Historiography:

How Interpretations of the Past Change

- **Opening puzzle:** two popular accounts of one event disagree — why do historians keep revising?
- **The past is** what happened; history is an evidence-based account; historiography studies how history is written
- **Promise:** explain why interpretations change and how to read competing accounts critically
- **For teachers:** textbook and curriculum literacy; adult learners: media and public-claim literacy; students: evaluating secondary sources
- **Framing question:** is written history always an interpretation?
- **Roadmap:** evidence → engines of revision → schools → toolkit → public memory → case study → digital pressures → teaching → synthesis



The Past Versus History: Evidence, Sources, and Narrative

- The past is events; history is an argument built on surviving traces
- Primary sources: first-hand traces—diaries, letters, newspapers, maps, photographs, film
- Secondary sources: later accounts that interpret them—monographs, textbooks, biographies, films
- The same document can be primary or secondary depending on your question
- Edited texts complicate this: a seventeenth-century editor reshaped the Ludlow Memoirs
- Historians choose what to include, exclude, order, and foreground
- Narrative coherence itself carries interpretation; facts require framing



HISTORY
EVIDENCE
PEOPLE
PERSPECTIVE
TOMORROW

Seven Engines of Revision: Why Interpretations Change

PAST
QUESTIONS
NEW PERSPECTIVES
RICHER UNDERSTANDING



1. **New evidence:** Dead Sea Scrolls (1946); L'Anse aux Meadows (1960s)
2. **New methods:** DNA confirmed the Jefferson–Hemings relationship
3. **Present concerns:** industrial revolution growth-rate debates
4. **New voices:** women's, workers', colonized, and minority histories
5. **Shifting paradigms**, political pressures, generational revision
6. **Distinguish** legitimate revision from politically motivated distortion
7. **Activity:** classify examples; debate evidential vs. presentist drivers

SAME PAST.
DEEPER INSIGHTS.

HISTORY LIVES
IN CONVERSATION

Schools and Paradigms:
How Frameworks Shape What We See

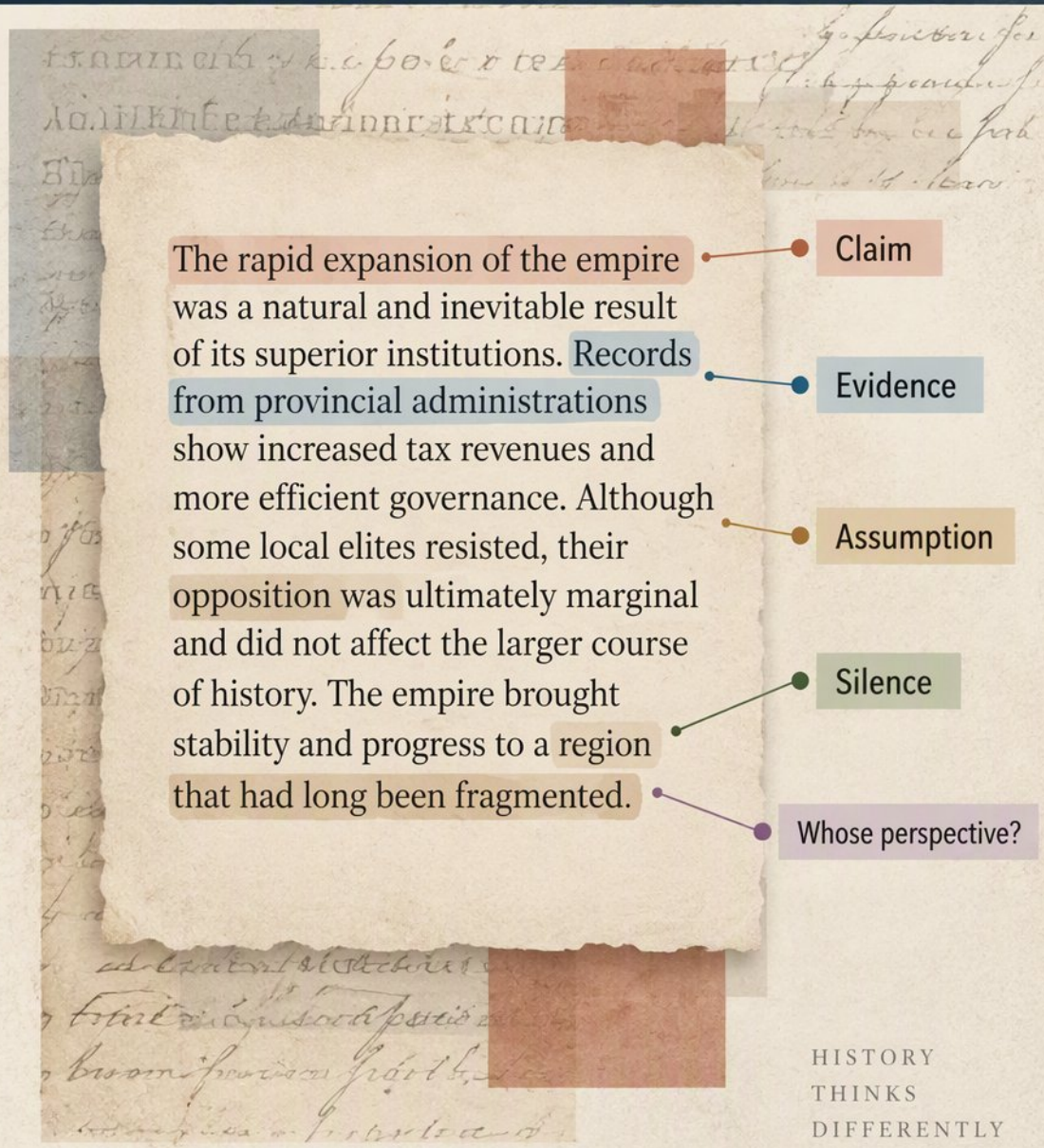
- Major schools: Rankean empiricism, Marxist history, Annales, quantitative and social history
- Later turns: cultural and linguistic turns, postcolonial and global history
- Each framework selects problems, prefers specific evidence, supplies explanatory categories
- The Annales case: long duration and social science methods; structures later opened cultural history
- Schools are loose toolkits, not fixed boxes—today's practice is plural and recombinant



Reading a Historian's Argument: A Five-Question Toolkit

READ CRITICALLY • THINK CONTEXTUALLY • ENGAGE MORE DEEPLY

- Five questions: claim? evidence? assumptions? silences? whose perspective?
- Ask what question the work answers and what debate it joins.
- Separate thesis, evidence, and interpretation; note author, audience, date.
- Spot rhetoric: appeals to authority, sweeping causation, metaphors, inevitability claims.
- Beware monocausal explanations, argument from silence, anachronism.
- Practice: apply the toolkit to two contrasting excerpts on one topic.

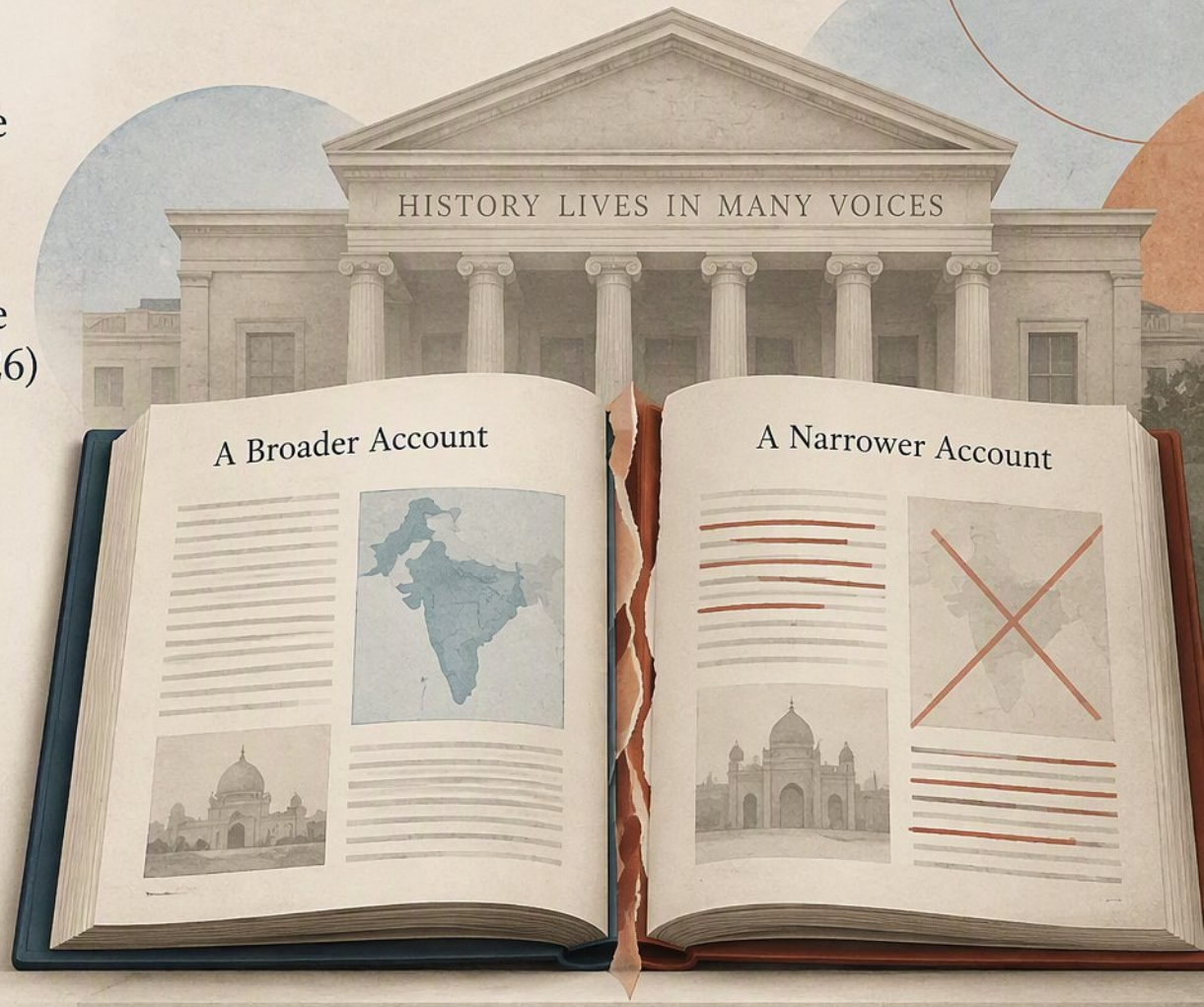


HISTORY THINKS DIFFERENTLY

SAME SOURCES. DEEPER QUESTIONS.

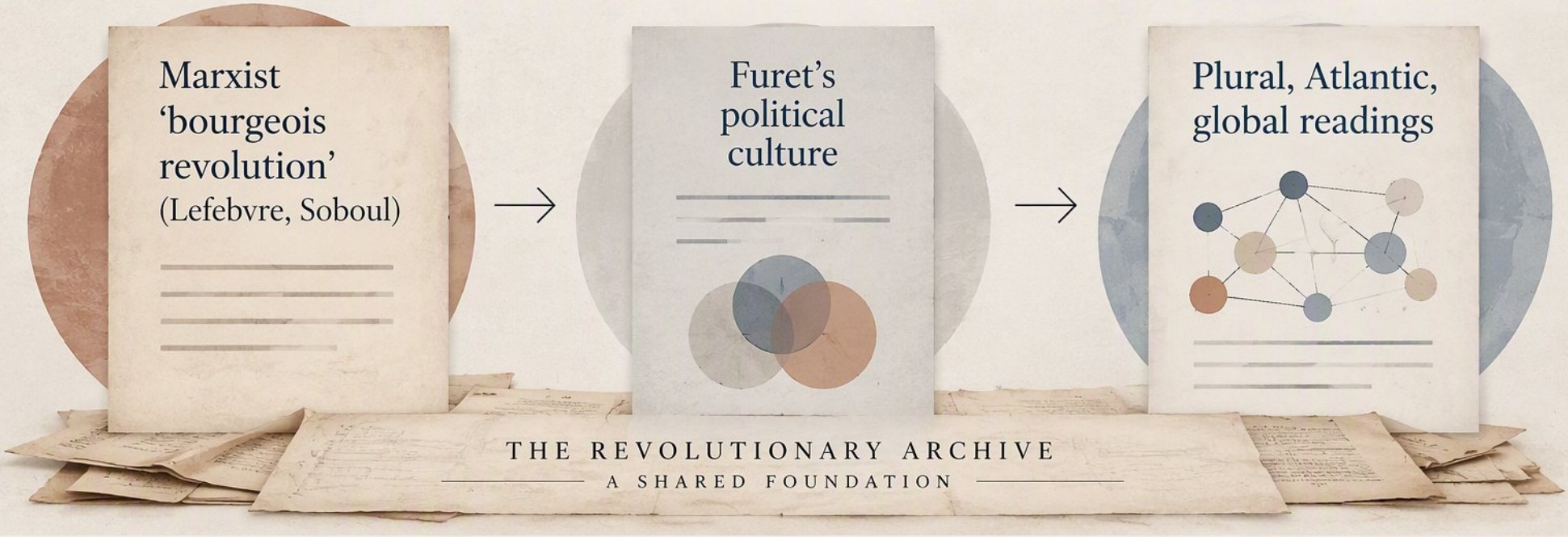
Textbooks, Curricula, and Public Memory: A Live Controversy

- India's NCERT 'rationalisation' (2021–2026): Mughal and Sultanate chapters trimmed
- Maratha empire map withdrawn after royal-family protests; Supreme Court seized a Class 8 book (Feb 2026)
- Competing framings: panel chair's 'honest history' versus critics' 'ideological selection'
- State-level: Maharashtra's Class 6 book recasts Vedic diet, drops Varna–caste link
- Texas's 2026 social studies rewrite shows the same dynamic beyond South Asia
- Teaching move: present historiography as inquiry, not settled fact



Case Study: One Event, Three Accounts

HISTORY
PERSPECTIVE
DIALOGUE
A RICHER PAST



- **French Revolution:** Marxist 'bourgeois revolution' (Lefebvre, Soboul) → Furet's political culture → plural, Atlantic, global readings
- **What changed:** post-1989 questions, generational shifts, structures to culture, categories of race, gender, global entanglement
- **What did not:** the core revolutionary archive remains foundational
- **Debrief:** map each shift onto the engines of revision; how should learners respond to genuinely competing accounts?
- **Local variant:** swap in a revolution or empire familiar to your audience

SAME EVENTS
DIFFERENT LENSES
DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

Public Memory and Commemoration:

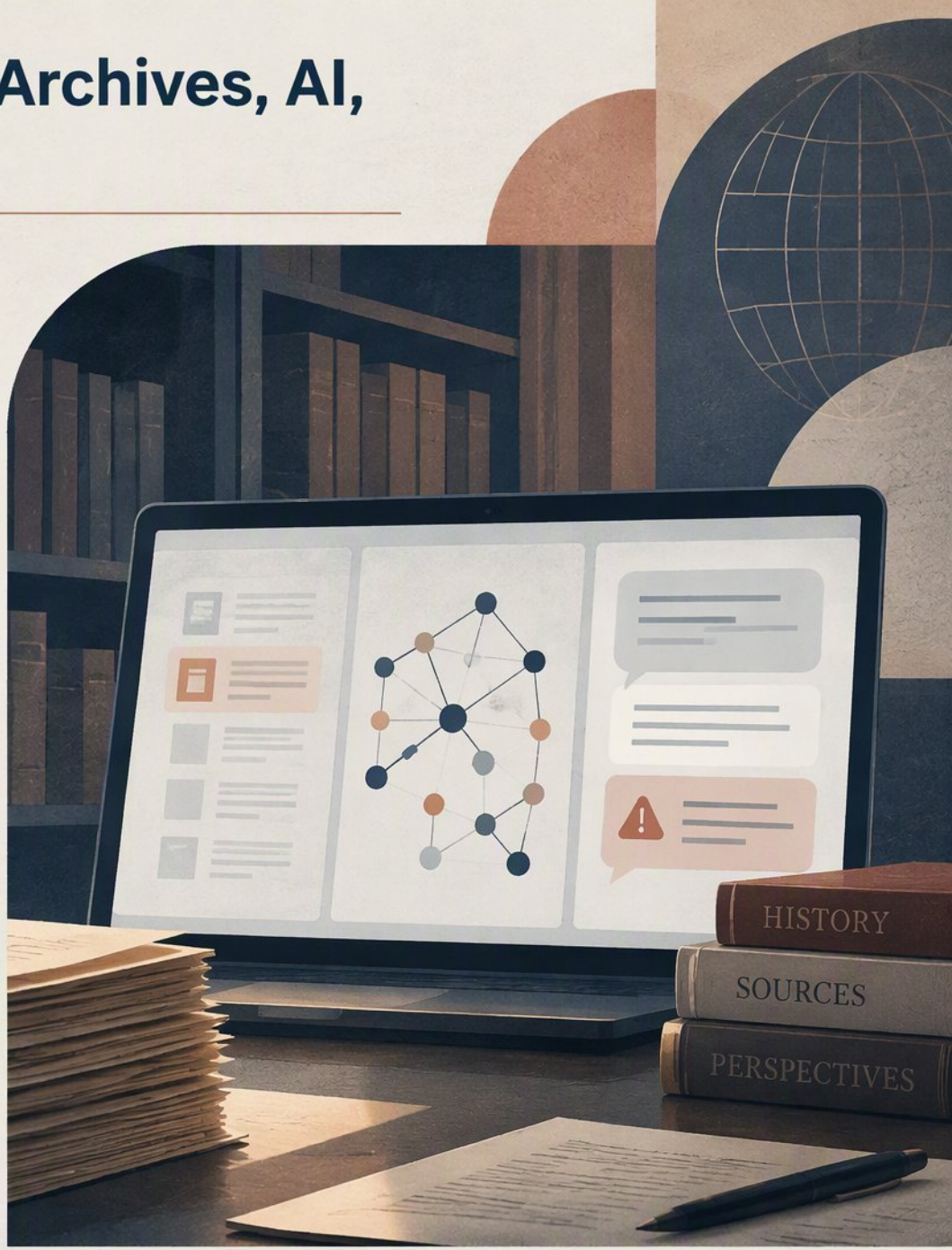
When the Past Is Built in Stone

- Monuments narrate who 'we' are; altering them is interpretation, not just repair.
- Spain: Valley of Cuelgamuros 'resignification' — Franco exhumed in 2019.
- Aotearoa NZ: Boulcott's Farm memorial revised through Māori oral traditions and wānanga.
- Korea: Park Chung Hee recast Yulgok Yi I as patriotic sage via festivals, statues, banknotes.
- Livingstone and Noreika debates show revisionism working for and against national myth.
- Teachers: commemoration is an accessible entry point for historiographical inquiry.



Current Pressures: Digital Archives, AI, and the Global Turn

- Digitization at scale: OCR, text mining, network analysis, computer vision
- New biases: only part of the record is digitized, with its own encoding biases
- AI assistants promise 'instant history'—keep sources mediated and archives incomplete
- Generative AI demands source criticism: hallucinations and fabricated citations need verification
- The global turn challenges Eurocentric and nation-centered narratives—and faces its own critiques
- Practical guidance: verify references, contextualize claims, and question online historical sources

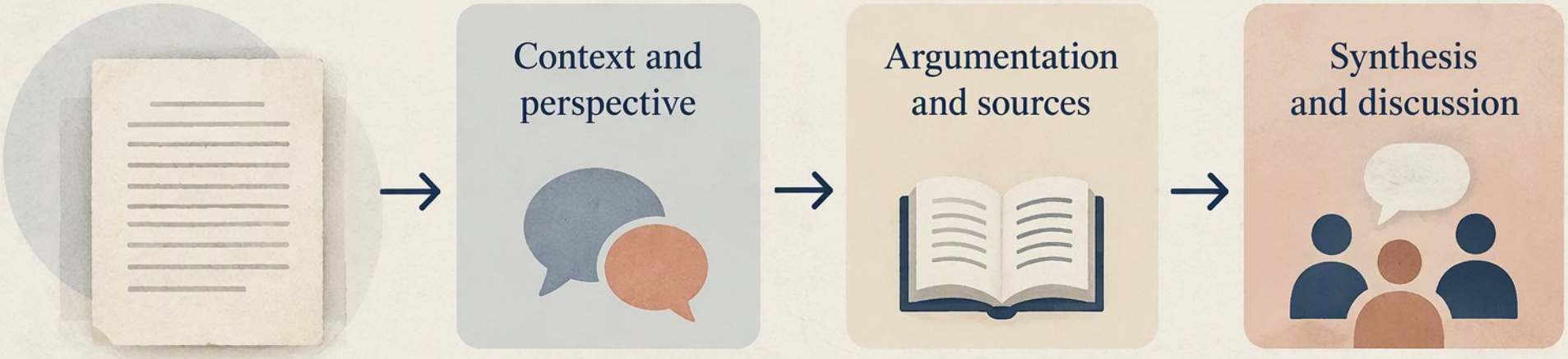


Projecting Present Concerns: The Question of Objectivity

- Presentism is unavoidable; rigorous procedures in question, source, and presentation make it manageable
- Objectivity is an aspiration to pursue, not a possession to hold
- Judge accounts by evidential breadth, source criticism, method transparency, counterargument
- Distinguish legitimate revision (evidence, procedure) from distortion (political convenience)
- A present-day question can open a valid line of inquiry—and tempt anachronism



Teaching Strategies for Classrooms and Adult Learners



- Teach history as argument and evidence, not a fixed script
- HBI: two rounds—context and perspective, then argumentation and sources
- Activities: source comparisons, textbook revision hunts, debates, argument maps
- Adult and museum settings: short excerpts, explicit framing, dialogue
- Scaffold with modelling, organizers, rubrics; assess evaluation, not recall

Watching the Watchdogs:
Textbook Revisions in the Classroom



- Students trace one textbook revision: what changed, and why?
- Compare a current edition with one from fifty or a hundred years ago.
- Read India and Texas framings side by side as structured inquiry.
- Don't reduce every revision to ideology; treat stated rationales as evidence.
- Adult learners apply the same method to documentaries and museum labels.

SAME STORIES.
DIFFERENT LENSES.
DEEPER QUESTIONS.

Evaluation and Feedback:
Assessing Historiographical Thinking

- Assess comparison of arguments, evidence evaluation, and justified judgment
- Rubric: sourcing, contextualization, close reading, silences, corroboration, uncertainty
- Formative tools: think-alouds, exit tickets, peer review of argument maps
- Avoid false balance and relativism—not all interpretations are equal
- Feedback praises reasoning and evidence over confident opinion
- Shared prompt and model response for calibration

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL THINKING RUBRIC (EXCERPT)	
Criteria	**Illustrative Model Response**
Sourcing	
Contextualization	
Close reading	"The author's language frames the event as a 'crisis,' revealing a particular perspective and intended audience."
Silences	
Corroboration	
Uncertainty	

Synthesis and Next Steps:
Becoming a Critical Reader of History

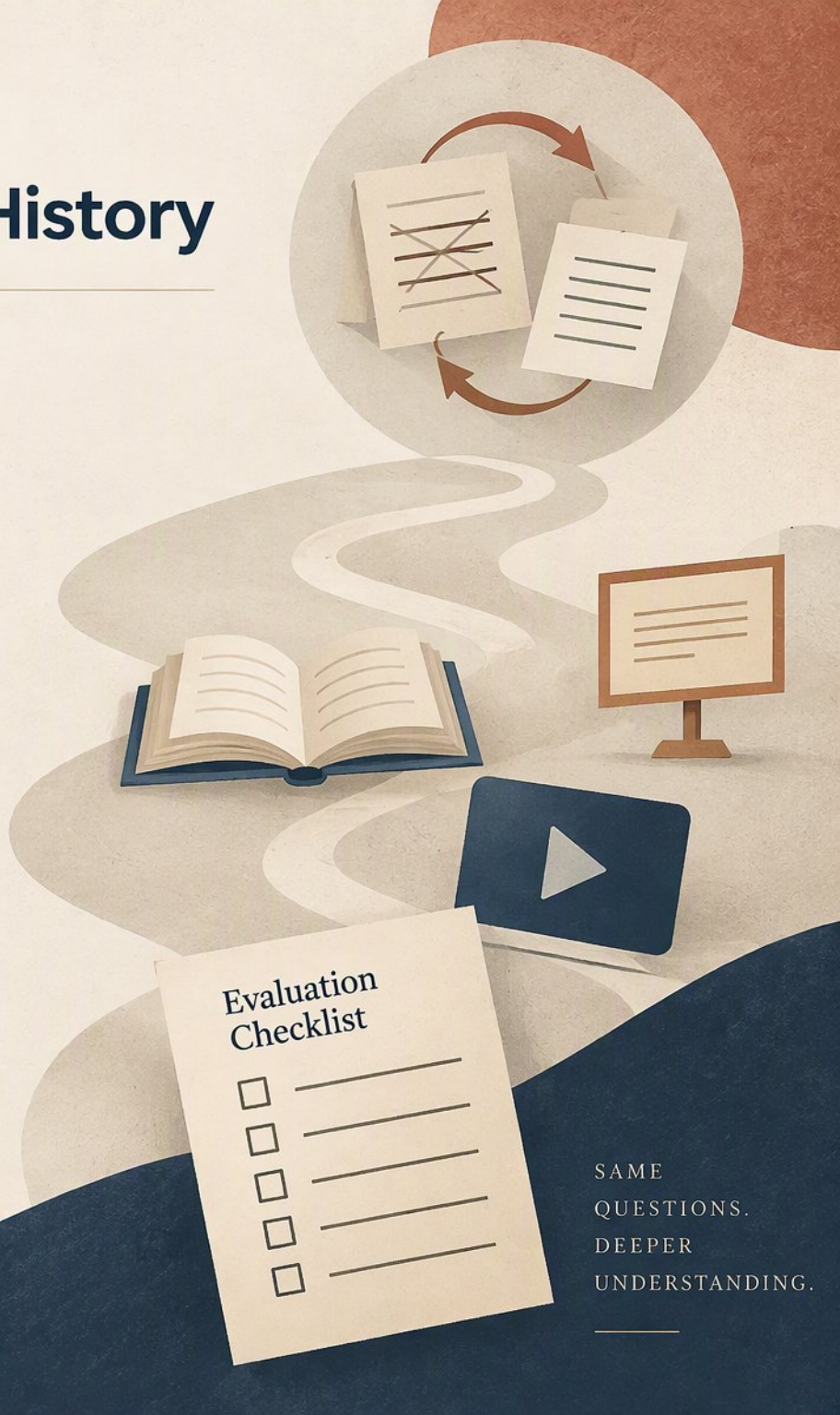
Recap: interpretations shift through evidence, methods, questions, voices, frameworks, present concerns—not caprice

Big idea: historical knowledge is revisionist by nature; “case closed” is rarely stamped

Personal takeaway: apply the five-question toolkit to your next text, museum label, or video

Resource handout: accessible readings, archives, databases, reusable evaluation checklist

Reflection prompt: name one belief about the past and test its source base



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