

Premier’s History Teachers Association History Scholarship

Studying *Power and Authority in the Modern World* through sources

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# Introduction

In Term IV, 2018 teachers will begin to implement the new Stage 6 Modern History Syllabus and the 2019 Higher School Certificate Modern History Exam will examine students’ engagement with sources differently. The more flexible HSC and the reforms to assessment mean that teachers will need to utilise a range of approaches and assessment strategies.

While ‘Germany: 1918 – 1939’ has been taught as a National Study in Modern History for many years, the focus was on developing students’ essay writing skills rather than developing their source skills. In the new Core Study *Power and Authority in the Modern World*, in addition to studying the rise of Nazism and the Nazi State, students will also need to study the rise of dictatorships in Russia, Italy and Japan and the search for collective responsibility through sources. They will also be required to engage with the historiography of the Inter-War Period.

During my study tour, I investigated new approaches to teaching students how to engage with sources by speaking with historians about the most appropriate sources to use to teach students about the rise of dictatorships. I also sought their opinions on the value and limitations of particular sources and types of sources.

I also spoke with Christine Counsell, Michael Fordham, Ben Walsh and Dr Andrew Payne about the ways to teach and assess source skills. All are renowned experts in teaching and assessing source skills.

# Focus of Study

During my five weeks in Germany and England I investigated ways to teach students how to engage with sources in Modern History. I met with Sir Richard J. Evans, Professor Baroness Ruth Henig, Professor Richard Overy, Professor Gary Sheffield, Professor James Harris and other eminent historians to discuss the most appropriate sources to teach students about *Power and Authority in the Modern World*.

I also met with museum curators and education officers to look at a range of sources and discuss of the value and limitations of particular sources. History curriculum specialists such as Christine Counsell, Michael Fordham, and Ben Walsh provided frameworks for assessing skills and developing appropriate teaching and learning activities to improve students’ historical understanding.

During the first half of my tour, I collected a range of sources for teachers to use as they taught this unit. As I spoke to curriculum experts such as Christine Counsell and Michael Fordham, the importance of the nature of the questions that teachers and examiners use became more apparent. Essentially, the two driving questions became:

* What sort of sources should students use?
* How should we examine students’ engagement with sources?

# Significant Learning

Over the five weeks, I met with a range of academics and museum curators. Some contributed to my understanding of what should be included in my source portfolio. Others contributed to my understanding of how sources should be used in the classroom, and how they should be examined.

### Professor Sir Richard J Evans

One of the foremost authorities on Nazi Germany, Professor Evans was Regis Professor of History at the University of Cambridge and President of Wolfson College, and is currently Provost of Gresham College.

Evans reviewed the new syllabus and was rather critical of it. He was most insistent that students must study Nazi Germany not just from above but also from below. He argued that students needed to know what it was like to experience Nazism not just the ‘big men’ of Nazism. He thought that students should also look at things like Weimar Culture. He also questioned the inclusion of Japan as a “dictatorship” and the creation of the United Nations, without studying the Second World War.

Evans also reviewed National Education Standards Authority (NESA)’s sample questions and was unimpressed. He was concerned that most of the questions had implied answers e.g. “How did the Treaty of Versailles contribute to the rise of Hitler?” He suggested that a question like “How significantly did the Treaty of Versailles contribute to the rise of Hitler?” would be better.

### Professor Richard Overy

Professor Overy was Professor of History at the University of Exeter and has written extensively on Nazi Germany. The books that would be of most use to teachers are *The Dictator*s *and The Inter-War Crisis.* His writing is accessible for most students.

Overy argued that both Stalin and Hitler came to power through a series of crises and were became dictators in 1934 (though neither would have agreed to the term) In Hitler’s case, after the Night of Long Knives, and in Stalin’s case when the Kirov Law was introduced.

His work would be useful for teachers looking for ways to engage with MH12-7 (discusses and evaluates differing interpretations and representations of the past) as Overy argues that Hitler did not intend to cause war in 1939 and so he could easily be contrasted with another historian like Evans.

### Dr Christopher Dillon

Dr Dillon, a Lecturer at King’s College London, is an expert in pre-war concentrations camps, and has recently just published the first academic analysis of Dachau.

He argued that Dachau, like other camps, was very different 1933 – 1939 to 1939 – 1945. The camp evolved significantly between 1933 and 1939 and before 1939, most prisoners only spent a matter of months in Dachau. He argued that teachers should stress to students that militarism and masculinity played a crucial role in the development of the camp.

### Dr Paul Moore

Dr Moore is a Lecturer at the University of Leicester. He suggested that teacher should emphasize that Nazis saw propaganda as essential to the running of the state. Propaganda was more than just posters; it also included things like art, literature, and music. He advised that recent research suggests that posters may have had a bigger impact than first thought, as Germans walked and used public transport more than those is comparable cities such as London and were therefore exposed to the posters constantly.

Dr Moore suggested the German Historical Institute’s online collection would be useful <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/section.cfm?section_id=12> and Calvin College’s collection is useful for propaganda <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/>

### Professor Baroness Ruth Henig

Prof Henig is a renowned scholar of the League of Nations. She has written several publications on Weimar Germany that are suitable for students and contributed to textbooks for students. Extracts from her books ‘The League of Nations’ and the ‘The Weimar Republic’ are accessible for students.

Henig argued that the *Rise of Dictatorships* should be studied with World War I as the starting point. She felt that students needed to have studied WWI before attempting unit like *Power and Authority*.

While she applauded including a study such as Japan, she questioned how it fitted the pattern of dictatorships.

### Professor James Harris

Professor Harris specialises in Stalinist Russia. He has published several books including *Stalin: A New History* (with Sarah Harris) and *The Great Fear: Stalin’s Terror of the 1930s*

Professor Harris provided a number of useful resources for students including an online lecture ‘The Great Fear: Intelligence and Threat Perception under Lenin and Stalin’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=GQzikjZP9a8> and a range of shorter 10 min lectures on topics like Stalin’s Rise to Power <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7497BC5A0008BECB>

Harris felt that students tend to treat primary and secondary sources in the same way, when the should be approached differently as they are useful in different ways. Teachers should be wary of using a ‘one size fits all’ approach to sources.

## Source Skills

There is much debate about source skills, how they should to taught and how they should be examined. I spoke with a range of curriculum specialists including Christine Counsell, Michael Fordham, Ben Walsh and Dr Andrew Payne. Each added to my understanding of how sources should be used.

It should be noted that a source task or exam cannot replicate what historians do. When historians look at a source, they are not normally looking at a fragment of the source, and they bring with them a huge amount of contextual knowledge.

Thus, if teachers are trying to get as close as possible to what historians do, the following principles should be used:

* Be clear about whether you are testing content or source skills. (Many ‘source questions’ are really knowledge questions)
* Source questions should require the students to engage genuinely with the sources. Sources shouldn’t just be memory prompts
* Give students fewer, longer sources. For a 25 mark paper, there should only be three to four sources.
* Give students more background / contextual information about the sources
* Ensure the questions don’t lead the students into particular answers.

#### Sample Questions based on these prinicples

* How might Source X be used by an historian seeking to investigate Goebbels' role in the Nazi State?
* In what ways might Source X be useful to an historian studying the nature of Nazi Foreign Policy? (Note:  This is actually very different to ‘How useful is Source A?’)
* How might Source X be used as evidence for an argument about the extent to which the Nazis transformed Germany?
* How might an historian use Sources X & Y to support possible claims about the nature of resistance in Germany to 1939?
* (Give students two sources that differ in one/more ways.)

*How* do the perspectives/assumptions/arguments/accounts offered by these sources differ?

Drawing on your wider knowledge, suggest *why* the perspectives/assumptions/arguments/accounts might differ.

* Making close reference to Sources B & C, analyse the impact that the Nazis had on women to 1939.
* Drawing on Sources X, Y, and Z, build an argument concerning ….

### Sources

During my travels I visited many museums, documentation centres and libraries. During these visits, I spoke with a range of curators, archivists and education officers.

Many historians suggested that Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham’s *Documents on Nazism: 1919 – 1945* is useful starting point for translated documents. I collected a vast collection of other sources, the best of which will be distributed through presentations at the History Teachers’ Association of NSW’s Stage 6 Days.

I also visited a number of instutions to collect sources. Those that were most useful were

#### German Resistance Museum

A variety of resources were collected to show students how people were able to resist the Nazis, in a variety of ways and with varying impacts.

#### Munich Documentation Centre

Recently opened, the Centre uses current best pedagogical practice. Most notable was its attempt to contextualise the Rise of the Nazis. It is very localised. Visitors are able to see how the Nazis reflected conservative movements in the Bavaria, how they impacted on Munich, and how Munich contributed to the Holocaust. In my discussions with the education officers, it became clear that at particular points teachers should try to use sources that students will be able to relate to so that they are able to see people in Germany in the 1930s were both similar and different to them.

#### Wiener Library

The Wiener Library in Berlin is best known for its *Motorcycle Diaries*. However, it has an extensive collection of other primary and secondary sources. I photographed an array of sources, the most useful of which will be the Nazi calendars which are ideal for teaching multiple aspects of Nazi ideology – propaganda, racial ideology, Volksgemeinshaft, etc

# Conclusion

The Modern History Core is vast in scope and the historians and curriculum specialists I met with all expressed clear and strong concerns about it. It is hoped that when the syllabus is reviewed their recommendations are implemented.

Teaching the content through sources presents further challenges. Teachers should ensure they have a range of sources that enable students to explore the range of perspectives and experiences. (The sources I collated during my travels will be distributed at the HTA Stage 6 Modern History Day in August 2018 and the 2019 National and/or State Conference.

Much of what teachers will do with their students though will be driven by the type of questions examiners use in the forthcoming Modern History Examination. Currently teachers have little guidance as the sample questions are unclear and most academics found it difficult to see what the examiners were wanting from the students, especially as the many of the source questions didn’t really require genuine source engagement. It is hoped that examiners will be guided by best practice, including:

* Fewer, lengthier sources should be used, with considerable contextual information provided
* Questions should require genuine, close engagement with the source/s
* Questions should not leadstudents to particular answers
* Reliability and usefulness should be examined separately
* Students should be required to construct possible arguments based on the sources.

When using sources in the classroom, teachers should:

* Contextualise sources within a genuine historical enquiry across a series of lessons
* Use sources for a range of purposes e.g. stimulus, illustration, evidential thinking.

I have written an overview of my findings and a sample task for the HTA’s next *Teaching History Journal.* I am also presenting the approach to source work that I developed during this study tour at the upcoming History Teachers’ Association of NSW Stage 6 Day. Attending teachers will be given an extensive collection of sources they can use in their classrooms. The sample task will also be provided. This source task uses the approach to source work suggested by Christine Counsell and uses sources that I collected during my travels.

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