supposed to be able to not only explain, interpret, and evaluate how and why historical events occurred, but also to explain the effects and significance of these historical events in the greater context of history. All of this pointed to notions of causation in history. While the latter part suggested that students also needed to have a firm understanding of historical significance in order to connect events to a wider historical context, it is likely that most students were taught to explain the significance of any event in history in terms of the immediate impact or effects. Yet, such a teaching approach might not have been entirely out-of-place as the focal point of many of the questions seemed to be causation (as analysed in Appendix A).

The assessment section of the 2007 O-Level History syllabus is similar to the 2001 syllabus. The following description of the SEQs can be found in the assessment section of the 2007 syllabus: “Each structured-essay question comprises two sub-questions. The two sub-questions will test candidates’ ability to explain, analyse and make judgements on events and/or issues” (Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board [SEAB], 2013, p. 4). Much like the 2001 syllabus, this description pointed to events as one of the major focal points for the questions. Once again it seemed that students were expected to know how and why historical events occurred, and that they were supposed to be able to make judgements about these events (and issues). While there was a change in question rigour after the release of the 2007 syllabus, the questions remained focused on causation.

The analysis of the SEQs from 2002-2012 seemed to show that causation was privileged above other second-order historical concepts. Two possible reasons may have accounted for such a preference. First, as the assessment guidelines required students to demonstrate ability to interpret and/or assess events, question setters may have focused on cause and effect, as well as consequence, because all events in history have causes and effects that can be studied. Second, the examination board might have ignored non-causation types of questions as they viewed them unnecessary in light of the fact that second-order historical concepts were not identified as assessment objectives, nor were they explicitly described in the assessment sections of the 2001 and 2007 syllabi.

However, it is interesting to note that the question design appeared to suggest that the examination board may not have interpreted causation as limited only to causes or effects. For example, while each of the following questions could be said to have causation as a reference point, each one assessed students on a different variation or permutation (that varied according to the nature of questions) that tested students’ understanding of causation in history.

As the examples in the table show, questions that dealt with causation did not focus solely on broad factors that led to the occurrence of historical events. For example, the question from the 2007 examination asked, “‘The main reason why Communism failed in the Soviet Union was Gorbachev’s weak leadership.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.” This question connected the reasons for the failure of Communism (causation) with the agency of Gorbachev as a historical actor. In order to answer the question, students would have had to consider not only the main causes for the failure of Communism in the USSR, but also how much of a role Gorbachev played in the failure. To do this well, students would have needed to determine what power and influence Gorbachev had over the events of his day, and this would have had the potential to significantly deepen their understanding of causation because the question went above and beyond simply asking students to explain the reasons for the failure of Communism in the USSR. The other examples in the table illustrate questions with similar potential to extend students’ understanding of causation.

Table 1: Different O-Level SEQs with Causation as a Link

Historical Concept	Question	Examination
Agency – people were active participants in the events and trends of the day (Barton, 2012, p. 131).	‘The main reason why Communism failed in the Soviet Union was Gorbachev’s weak leadership.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2007 Examination
Significance	To what extent did the Cuban Missile Crisis threaten world stability? Explain your answer.	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2010 Examination
Intention	How far was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour caused by its intention to expand its Empire? Explain your answer.	History 2173/2 Combined Humanities 2192/3 2009 Examination
Motivation	Why did Stalin introduce the Five-Year plans for industry?	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2005 Examination
Consequence	How far do you agree that Hitler’s policies were a success for German people during the 1930s? Explain your answer.	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2004 Examination
Inevitability	Was the breakdown of the wartime alliance between the USA and USSR inevitable after the war ended in 1945? Explain your answer.	History 2173/2 Combined Humanities 2192/3 2008 Examination

\*Questions are from SEAB (2012a) and can be found in Appendix A.

Apart from issues related to assessing for conceptual or historical understanding, the explicit target skills assessed through the SEQs in Section B appeared to be more stable. The first question in each set – sub-question (a) – required students to demonstrate the skill of explanation. The second question in each set – sub-question (b) – required students to

demonstrate the skill of evaluation. This common structure came directly from the ‘Assessment Objectives’ section of each syllabus, and showed that exam setters constructed each set of questions with clear specifications in mind.

Interestingly, the assessment expectations (skills) for sub-question (a) increased for the O-Level examinations from the year 2008 onwards. This was in line with the new assessment expectation that students were supposed to be able to “explain, analyse and make judgements” for each of the two sub-questions in Section B (SEAB, 2013, p. 4). In 2008, sub-question (a) began to require students to explain AND come to a judgement in order to answer the question. For example, question 4a of the 2009 examination read as follows: “Was the Depression the main reason Japan attacked Manchuria in 1931? Explain your answer.” (SEAB, 2012a, p. 32). This question required students not only to explain why the Great Depression influenced Japan to attack Manchuria in 1931, but also to come to a judgement on whether this was the main reason for the Japanese attack on Manchuria. This was in contrast to sub-question (a) from previous exams where students were simply asked to explain why some action was made or why an event occurred.

It seems that the expectations for sub-question (a) have changed again with the 2013 syllabus. The TLG noted that sub-question (a) “requires candidates to explain and analyse” (MOE, 2012, p. 248). Noticeably absent was the “judgement” expectation that appeared in the 2007 syllabus. Based on this description, it would seem that students will no longer be expected to answer questions such as sub-question 2a from the 2010 paper; the question read as follows: “Was there a complete absence of international conflict during the 1920s? Explain your answer.” (Appendix A). This question expected students to come to a judgement as to whether there was a “complete absence” of international conflict beyond merely explaining whether or not international conflicts occurred in the 1920s. It is possible that this change was made in order to differentiate the skill expectations between sub-questions (a) and (b) as sub-question (b) will continue to require

“candidates to evaluate and make a judgement” (MOE, 2012, p. 248).

Just as it seems the target skill for sub-question (a) will change slightly, it will be interesting to see if the concepts targeted by the questions change on the 2014 O-Level examination. The 2014 examination will be the first national assessment of students based on the new History (2013) syllabus, and the new assessment objectives that accompany this syllabus are more explicit in mentioning second-order historical concepts. Assessment Objective 2 (AO2) – which is assessed by the SEQs of Section B – from the newly implemented syllabus reads as follows:

Objective 2: Constructing Explanation and Communicating Historical Knowledge

*Candidates should be able to demonstrate:*

- their understanding of the past through explanation and analysis of
  - key concepts: causation, consequence, continuity, change and significance within a historical context; and
  - key features and characteristics of the periods studied and the relationship between them;
- their ability to evaluate causation and historical significance to arrive at a reasoned conclusion. (MOE, 2012, p. 220)

Based on what is written as AO2 above, it appears that causation, change and continuity, and significance will all be assessed through the SEQs. These historical concepts comprised three of the eight second-order concepts detailed in the TLG. An understanding of chronology is important in historical study, and thus, teachers are likely to have to teach students about the overview of events over time even if there is no mention

that the concept will be explicitly assessed. Since ‘Evidence’, and to a certain extent ‘Accounts’, are assessed using the questions in the Source-Based Case Study (Section A), that leaves only ‘Empathy’ and ‘Diversity’ that do not seem to be suggested by the new assessment objectives.

The absence of certain second-order historical concepts in the Assessment Objectives could be explained by the following note in the TLG: “Amongst these skills are familiar terms drawn from the ‘Assessment Objectives’ of the examination syllabus. It must be noted that the ‘Assessment Objectives’ are crafted to test a sample from the range of historical skills that are integral to the discipline” (MOE, 2012, p. 24). This suggests that the O-Level examination will NOT assess students on all the second-order historical concepts, but rather only those that have been explicitly mentioned in the Assessment Objectives – that is, causation, change and continuity, significance, and evidence. What Does All This Mean for Second-Order Historical Concepts and National Examinations?

The current trend of assessing students using “cause and effect” and “consequence” questions has led students to have a relatively strong understanding of causation, but it has left them with an underdeveloped understanding of the other second-order historical concepts<sup>iv</sup>. The implication of this is that many students would have shallow understandings of history and the past<sup>v</sup>. To a student who has been drilled extensively about causation, history as a subject might only be

the study of causes and effects of historical events. This of course would neglect the fact that history as a discipline is about much more than that – it is about selecting appropriate sources to find evidence to answer historical questions, understanding why different historians produce different accounts of the same event, understanding why certain events are accorded historical significance, and so on.

It is possible this shallow understanding of history will change in the coming years if the assessment questions change. Given the explicit mention of assessment requirements in the 2013 History syllabus that stipulates demonstration of some key historical concepts, indications are that these expectations will lead to a possible shift in the trend of assessing causation and consequence – one that may be characterised by questions that test students for their understanding of historical concepts other than causation. As noted previously, Assessment Objective 2 of the syllabus makes it clear that students must be able to demonstrate an understanding of causation, consequence, continuity, change and significance. This could very well mean that the SEQs in Section B will take on unfamiliar forms that may buck the trend established from 2002 to 2012.

What might some of these new questions look like? The table below showcases some possible examples of questions that target the historical concepts detailed in AO2. (Note: these questions are formulated based on syllabus topics from the 2013 syllabus. A brief explanation of how the question targets the historical concept is also included).

Table 2: Sample Questions Targeting Second-Order Historical Concepts

Historical Concept	Question	Explanation
Cause and Effect	Why did the Soviet Union send missiles to Cuba?	The concept of 'cause and effect' or 'causation' is currently assessed through the Structured Essay Questions (Section B) in the O-Level examination, and it is unlikely to disappear.
Change and Continuity	How did the international order change from the pre-WWII years to the post-WWII years (pre-1939 and post-1945)?	This question focuses on the idea of change and continuity from the pre-WWII world to the post-WWII world. What changed? What remained the same? In order to answer the question, students would need to consider the international order in the pre-WWII world and the international order in the post-WWII world. In so doing, they would need to delineate criteria to identify and explain aspects of the international order that changed and others that remained the same (continued).
Significance	Why was the Korean War important in the Cold War context?	This question focuses on the importance and significance of the Korean War in the larger context of the Cold War that dominated the second half of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century. How does the Korean War shed light on the Cold War in general? In order to answer the question, students would need to consider why and how the Korean War had deep consequences throughout 20 <sup>th</sup> century world history. In so doing, they would need to identify and explain consequences of the Korean War that mattered long after the armistice was signed in 1953.
Consequence	How far do you agree that Hitler's economic policies benefited the German people?	The concept of consequence is currently assessed through the Structured Essay Questions (Section B) in the O-Level examination, and it is unlikely to disappear.

None of the questions detailed above are outside the scope of the 2013 O-Level History syllabus. Most history teachers in Singapore

would probably have covered the content necessary to answer these questions in their classrooms, but how many of them have asked

students to answer questions such as the non-causation/consequence ones mentioned above? The analysis of the O-Level History question papers shows that the national examinations have almost never asked questions such as the 'significance' and 'change and continuity' examples above. However, with the new Assessment Objectives detailed in the 2013 syllabus, these questions appear to be fair game. Teachers, then, could lead the way by asking students to answer questions such as these in class, and suggestions on possible criteria teachers could use to design questions that support the teaching and learning of historical concepts appear in Appendix B. With proper scaffolding and teaching for conceptual understanding, students should eventually be able to answer these questions doing justice to both content and concept. Beyond preparing students for their eventual summative examination, such a deliberate approach would help to better develop the Qualities of the History Learner that the syllabus aspired for each student.

### Conclusion

As noted in the introduction, this article is meant as a starting point for a meaningful conversation about how assessment – school-level and national-level – can encourage the teaching of second-order historical concepts. Every conversation must start somewhere, and it is important to start by figuring out where assessment has been, as well as where it might go. It is clear from the analysis of past examination questions that causation has maintained a consistent presence in the way we have assessed our students' knowledge of history. However, there are signs that this oft-explored concept might soon be joined by others.

The TLG serves as strong evidence that CPDD (History Unit) wants history education to be more than just an understanding of cause and effect. The number of pages devoted to the explanation of historical concepts is certainly

impressive. Perhaps more important, however, is the explicit delineation of second-order historical concepts in the Assessment Objectives that will guide how the Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB) and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) structure future O-Level history examinations. While the TLG hints that not all of the eight historical concepts will be assessed by the national exams, assessing anything more than causation and consequence is already a step in the right direction. Every journey begins with a first step, and the 2014 O-Level History exams will provide evidence as to whether that first step has been taken.

However, there is no need for teachers to wait to begin helping their students deepen their conceptual understanding in history. While the test spurs some teachers to action, many are motivated by the desire to see their students succeed and grow. While there is a growing body of Singapore-based research about students' conceptual understanding in history<sup>vi</sup>, there will always be questions about the value of teaching for conceptual understanding. Hopefully in the next few years this will change, and someday there will be sufficient data showing that students who learn in history classrooms built on historical thinking and concepts not only perform well in examinations, but more importantly enjoy and understand what it means to be a student of history.

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<sup>i</sup> The History Elective paper of the Combined Humanities (SEAB/CIE Course Code 2190/3 and 2192/2) subject was chosen as the basis for the analysis because it mirrors the Full History paper in terms of question types and targets (assessment objectives), and because more students sit for the O-Level History Elective examination each year.

<sup>ii</sup> This section was summarized from pages 35-38 and pages 325-345 in the TLG. Please see the TLG published by MOE/CPDD for more detailed descriptions and examples.

<sup>iii</sup> A more detailed breakdown of the questions and a simple calculation of the approximate percentages of questions that assess causation and other concepts appear in Appendix A.

<sup>iv</sup> This statement is based on observations in the author's history classrooms.

<sup>v</sup> Suggestions for ways to overcome this appear in Appendix B.

<sup>vi</sup> Dr Suhaimi bin Afandi from HSSE at NIE, Ms Fiona Koh from MOE, and Ms Delia Foo from MOE have contributed to the scholarship on the teaching and learning of second-order historical concepts in Singapore schools.

**Appendix A**

Combined Humanities History (Elective)

Section B Structured Essay Questions

2002-2012

Question	Target	Skill	Notes
2a – Why did the Bolsheviks win the Civil War?	Cause and Effect	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2002 Examination
2b – Was Stalin’s persecution of his political enemies the most important factor that enabled him to control the Soviet Union? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2002 Examination
3a – Why did the British government appease Germany in the 1930s?	Cause and Effect	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2002 Examination
3b – Was the failure of the League of Nations the most important cause of the Second World War? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2002 Examination
4a – Why did the USA introduce the Marshall Plan?	Cause and Effect	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2002 Examination
4b – Was the Soviet Union’s fear of attack from the West the most important cause of the Cold War? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2002 Examination
2a – Why did the Allies impose a tough peace settlement on Germany in 1919?	Cause and Effect	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2003 Examination
2b – ‘The main reason Germany hated the Treaty of Versailles was reparations.’ How far do you agree with this judgement? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2003 Examination
3a – Why were the Japanese	Cause and Effect	Explanation	History 2172/2

aggressive towards China during the 1930s?			Combined Humanities 2190/3 2003 Examination
3b – ‘The main reason the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941 was they wanted to destroy American power in the Pacific.’ How far do you agree with this judgement? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2003 Examination
4a – Why did the Communist governments in Eastern Europe fall in 1989?	Cause and Effect	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2003 Examination
4b – The main reason for Gorbachev’s failure as leader of the Soviet Union was his policy of glasnost.’ How far do you agree with this judgement? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2003 Examination
2a – Why did Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) turn against his Communist allies in 1927?	Empathy	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2004 Examination
2b – How far do you agree that the Long March was a success for the Communists? Explain your answer.	Consequence	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2004 Examination
3a – Why did the effects of the Great Depression help Hitler to gain power in Germany?	Cause and Effect	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2004 Examination
3b – How far do you agree that Hitler’s policies were a success for German people during the 1930s? Explain your answer.	Consequence	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2004 Examination
4a – Why did the USA and the USSR become enemies after the end of the Second World War?	Cause and Effect	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2004 Examination
4b – How far do you agree that the Berlin Blockade was a mistake by Stalin? Explain your answer.	Consequence	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2004 Examination
2a – Why did Stalin introduce	Empathy	Explanation	History 2172/2

the Five-Year plans for industry?			Combined Humanities 2190/3 2005 Examination
2b – ‘Stalin’s industrial and agricultural reforms were a total success.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.	Consequence	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2005 Examination
3a – Why did Hitler completely control Germany by late 1934?	Cause and Effect	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2005 Examination
3b – ‘Nazi economic policies up to 1939 were a complete success.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.	Consequence	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2005 Examination
4a – Why did Mao start the Cultural Revolution?	Empathy	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2005 Examination
4b – ‘Mao’s leadership of China between 1966 and 1976 was a success.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.	Consequence	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2005 Examination
2a – Why was the League of Nations set up after World War 1?	Cause and Effect	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2006 Examination
2b – ‘The Treaty of Versailles was a failure.’ How far do you agree with this judgement? Explain your answer.	Consequence	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2006 Examination
3a – Why was the United Nations Organisation set up after World War 2?	Cause and Effect	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2006 Examination
3b – ‘The peace settlement after World War 2 was a success.’ How far do you agree with this judgement? Explain your answer.	Consequence	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2006 Examination
4a – Why did the Berlin Blockade take place?	Cause and Effect	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2006 Examination

4b – ‘The USSR’s control over Eastern Europe was complete by the early 1960s.’ How far do you agree with this judgement? Explain your answer.	Consequence or Chronology	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2006 Examination
2a – Why was there a revolution in China in 1911?	Cause and Effect	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2007 Examination
2b – ‘The main consequence of the 1911 Revolution in China was the rise of the Kuomintang.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.	Consequence	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2007 Examination
3a – Why did the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor (December 1941)?	Cause and Effect	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2007 Examination
3b – ‘The main reason why the Japanese were defeated in World War 2 was the size of the Japanese empire.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2007 Examination
4a – Why did Gorbachev introduce his policies of perestroika and glasnost in the Soviet Union?	Empathy	Explanation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2007 Examination
4b – ‘The main reason why Communism failed in the Soviet Union was Gorbachev’s weak leadership.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	History 2172/2 Combined Humanities 2190/3 2007 Examination
2a – Was the tough peace settlement imposed on Germany in 1919 necessary?	Cause and Effect	Explanation + Judgment	History 2173/2 Combined Humanities 2192/3 2008 Examination
2b – The following were equally important reasons why Germany hated the Treaty of Versailles: (i) Limitations on armed forces;	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	History 2173/2 Combined Humanities 2192/3 2008 Examination

<p>(ii) Reparations; (iii) The loss of land.</p> <p>Do you agree with this statement?</p> <p>Explain your answer referring only to (i), (ii), and (iii).</p>			
<p>3a – Was the appeasement policy of the late 1930s justified? Explain your answer.</p>	Cause and Effect	Explanation + Judgment	History 2173/2 Combined Humanities 2192/3 2008 Examination
<p>3b – The following were equally important reasons why war broke out in Europe in 1939:</p> <p>(i) Hitler’s aggressive foreign policy; (ii) The failure of the League of Nations; (iii) The Nazi-Soviet Pact.</p> <p>Do you agree with this statement?</p> <p>Explain your answer referring only to (i), (ii), and (iii).</p>	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	History 2173/2 Combined Humanities 2192/3 2008 Examination
<p>4a – Was the breakdown of the wartime alliance between the USA and USSR inevitable after the war ended in 1945? Explain your answer.</p>	Cause and Effect	Explanation + Judgment	History 2173/2 Combined Humanities 2192/3 2008 Examination
<p>4b – The following were equally important reasons for the collapse of the USSR:</p> <p>(i) The weaknesses of the Soviet economy; (ii) The reforms of Gorbachev; (iii) Relations with other Eastern European</p>	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	History 2173/2 Combined Humanities 2192/3 2008 Examination

<p>countries. Do you agree with this statement?</p> <p>Explain your answer referring only to (i), (ii), and (iii).</p>			
<p>2a – Was Stalin’s ruthless personality the main reason he came to power in Russia? Explain your answer.</p>	Cause and Effect	Explanation + Judgment	History 2173/2 Combined Humanities 2192/3 2009 Examination
<p>2b – How far was Stalin’s control over Russia achieved by the use of propaganda? Explain your answer.</p>	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	History 2173/2 Combined Humanities 2192/3 2009 Examination
<p>3a – Were economic factors the main reason Hitler rose to power in 1933? Explain your answer.</p>	Cause and Effect	Explanation + Judgment	History 2173/2 Combined Humanities 2192/3 2009 Examination
<p>3b – How far was Hitler’s control over Germany achieved because of fear? Explain your answer.</p>	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	History 2173/2 Combined Humanities 2192/3 2009 Examination
<p>4a – Was the Depression the main reason Japan attacked Manchuria in 1931? Explain your answer.</p>	Cause and Effect	Explanation + Judgment	History 2173/2 Combined Humanities 2192/3 2009 Examination
<p>4b – How far was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour caused by its intention to expand its Empire? Explain your answer.</p>	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	History 2173/2 Combined Humanities 2192/3 2009 Examination
<p>2a – Was there a complete absence of international conflict during the 1920s? Explain your answer.</p>	Chronology	Explanation + Judgment	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2010 Examination
<p>2b – To what extent did Germany recover during the 1920s? Explain your answer.</p>	Chronology	Evaluation	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2010 Examination
<p>3a – Was rearmament during the 1930s avoidable? Explain your answer.</p>	Cause and Effect	Explanation + Judgment	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2010 Examination
<p>3b – To what extent did Hitler’s attack on Poland cause World War 2? Explain your answer.</p>	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2010 Examination
<p>4a – Was a large scale conflict in Korea inevitable? Explain your answer.</p>	Cause and Effect	Explanation + Judgment	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2010 Examination

4b – To what extent did the Cuban Missile Crisis threaten world stability? Explain your answer.	Consequence	Evaluation	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2010 Examination
2a – Was the loss of territory the only reason for German hatred of the Treaty of Versailles? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Explanation + Judgment	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2011 Examination
2b – ‘The Allies were completely satisfied with the peace settlement agreed at Versailles.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.	Consequence	Evaluation	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2011 Examination
3a – Was the aggression towards China the main aim of Japanese foreign policy during the 1930s? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Explanation + Judgment	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2011 Examination
3b – ‘Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941 because they wanted to destroy US power in the Pacific.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2011 Examination
4a – Was the Truman Doctrine the main reason for the outbreak of the Cold War in Europe? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Explanation + Judgment	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2011 Examination
4b – ‘The USSR was not to blame for the Korean War.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2011 Examination
2a – Were worsening relations with the West after 1919 the main reason for the rise in militarism in Japan? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Explanation + Judgment	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2012 Examination
2b – How successful was militarism in improving the lives of Japanese people? Explain your answer.	Consequence	Evaluation	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2012 Examination
3a – Were the effects of the Great Depression the main reason for the failure of the League of Nations during the	Cause and Effect	Explanation + Judgment	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2012 Examination

1930s? Explain your answer.			
3b – How successful was the British government’s policy of appeasement between 1935 and 1939? Explain your answer.	Consequence	Evaluation	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2012 Examination
4a – Were worsening relations between the USA and Cuba the main reason for the Cuban Missile Crisis? Explain your answer.	Cause and Effect	Explanation + Judgment	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2012 Examination
4b – How successful were the UN forces during the Korean War? Explain your answer.	Consequence	Evaluation	Combined Humanities 2192/3 2012 Examination

Question Target	Number Total	Percentage Total	A Total	A Percentage	B Total	B Percentage
Cause and Effect	45	68.2	28	84.8	17	51.5
Empathy	4	6.1	4	12.1	0	0.0
Consequence	15	22.7	0	0.0	15	45.5
Chronology	2	3.0	1	3.0	1	3.0
Skill Target	Number Total	Percentage Total	A Total	A Percentage	B Total	B Percentage
Explanation	18	27.3	18	54.5	0	0.0
Evaluation	33	50.0	0	0.0	33	100.0
Explanation + Judgment	15	22.7	15	45.5	0	0

References

Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board. (2012a). *Combined humanities 2192/03 history: Yearly questions, 2002-2011*. Singapore: Dyna Publisher Pte Ltd.

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**Appendix B**

Criteria for Design of Historical Concept-Based Structured Essay Questions (SEQs)

In order to design SEQs that support the teaching and learning of historical concepts through classroom assessment, teachers could follow the steps and criteria listed below.

General Planning Steps/Checklist for Teachers:

1. Why am I assessing my students' understanding of this historical concept?
  - a. It is important for a teacher to determine the purpose of the assessment in order to tailor the following elements to the purpose:
    - i. Level of difficulty of the question
    - ii. Amount of scaffolding to be provided to the students
    - iii. Amount of feedback to be given to the students
2. Do I understand the historical concept I am trying to assess?
  - a. If yes, then move to Step 3.
  - b. If no, then it would be best for the teacher to examine the Teaching and Learning Guide (TLG) explanations of the historical concepts. In addition, teachers could look at The Historical Thinking Project's work on historical concepts for more ideas (<http://historicalthinking.ca/>).
3. Do I know my students' level of understanding of the concept?
  - a. It is important to have some understanding of students' prior knowledge about the concept in order to pitch the question at the appropriate level of difficulty.
    - i. If yes, then move to Step 4.
    - ii. If no, then move to Step 4, but try to approximate the level of difficulty so that the question is not too easy or too hard for the majority of students in the class. Ideally, student answers will demonstrate a range of levels of understanding.
4. Does this concept mesh well with the content topic I am examining?
  - a. While historical thinking is not dependent on content topics, it is important to consider the learning objectives in terms of content as well as the conceptual learning objectives.
    - i. If you want to support student learning of the causes of a particular historical event, then you would probably not design a question that deals with the significance of the event.
5. Design the question.
  - a. Use the concept-specific criteria in the next section to determine whether your question is likely to meet your conceptual learning objectives.

Concept-Specific Question Criteria for Teachers Assessing *Significance* and *Change and Continuity*<sup>1</sup>:

The table below illustrates suggested concept-specific criteria that could help teachers ensure that they design good questions to support the teaching and learning of historical concepts.

Concept	Criteria	Question	Explanation
Significance	<p>In order to elicit student answers that demonstrate understanding of the concept of <i>significance</i> in addition to content knowledge, questions should be designed that ask students to do one or both of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explain/analyse/evaluate how an event/person/development <u>resulted in change</u> and “deep consequences” over a long period of time (Seixas, 2006, p. 3).</li> <li>- Explain/analyse/evaluate how an event/person/development <u>revealed</u> or shed light on “enduring or emerging issues in history and contemporary life or was important at some stage in history within the collective memory of a group or groups” (Seixas, 2006, p. 3).</li> </ul>	<p>Why was the Korean War important in the Cold War context?</p>	<p>This question focuses on the importance and significance of the Korean War in the larger context of the Cold War that dominated the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. How does the Korean War shed light on the Cold War in general? In order to answer the question, students would need to consider why and how the Korean War had deep consequences throughout 20<sup>th</sup> century world history. In so doing, they would need to identify and explain consequences of the Korean War that mattered long after the armistice was signed in 1953.</p>
Change and Continuity	<p>In order to elicit student answers that demonstrate understanding of the concept of <i>change and continuity</i> in addition to content knowledge, questions should be designed that ask students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explain/analyse/evaluate <u>progress and decline</u> over time.</li> <li>- Explain/analyse/evaluate the <u>transition between different periods</u> in history in terms of what changed and what remained the same.</li> </ul> <p>Additional consideration for teachers: Does the period under study in the question include a turning point to help students locate when/where change occurred?</p>	<p>How did the international order change from the pre-WWII years to the post-WWII years (pre-1939 and post-1945)?</p>	<p>This question focuses on the idea of change and continuity from the pre-WWII world to the post-WWII world. What changed? What remained the same? In order to answer the question, students would need to consider the international order in the pre-WWII world and the international order in the post-WWII world. In so doing, they would need to delineate criteria to identify and explain aspects of the international order that changed and others that remained the same (continued).</p>

**References**

Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness/The Historical Thinking Project. (2013). *Concepts*. Retrieved from <http://historicalthinking.ca/concepts>

Peck, C., & Seixas, P. (2008). Benchmarks of historical thinking: First steps. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 34 (4), 1015-1038.

Seixas, P. (2006). *Benchmarks of historical thinking: A framework for assessment in Canada*. Vancouver, BC: Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness, University of British Columbia.

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<sup>i</sup> The concept-specific criteria and examples take into account the SEQ format, the second-order historical concepts explicitly mentioned in the Assessment Objectives of the 2013 History syllabus (that pertain to SEQ), and the history education research on historical concepts briefly mentioned in the body of the paper.