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The GeoHistory Diagram

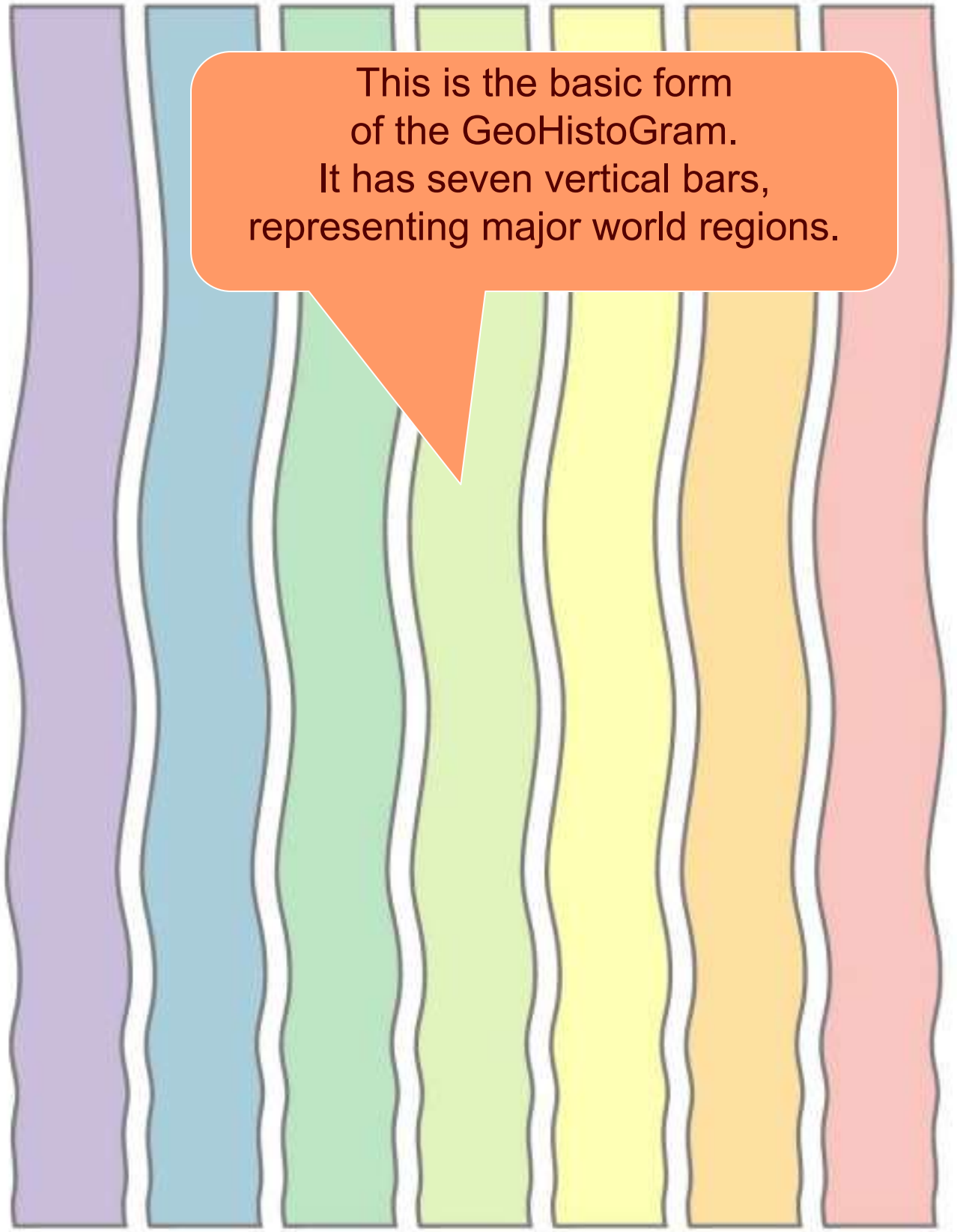
History-Geography Project

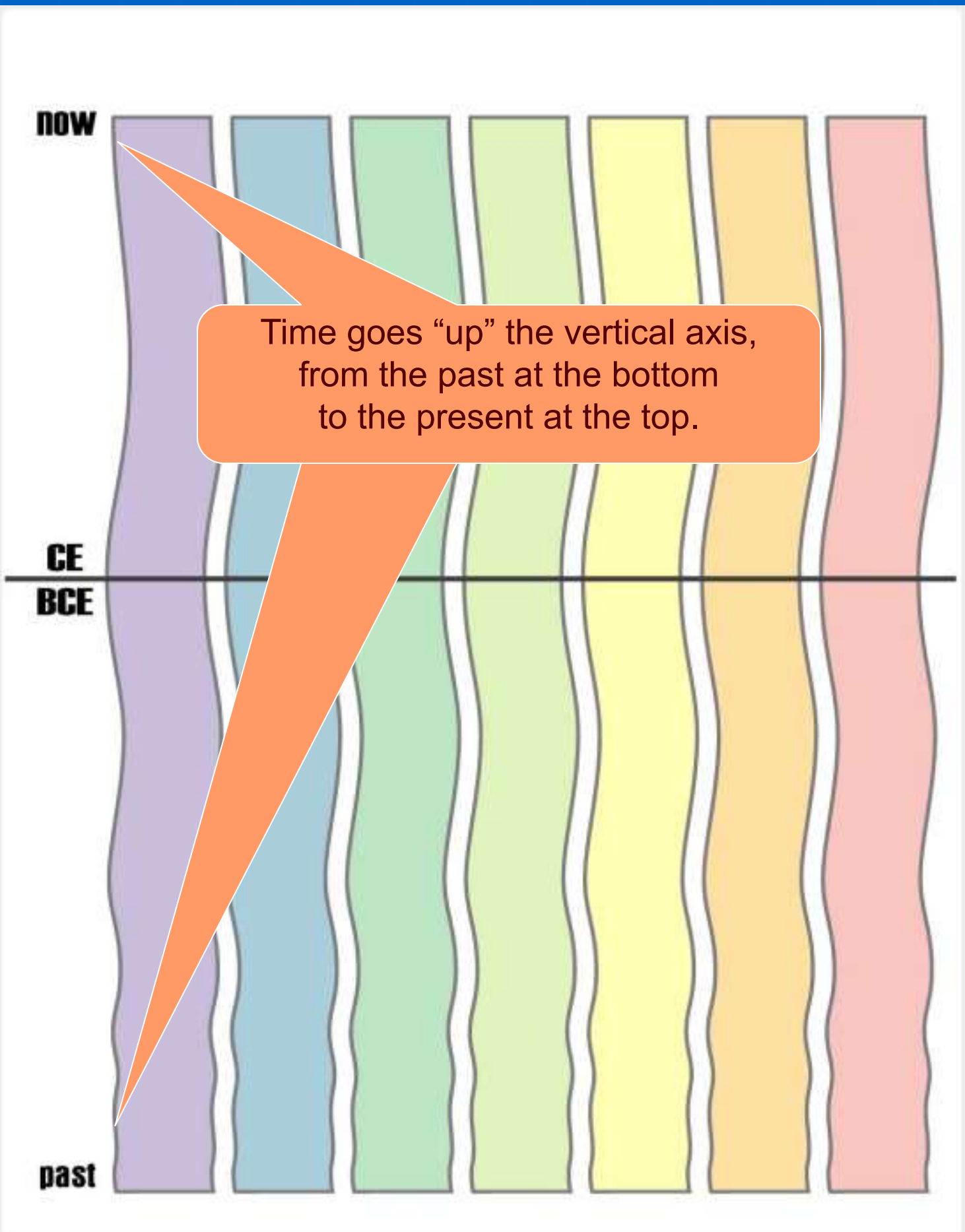
Michigan Geographic Alliance
Mississippi Geographic Alliance
New York Center for Geographic Learning
Grosvenor Center for Geographic Education
(San Marcos, Texas)

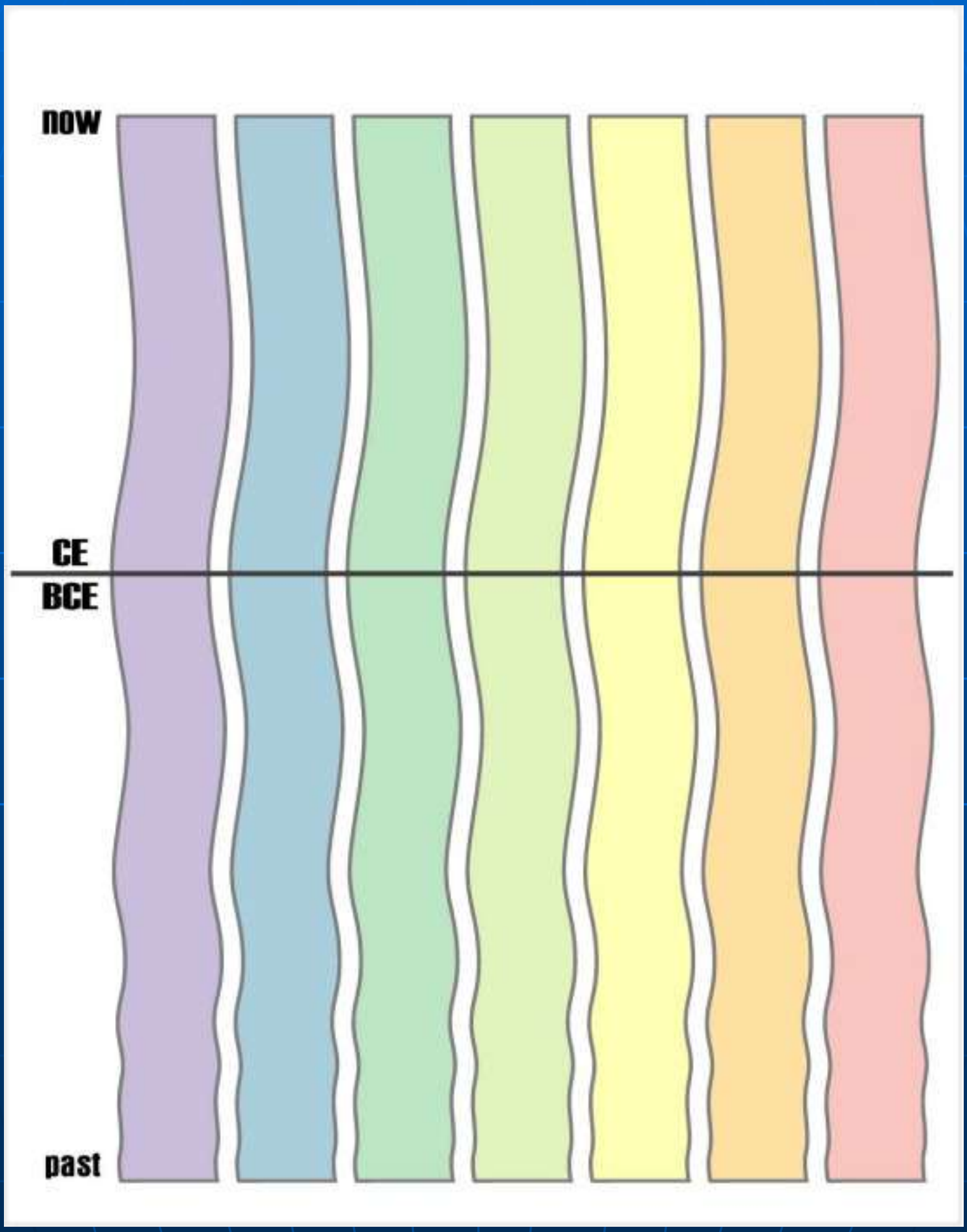
The GeoHistoGram

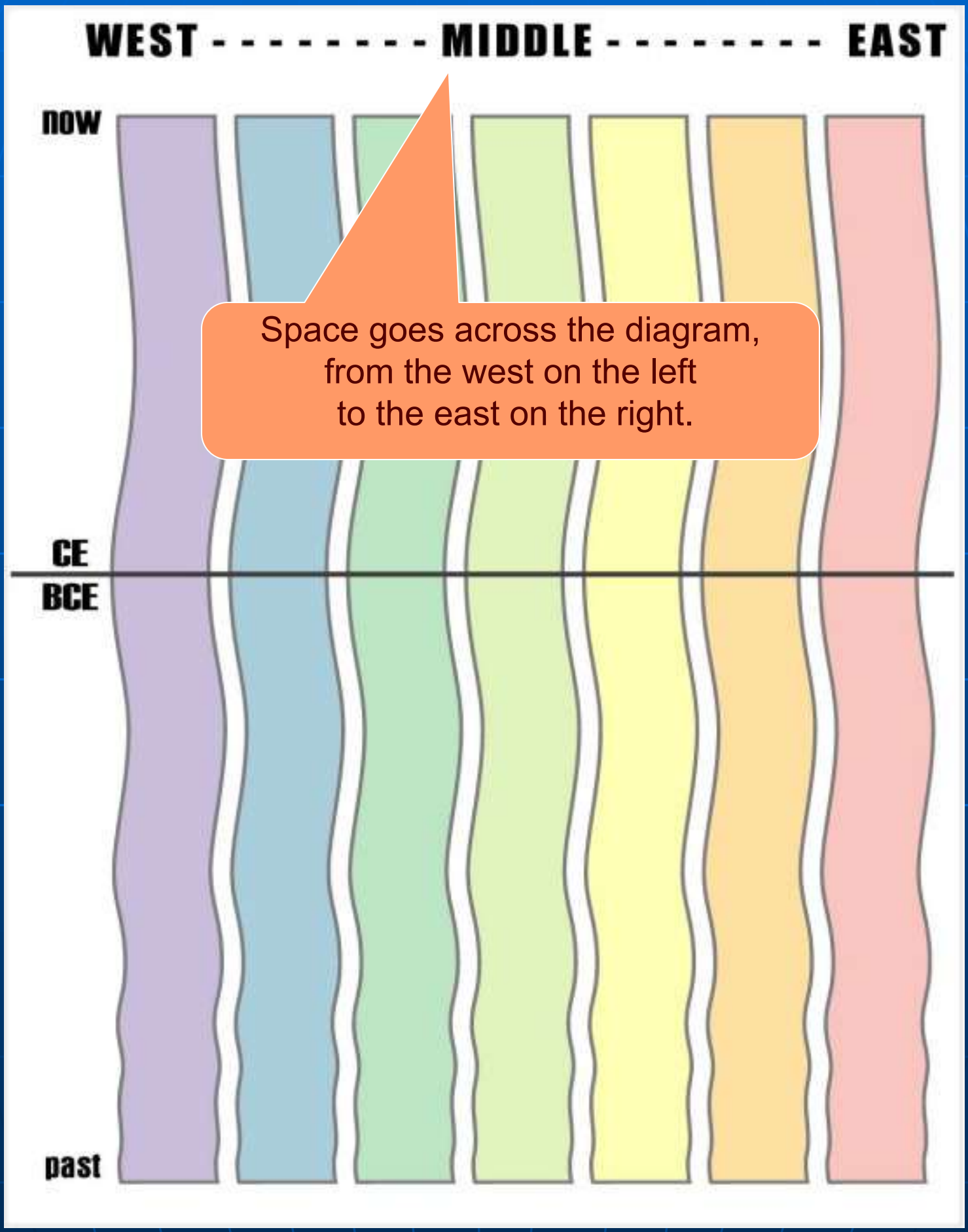
The GeoHistoGram

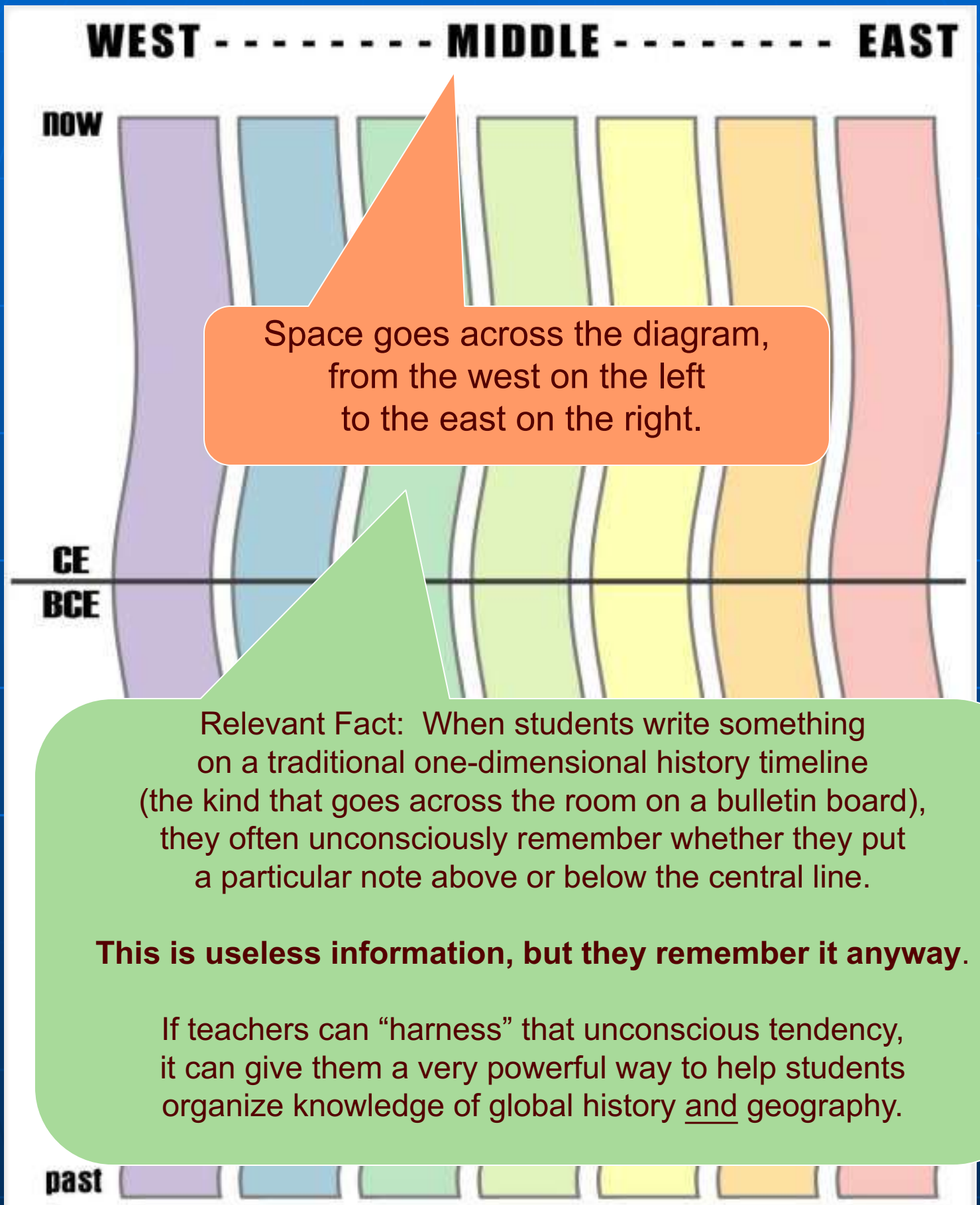
This graphic activity takes advantage of the human brain's natural tendencies to organize knowledge in a space-time context.

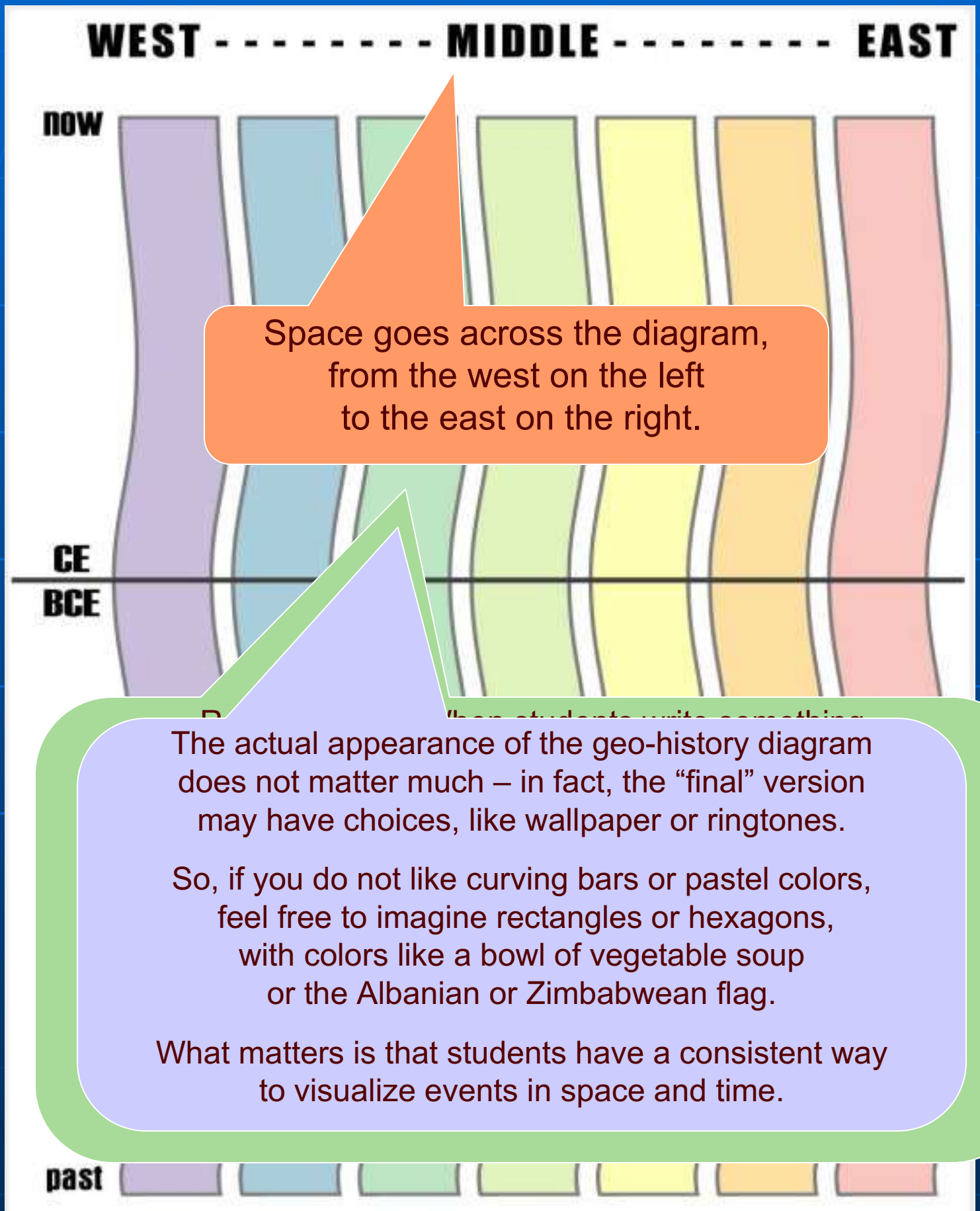

This is the basic form
of the GeoHistoGram.
It has seven vertical bars,
representing major world regions.

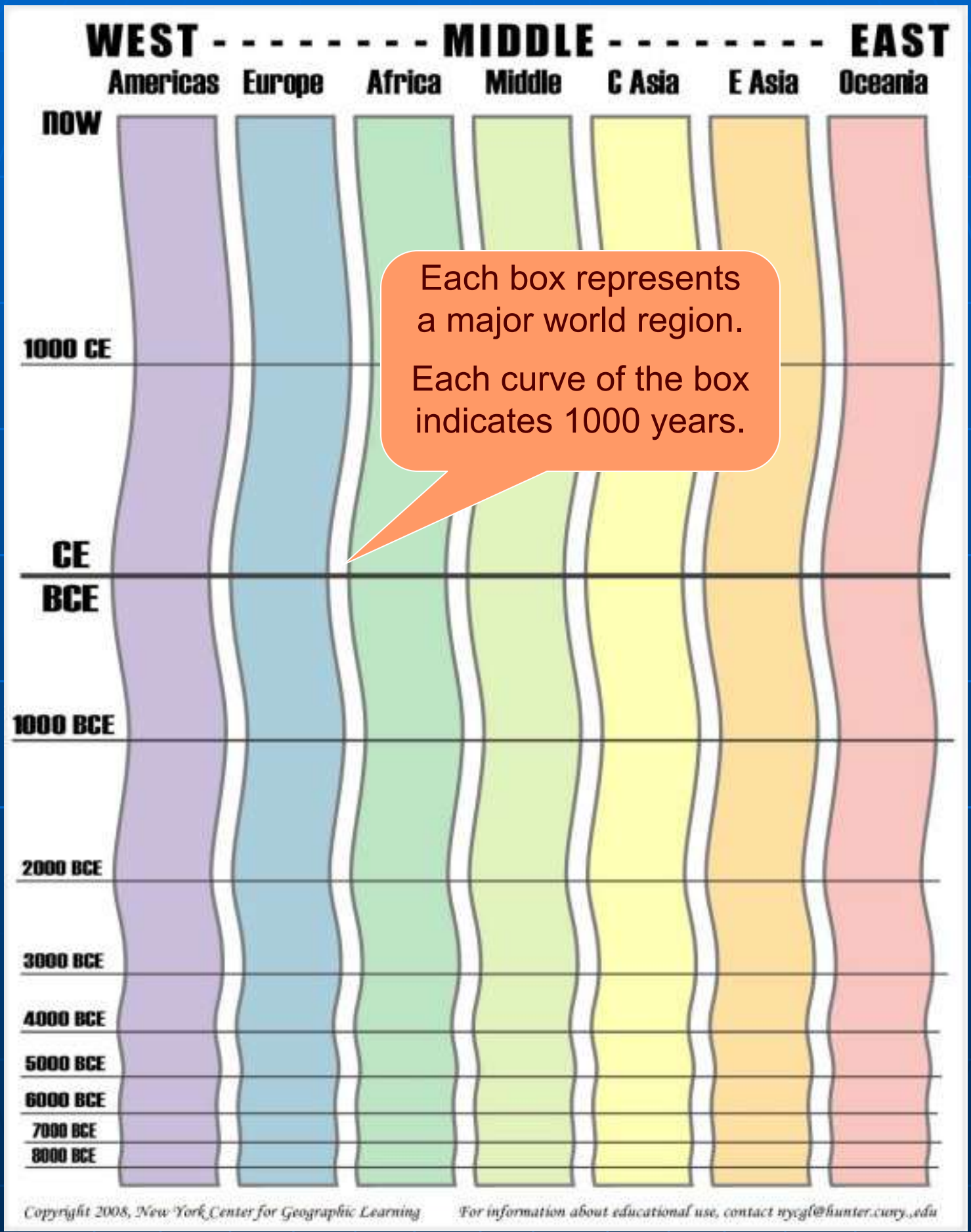

now
Time goes “up” the vertical axis,
from the past at the bottom
to the present at the top.
CE
BCE
past


now
CE
BCE
past


WEST - - - - - - - - MIDDLE - - - - - - - - EAST
now
Space goes across the diagram,
from the west on the left
to the east on the right.
CE
BCE
past


WEST - - - - - - - - MIDDLE - - - - - - - - EAST
now
Space goes across the diagram,
from the west on the left
to the east on the right.
CE
BCE
Relevant Fact: When students write something
on a traditional one-dimensional history timeline
(the kind that goes across the room on a bulletin board),
they often unconsciously remember whether they put
a particular note above or below the central line.
This is useless information, but they remember it anyway.
If teachers can "harness" that unconscious tendency,
it can give them a very powerful way to help students
organize knowledge of global history and geography.
past


WEST - - - - - - - - MIDDLE - - - - - - - - EAST
now
CE
BCE
past
Space goes across the diagram,
from the west on the left
to the east on the right.
The actual appearance of the geo-history diagram
does not matter much – in fact, the “final” version
may have choices, like wallpaper or ringtones.
So, if you do not like curving bars or pastel colors,
feel free to imagine rectangles or hexagons,
with colors like a bowl of vegetable soup
or the Albanian or Zimbabwean flag.
What matters is that students have a consistent way
to visualize events in space and time.


WEST - - - - - - - - MIDDLE - - - - - - - - EAST
Americas
Europe
Africa
Middle
C Asia
E Asia
Oceania
now
1000 CE
CE
BCE
1000 BCE
2000 BCE
3000 BCE
4000 BCE
5000 BCE
6000 BCE
7000 BCE
8000 BCE
Each box represents a major world region.
Each curve of the box indicates 1000 years.
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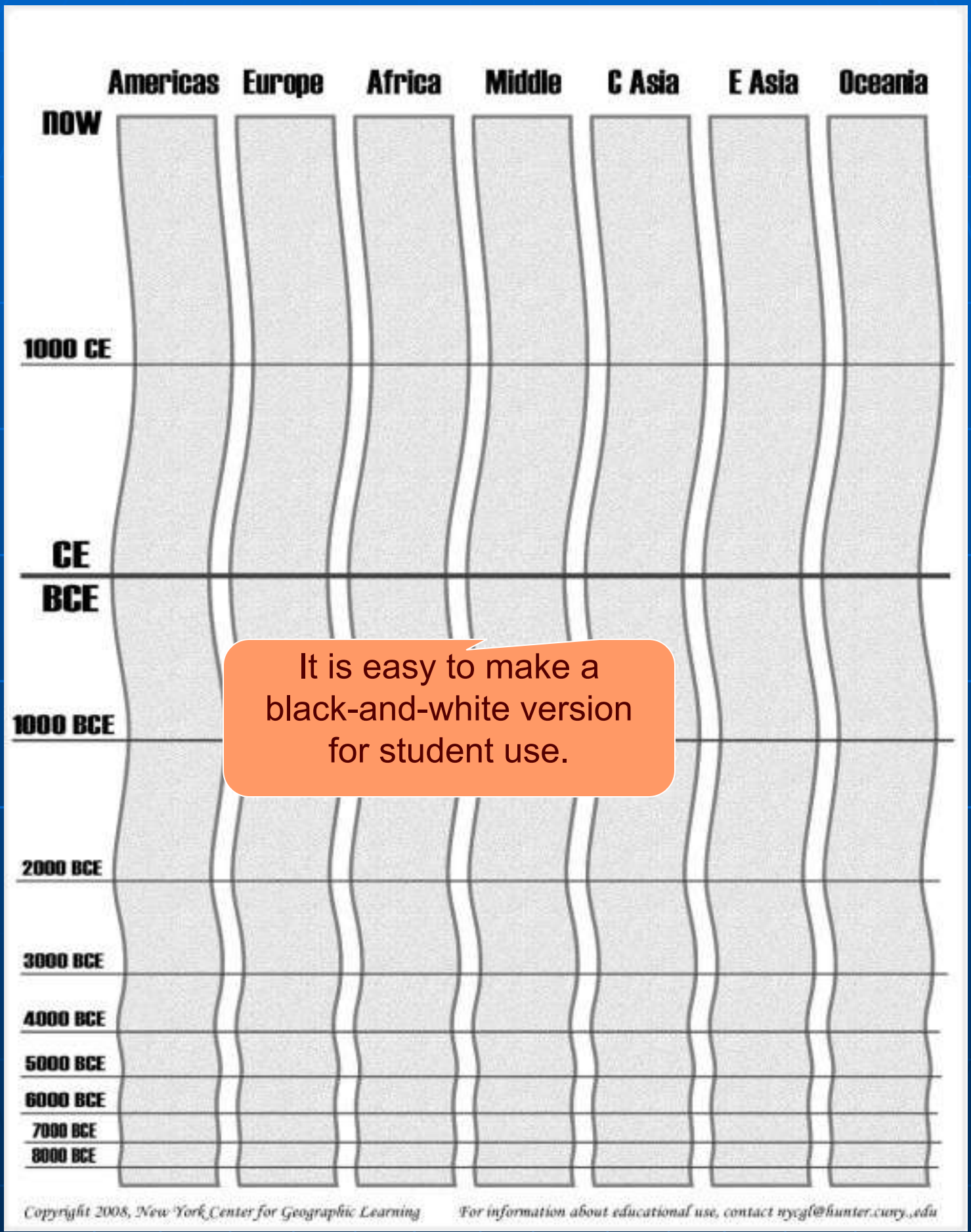
Americas
Europe
Africa
Middle
C Asia
E Asia
Oceania
now
1000 CE
CE
BCE
1000 BCE
2000 BCE
3000 BCE
4000 BCE
5000 BCE
6000 BCE
7000 BCE
8000 BCE
It is easy to make a black-and-white version for student use.
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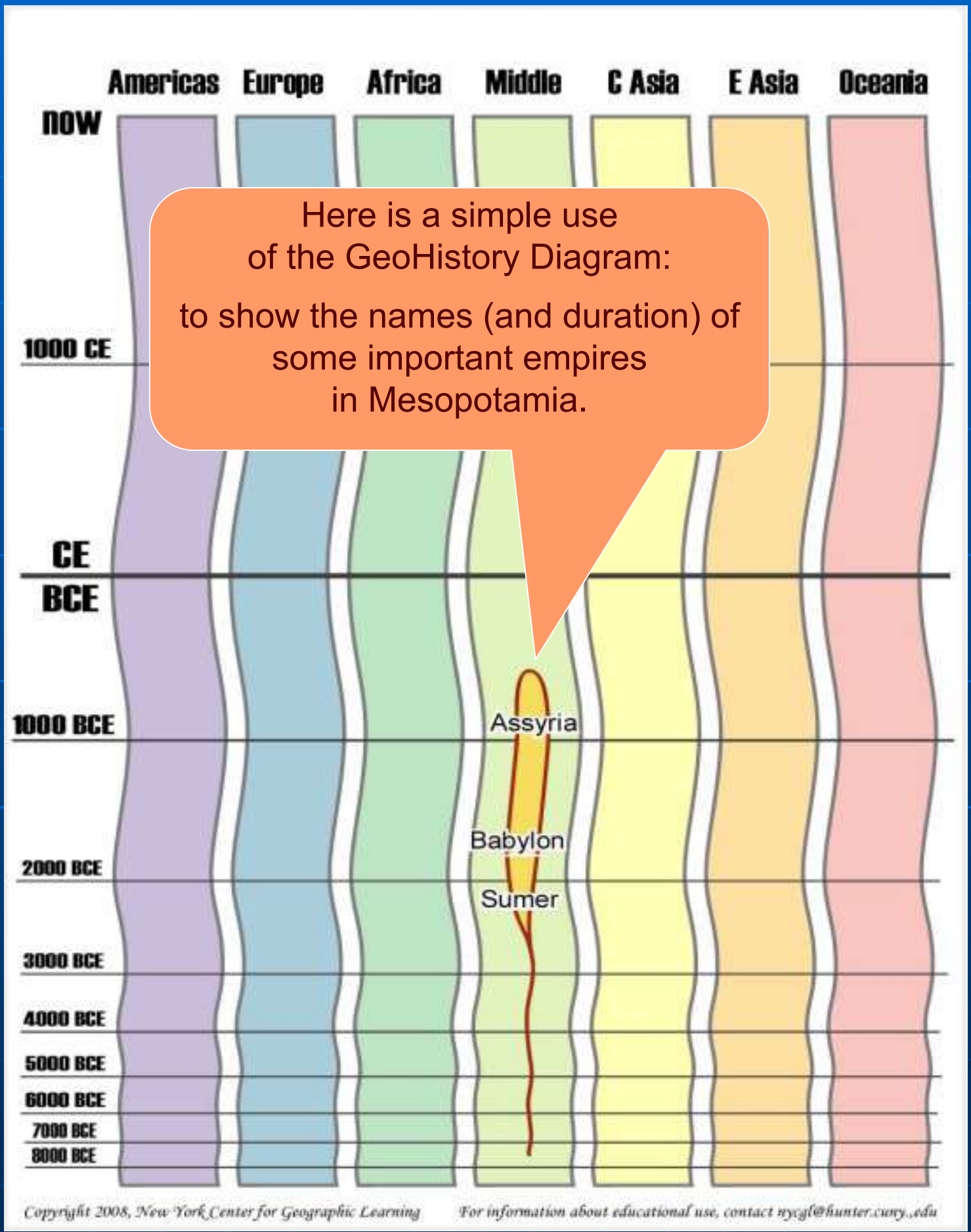
Americas
Europe
Africa
Middle
C Asia
E Asia
Oceania
now
1000 CE
CE
BCE
1000 BCE
2000 BCE
3000 BCE
4000 BCE
5000 BCE
6000 BCE
7000 BCE
8000 BCE
Here is a simple use of the GeoHistory Diagram:
to show the names (and duration) of some important empires in Mesopotamia.
Assyria
Babylon
Sumer
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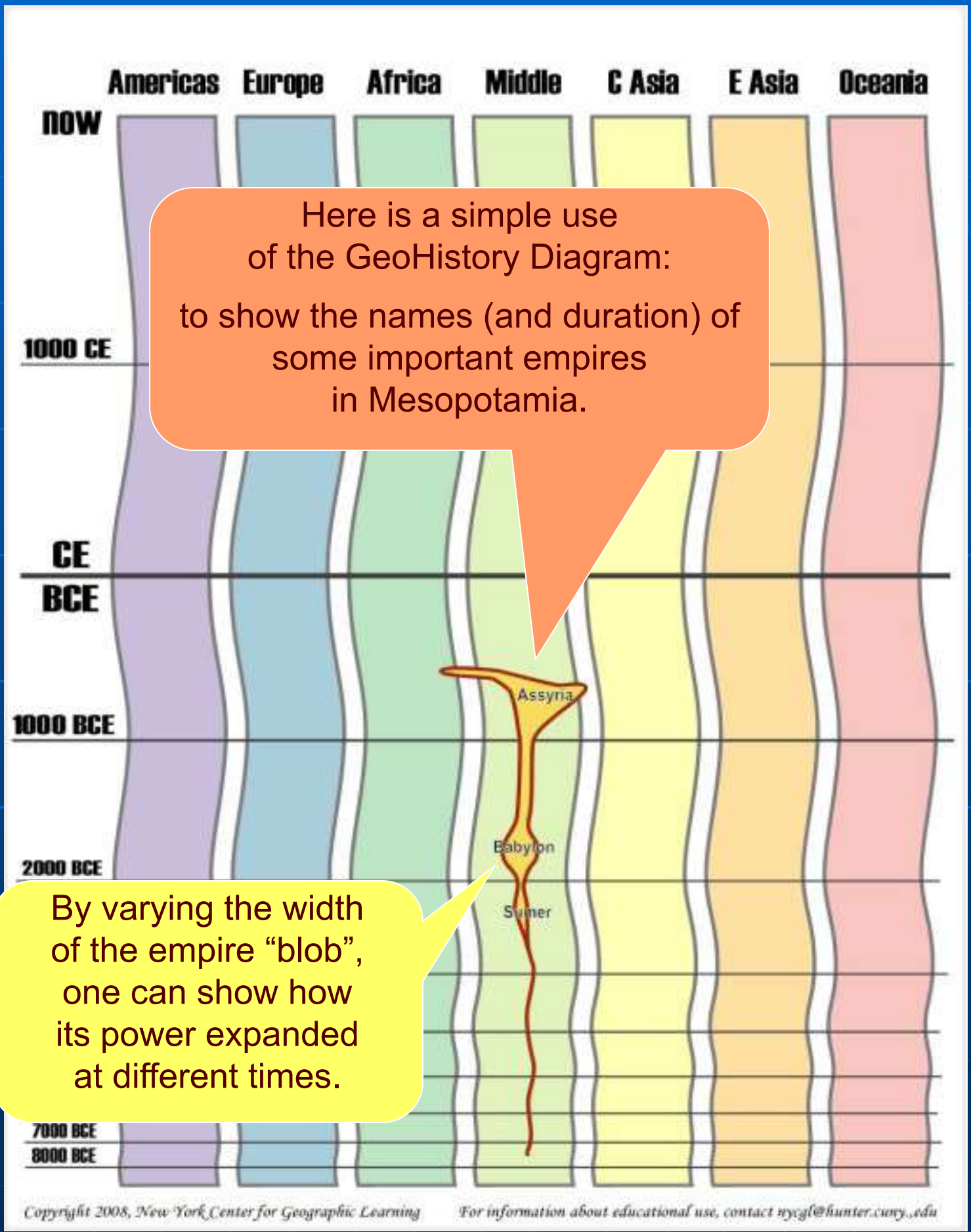
Americas
Europe
Africa
Middle
C Asia
E Asia
Oceania
NOW
1000 CE
CE
BCE
1000 BCE
2000 BCE
7000 BCE
8000 BCE
Here is a simple use of the GeoHistory Diagram:
to show the names (and duration) of some important empires in Mesopotamia.
Assyria
Babylon
Sumer
By varying the width of the empire "blob", one can show how its power expanded at different times.
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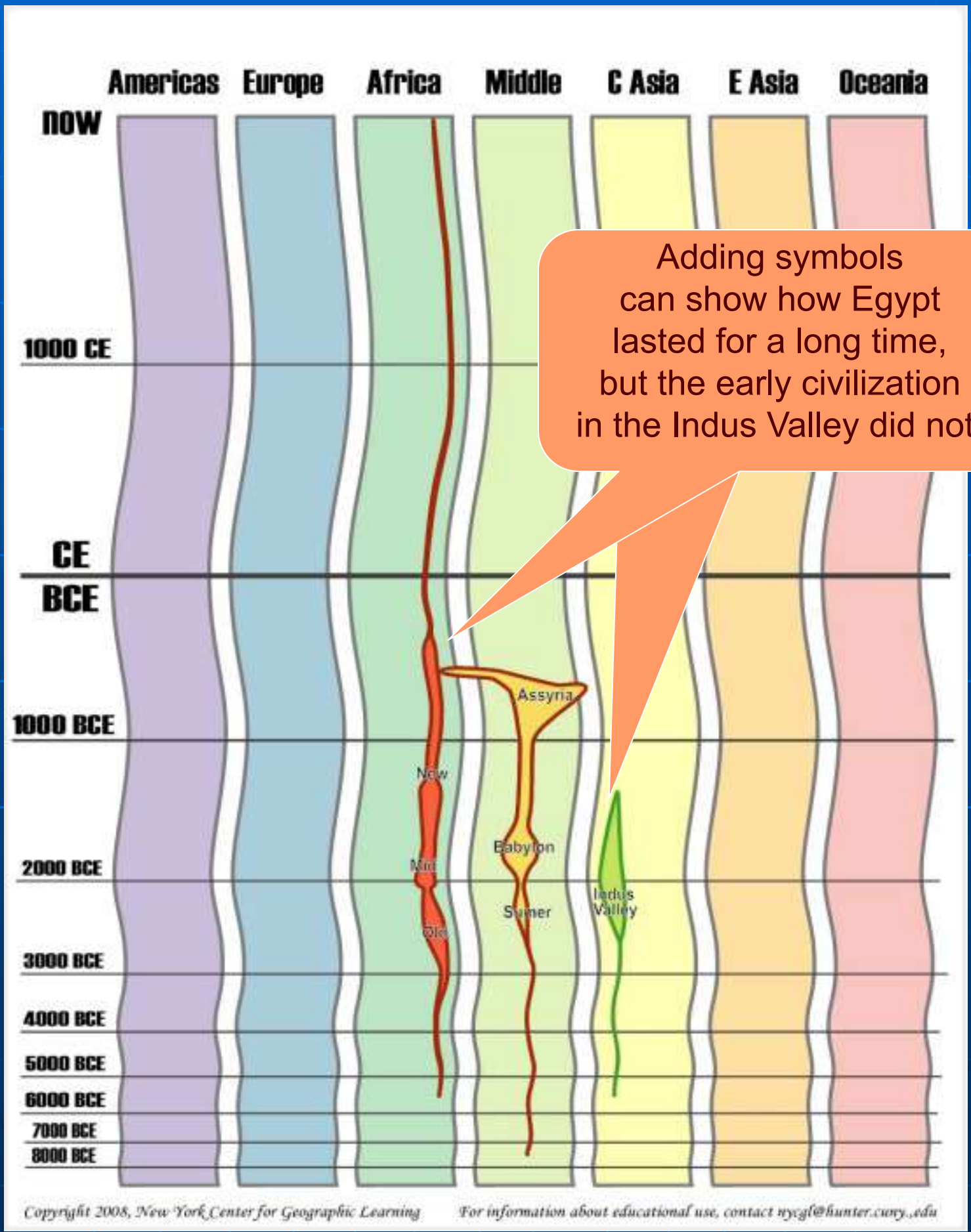
Americas
Europe
Africa
Middle
C Asia
E Asia
Oceania
now
1000 CE
CE
BCE
1000 BCE
2000 BCE
3000 BCE
4000 BCE
5000 BCE
6000 BCE
7000 BCE
8000 BCE
Assyria
New
Mid
Old
Babylon
Sumer
Indus Valley
Adding symbols can show how Egypt lasted for a long time, but the early civilization in the Indus Valley did not.
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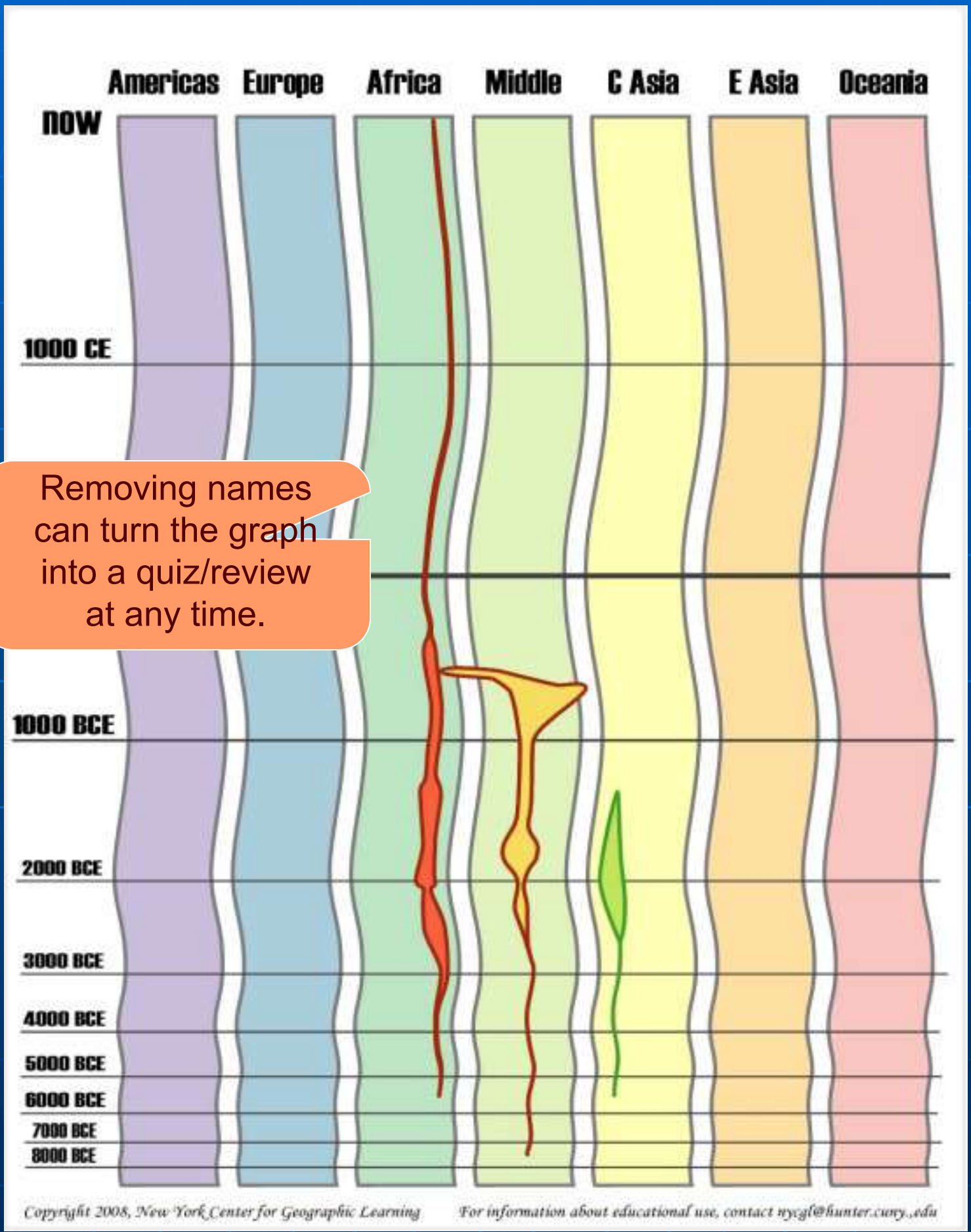
Americas
Europe
Africa
Middle
C Asia
E Asia
Oceania
now
1000 CE
1000 BCE
2000 BCE
3000 BCE
4000 BCE
5000 BCE
6000 BCE
7000 BCE
8000 BCE
Removing names can turn the graph into a quiz/review at any time.
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Adding a flag to show the date and location of the Revolutionary War can help U.S. students put the Mesopotamian empires into perspective.

Obviously, the graph is not limited to empires.

Major inventions
(such as iron smelting)
had great influence on the world.

Wooden Bats and Battle Axes

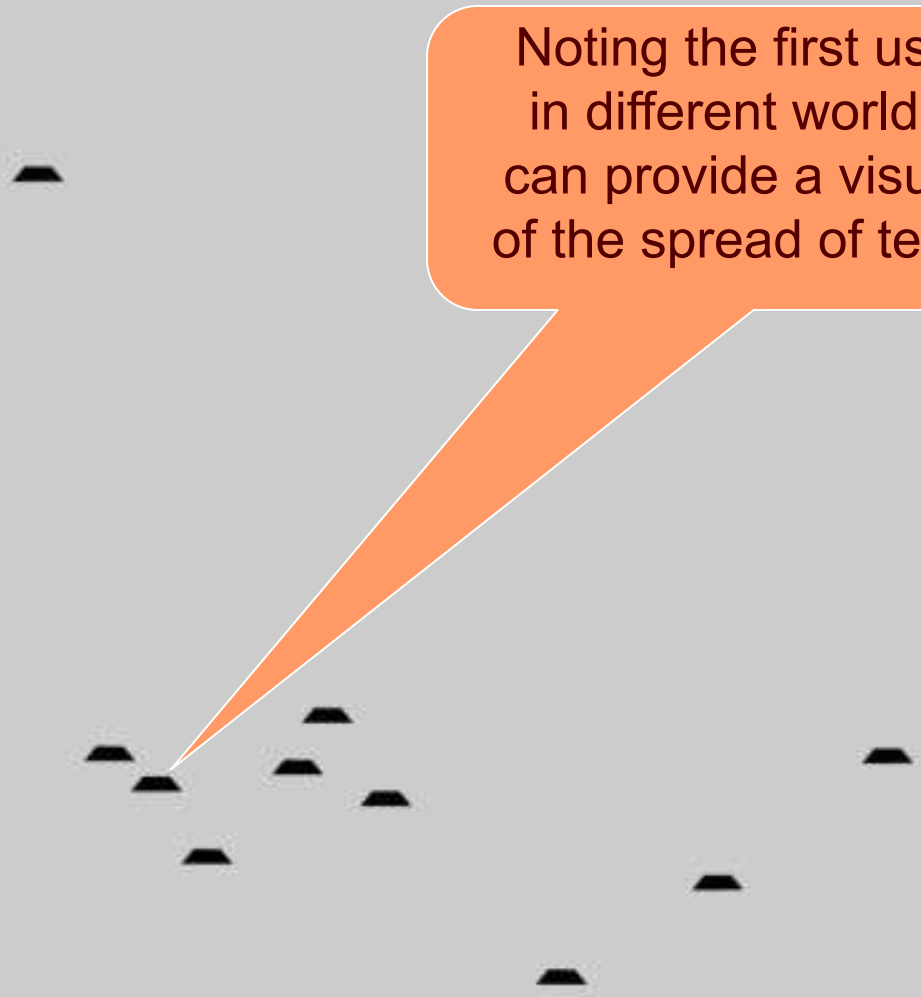
To appreciate the value of iron, you might try to chop down a tree with a rock. Or think about trying to cut a board with a sharpened bone. Or imagine that you have a wooden club, and someone attacks you with a long, sharp sword or a battle-axe.

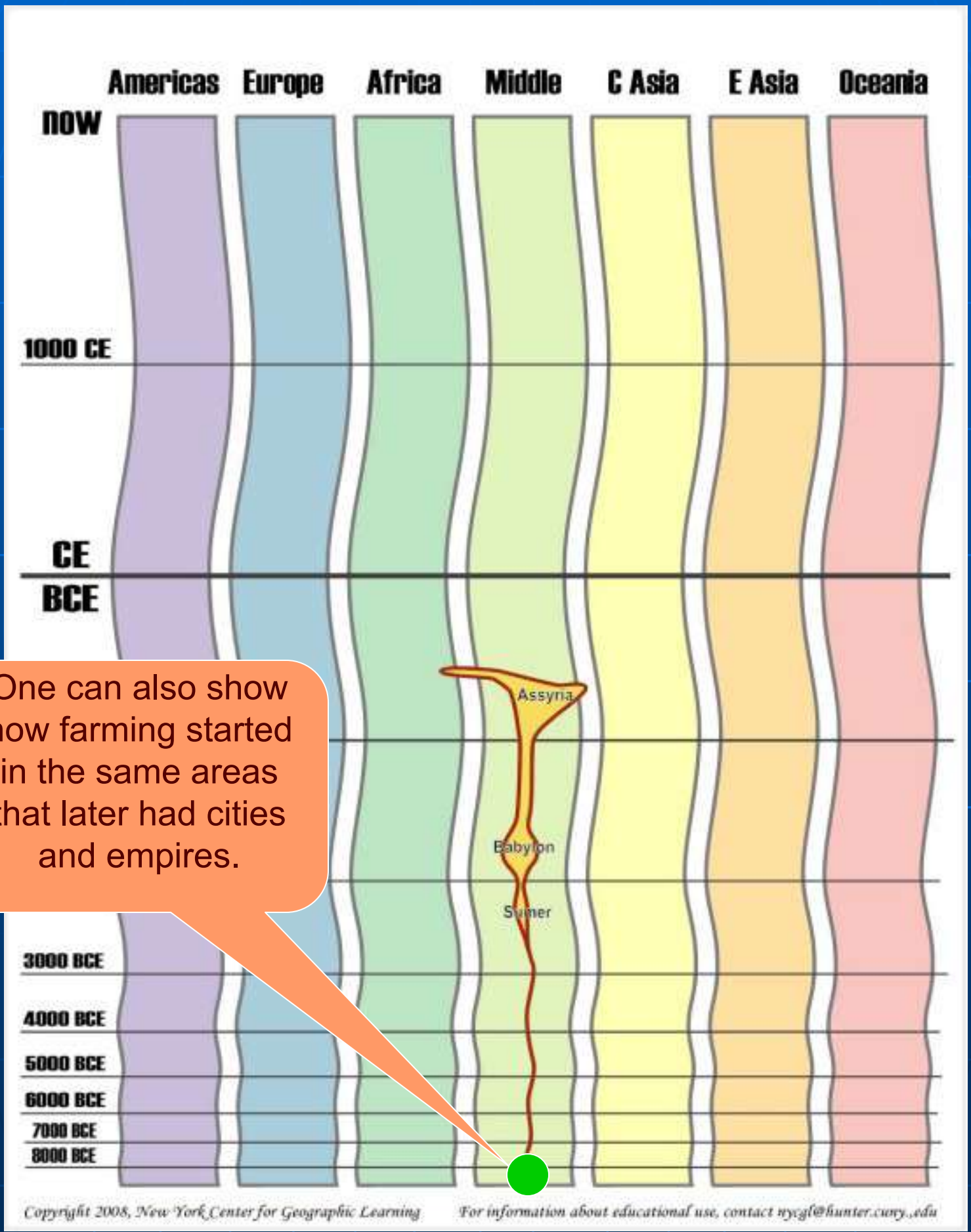
In short, having iron is a big deal. It changed the way people did many things. Moreover, people who did not have iron usually lost if they got involved in a war with people who had iron tools and weapons. The arrival of iron-making technology in an area, therefore, usually marks a turning point in its history.

Here is a summary of the archaeological evidence about iron:

1550 BCE	The Hittites develop iron technology in what is now called Turkey
1200 BCE	Iron spreads throughout Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq)
1100 BCE	People use iron in the Ganges Valley of northern India
1000 BCE	People in Greece make iron tools and weapons
750 BCE	Iron is used in the Nile Valley of Egypt
700 BCE	Iron-making spreads throughout continental Europe
600 BCE	Iron-making starts in the Nigerian area of west Africa
500 BCE	People in Scandinavia use iron
400 BCE	Iron-making reaches south Africa

Printed pages give students some background and data, which they can add to the diagram.


Noting the first use of iron in different world regions can provide a visual image of the spread of technology.


Americas
Europe
Africa
Middle
C Asia
E Asia
Oceania
now
1000 CE
CE
BCE
Assyria
Babylon
Sumer
3000 BCE
4000 BCE
5000 BCE
6000 BCE
7000 BCE
8000 BCE
One can also show how farming started in the same areas that later had cities and empires.
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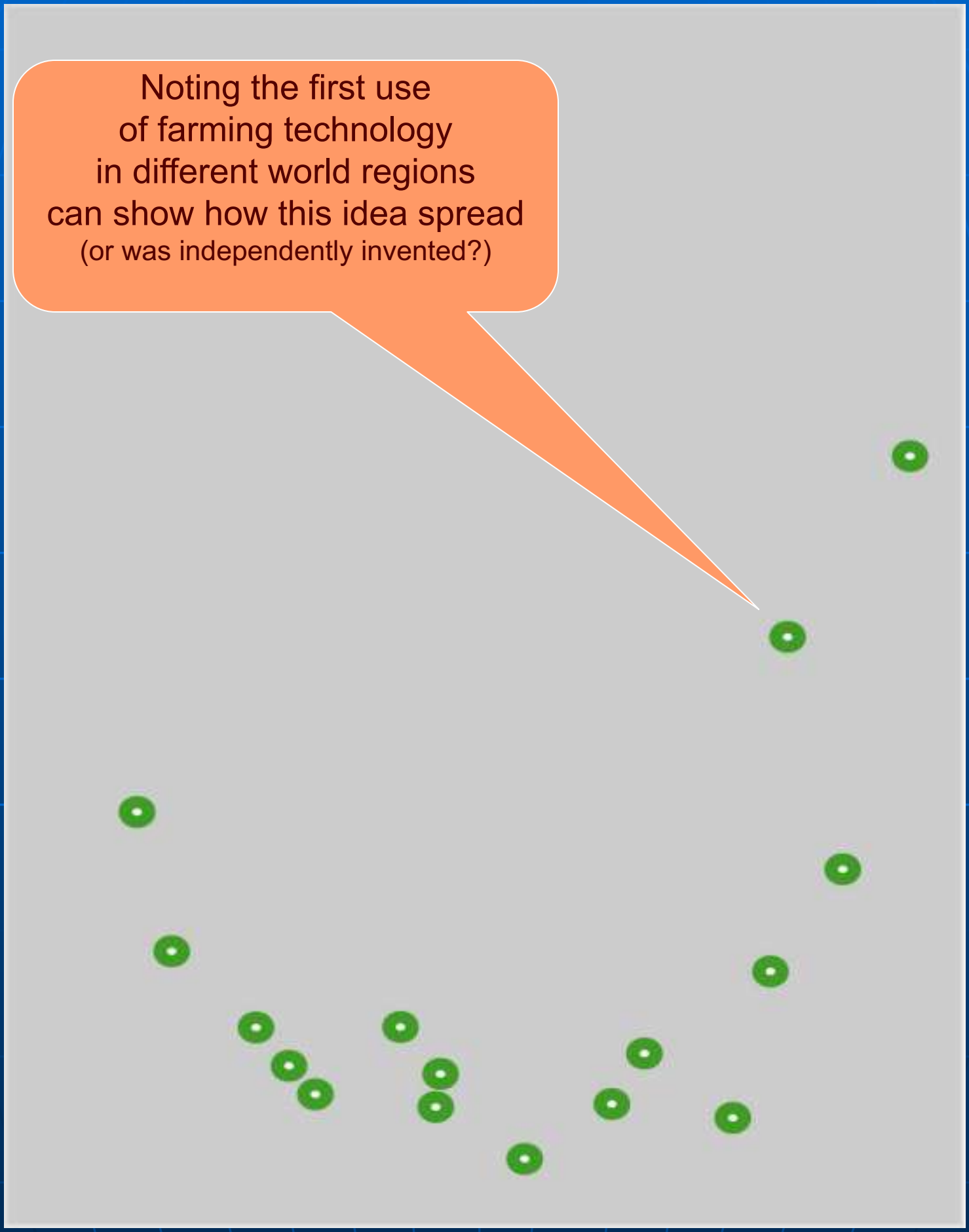
Noting the first use
of farming technology
in different world regions
can show how this idea spread
(or was independently invented?)



Gather It Wild or Grow Your Own?

The real breakthrough that we call agriculture is not just discovering how to put a seed into the ground – it is knowing what kind of seed is likely to have a chance of surviving in your environment and still providing useful food when it is fully grown.

Different parts of the world discovered different crop plants at different times. People who found really good seeds often grew faster and stronger, and in many cases eventually conquered their less fortunate neighbors. To understand the world today, therefore, it helps to know about what kinds of seeds do well in specific parts of the world.

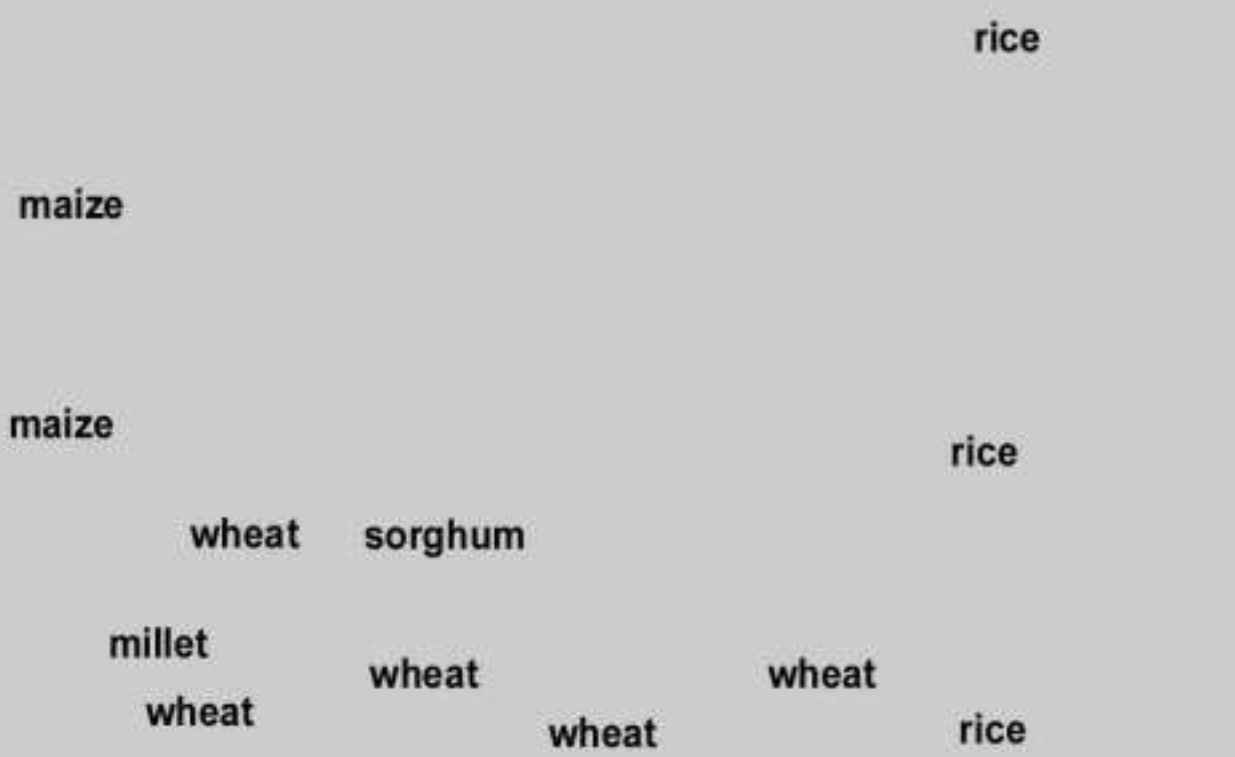
Here is a summary of some important archaeological evidence about farming:

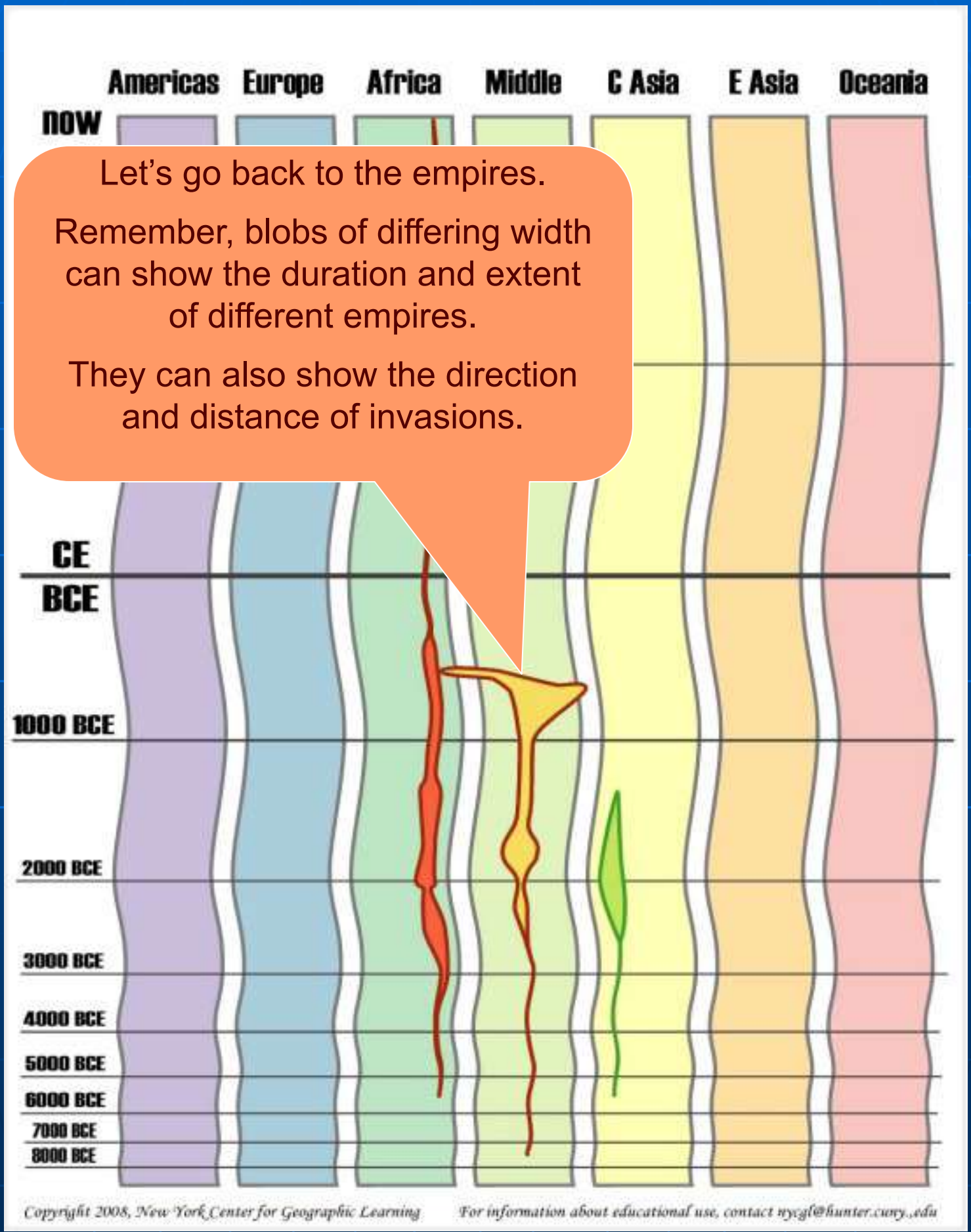
8000 BCE	Planting wheat in the hills around Mesopotamia
7000 BCE	Planting high-protein crops such as lentils and peas
6500 BCE	Planting rice in the Yangtze Valley (modern China)
6000 BCE	Farming in the Indus Valley (modern Pakistan)
6000 BCE	Farming in the Nile Valley of Egypt
5000 BCE	Irrigating to increase yield in Mesopotamia and Egypt
4500 BCE	Farming in the G[illegible]s Valley (modern India)
4000 BCE	Planting sor[illegible]lern Sudan)
[illegible]	[illegible]

As with iron and other topics, adding symbols to show farming could be a class demonstration or an individual/group activity.

In many cases, what spread was the *idea* of planting, not the specific crops.

People had to choose crops that fit their local environment.




Americas
Europe
Africa
Middle
C Asia
E Asia
Oceania
now
Let's go back to the empires.
Remember, blobs of differing width can show the duration and extent of different empires.
They can also show the direction and distance of invasions.
CE
BCE
1000 BCE
2000 BCE
3000 BCE
4000 BCE
5000 BCE
6000 BCE
7000 BCE
8000 BCE
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For example, Alexander made a very rapid expansion of the Greek Empire eastward

(and left many cities called Alexandria!).

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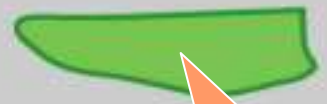
(and left many cities called Alexandria!).

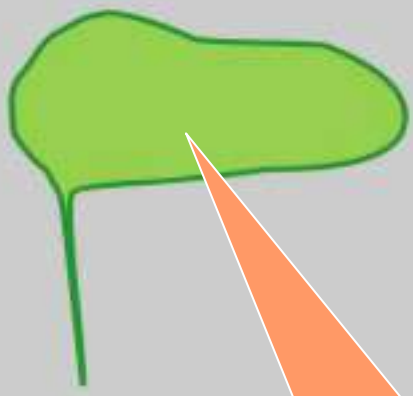


What he did, however, was basically to lead his army around an existing empire.

Several Persian rulers had already put a large empire together over several centuries.

Persians and Greeks
both ran into a barrier in India -
some powerful city-states that
became the Mauryan Empire.

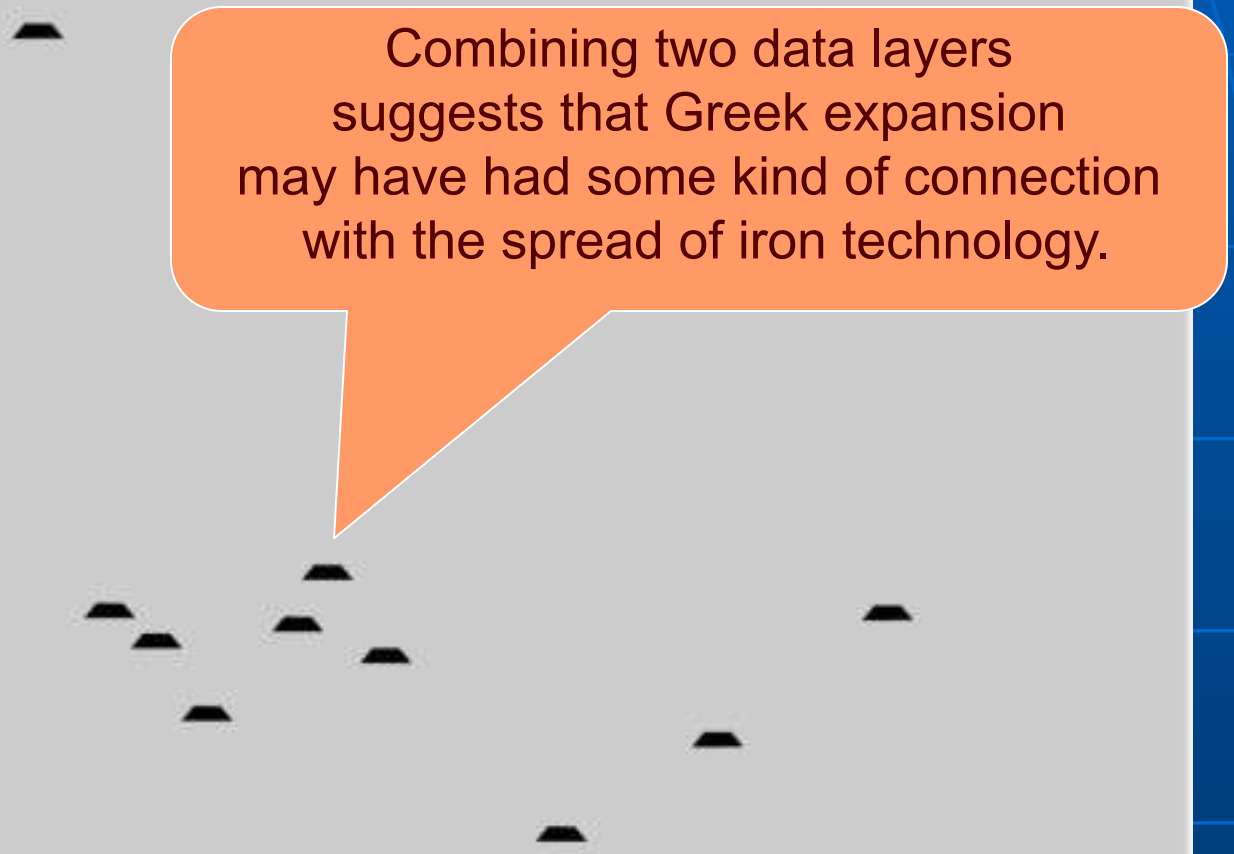
Students seldom see that connection,
because their textbooks usually treat
these world regions separately.



Adding a blob of appropriate width and height shows the size and extent of the Roman Empire.

We could continue adding empires for a long time (but you get the point).

Let's go back to look at Alexander to make some different connections.


Combining two data layers
suggests that Greek expansion
may have had some kind of connection
with the spread of iron technology.

You could also use
a completely different
“graphic vocabulary”
to describe Alexander
as a kind of “bridge”
between world regions.

As with the empires,
you can choose whether to show
the names of the “famous people”
associated with each bridge.

Intercontinental "Bridges" in History

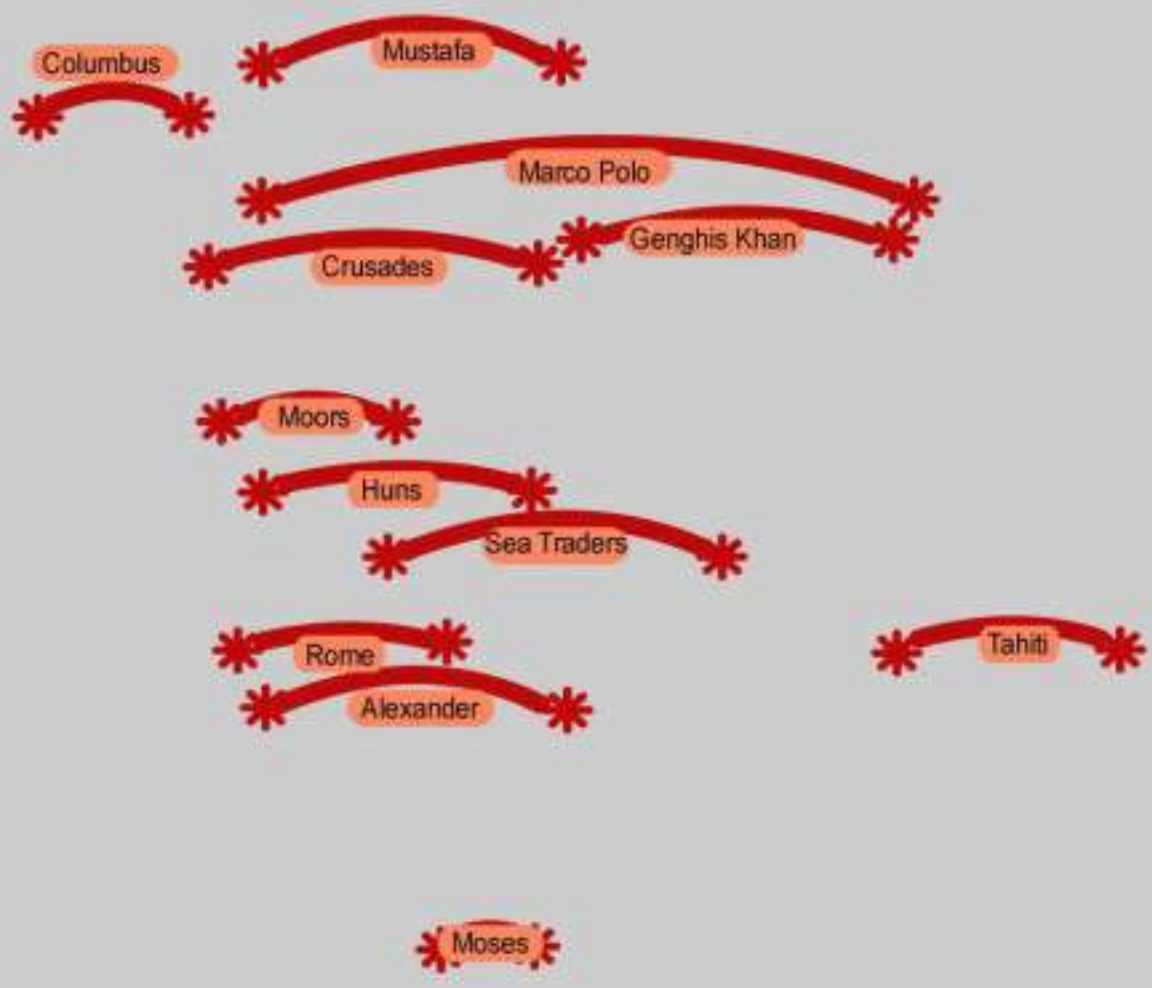
At several key moments in history, people made journeys that linked major world regions in new ways. These links often led to the spread of ideas, trade in food or other goods, movement of people, and more wealth at both ends of the connection. On the other hand, the links could also lead to invasion, war, disease, and death.

In other words, you have to know something about the conditions at both ends of a new connection in order to understand the consequences of the connection.

Here is some background information on some important "intercontinental bridges":

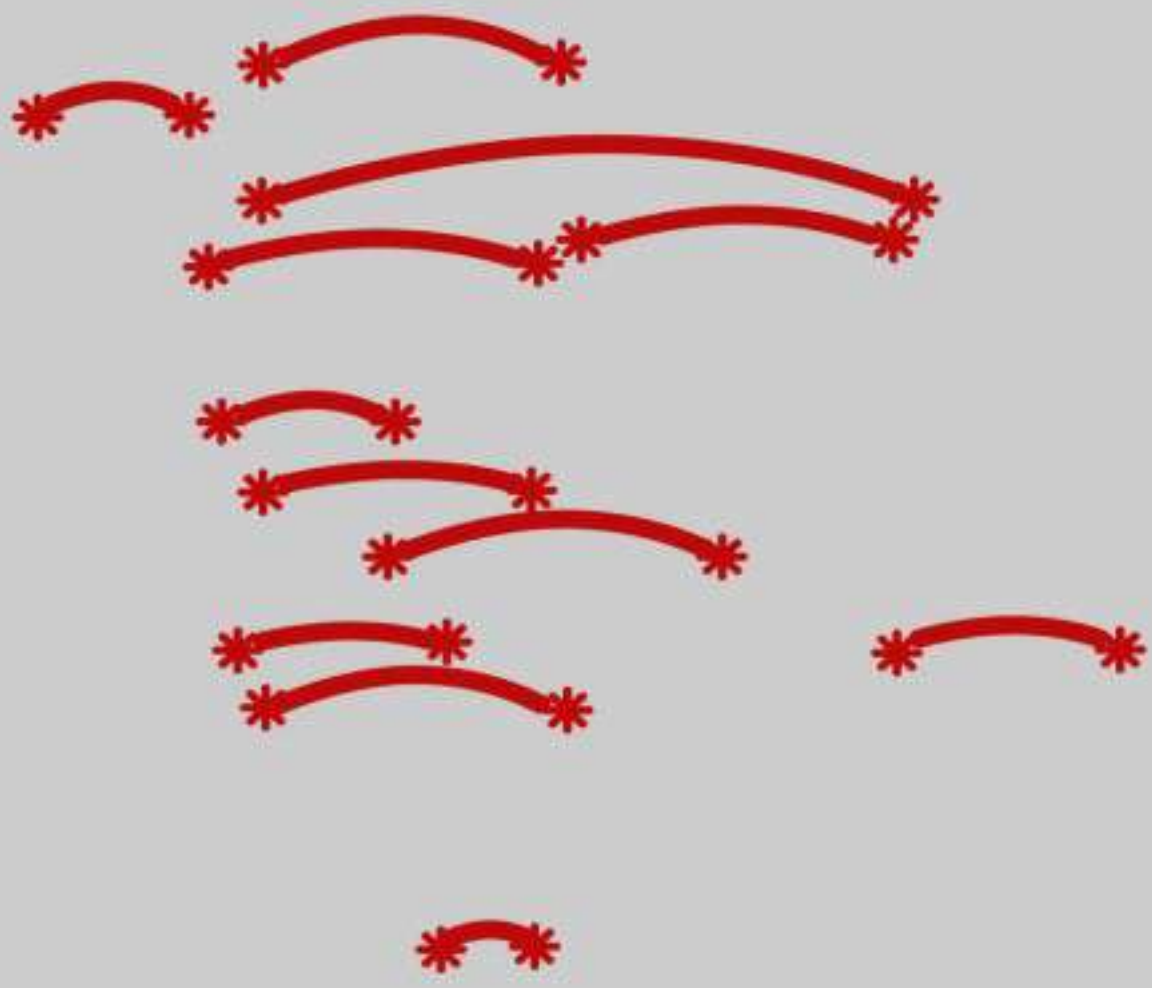
1300 BCE	Hebrews moved from Egypt to Palestine
325 BCE	Alexander led an army from Greece to the Indus Valley
200 BCE	Polynesian people sailed to Tahiti
125 BCE	Romans crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Carthage
150	Sea traders traveled from India to east Africa
400	Huns from centr Asia attacked Rome
711	Moors from Mor co invaded Spain
1099	Crusaders from ope went to Palestine
1225	Genghis Khan le rmy from Mongolia to Iraq, Europe
1300	Marco Polo tr rom Venice to China
1492	Columbus sail Spain to the Caribbean islands

This topic can also be a class demonstration or an individual activity.



Here are a dozen important bridges between regions at various times.

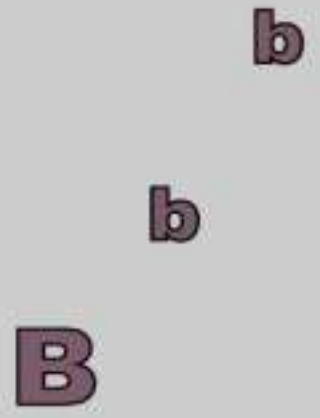
(Students could “research” them individually or suggest others to add.)



Removing the names could turn this into a useful review or quiz.

Letters or other symbols can show where religions started and spread.

These letters show when Buddhism appeared in India, China, and Japan.



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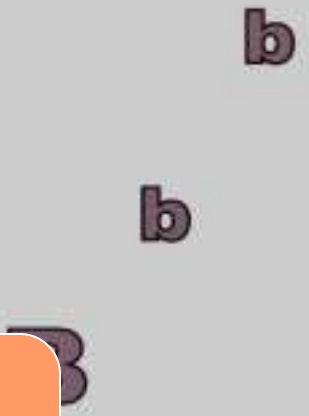


As with iron, farming, bridges, and other topics, this also can be an individual or group activity

Religion has been a great force in human ... religions developed in different parts of the world. Moreover, ... times and places, religion helped to unify or divide large numbers of people. W... those facts together, you can see how religion helped influence human history.

The first step is to identify the source areas ... at religions. Here is some background information on several major religio... dates are approximate):

1900 BCE Epic of Gilgamesh (G) written in M... amia

1200 BCE Vedas written in India – beginning o... uism (H)

1200 BCE Moses writes Ten Commandments near ... der of Africa and Eurasia; Judaism (J) spreads after Jews are d... orted to Babylon in 586 BCE

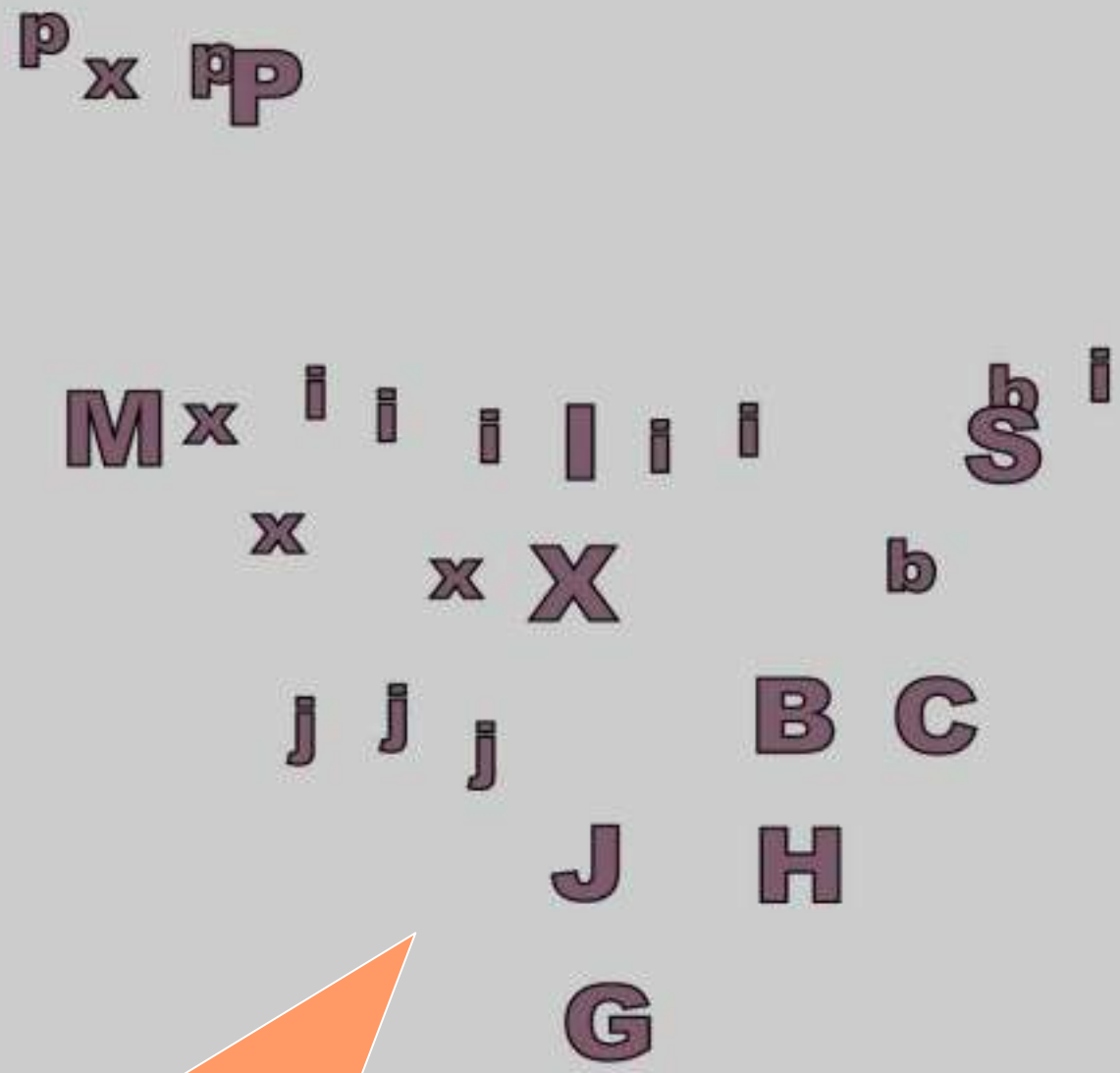
550 BCE Lao Tzu teaches in China; known as founde... of Taoism (T)

500 BCE Siddhartha Gautama, later known as the Buddha, teaches in India: Buddhism (B) becomes the official religion of India in 256 BCE and spreads to China about 100 CE, to Japan about 550 CE

500 BCE Confucius teaches in China; Confucianism (C) becomes the official religion of China in 136 BCE

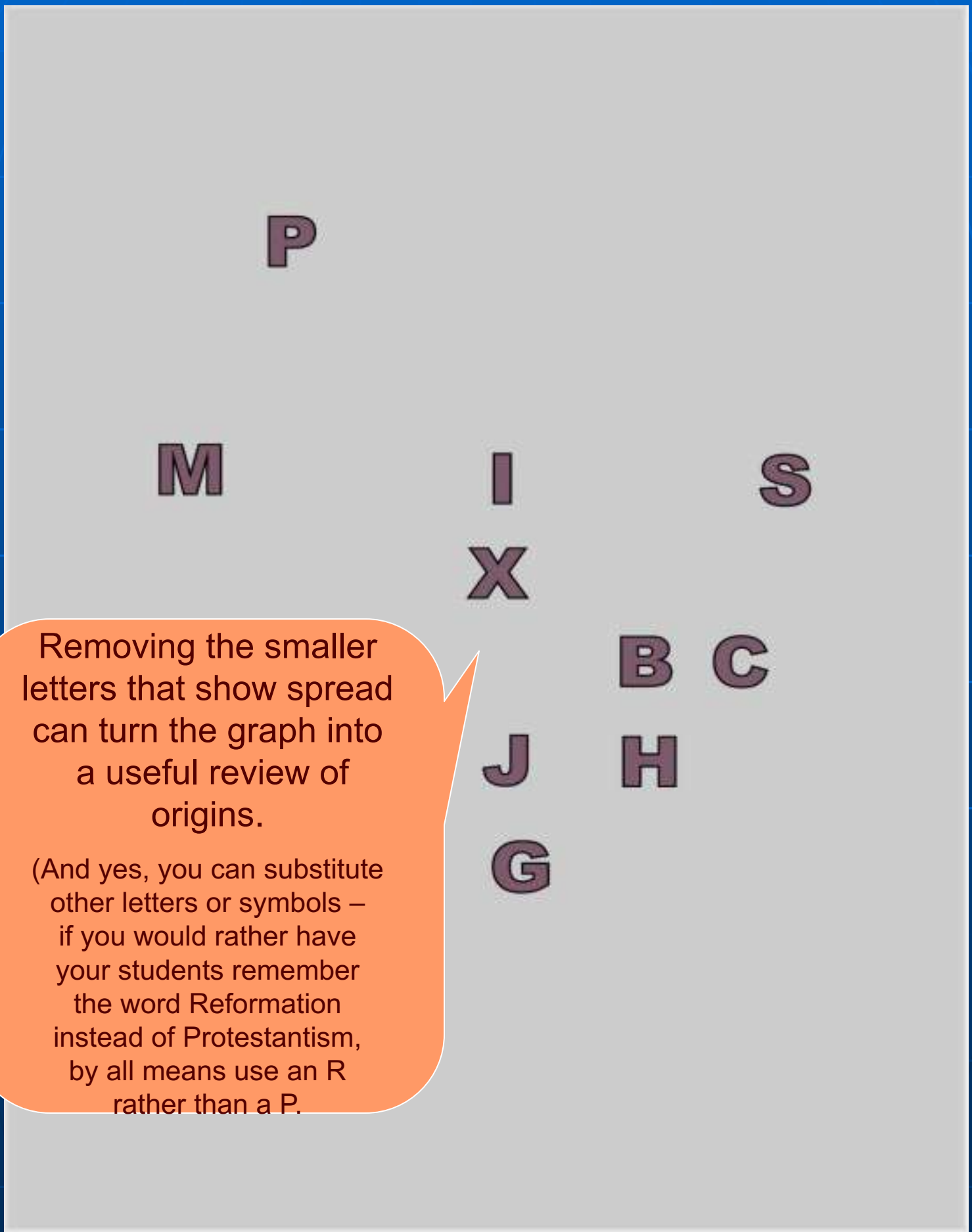
This set of letters shows how Islam rapidly spread both east and west from its “birthplace” in Arabia.

Combining those “data layers” can show how Islam spread much more widely and rapidly than Buddhism did.



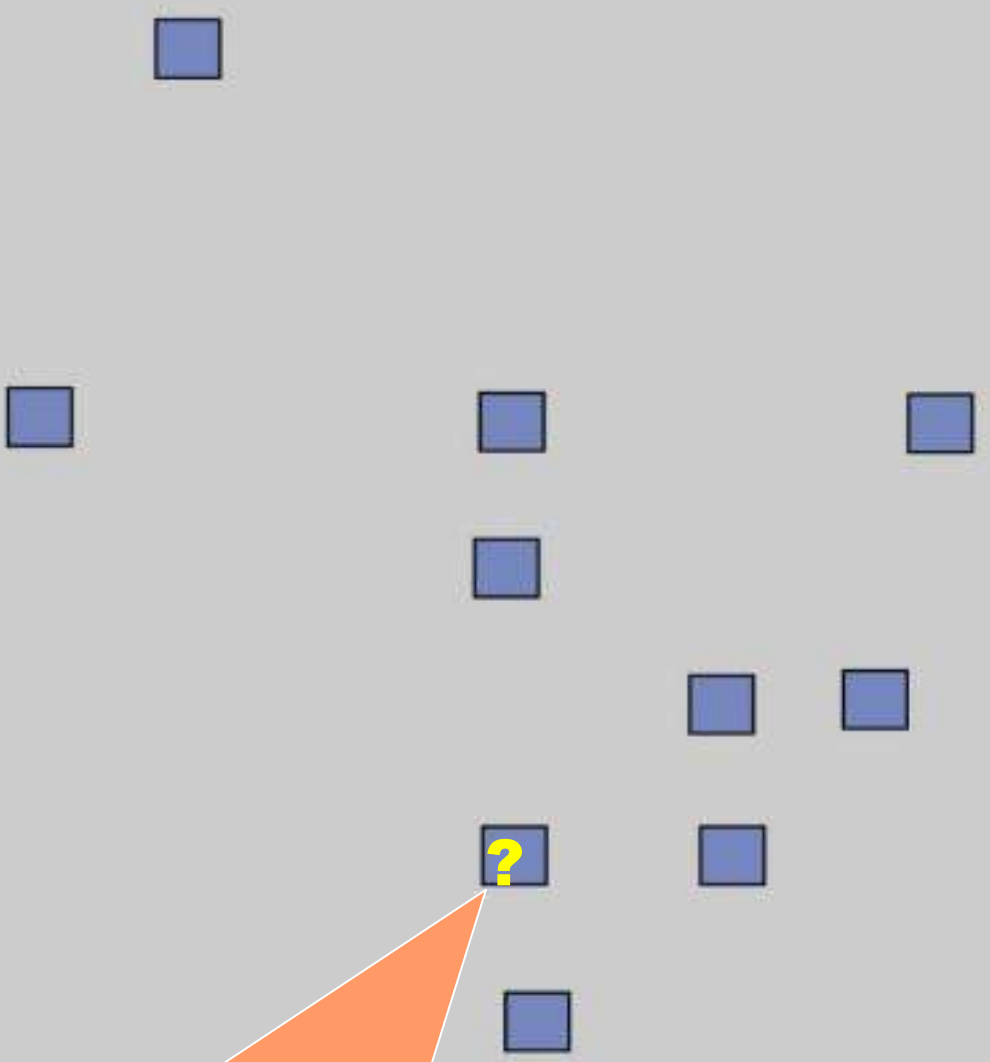
One could add easy-to-remember symbols for other major religions - Judaism, Confucianism, Shintoism, the Protestant Reformation, etc.

The graph, however, is rapidly becoming cluttered and confusing.



Removing the smaller letters that show spread can turn the graph into a useful review of origins.

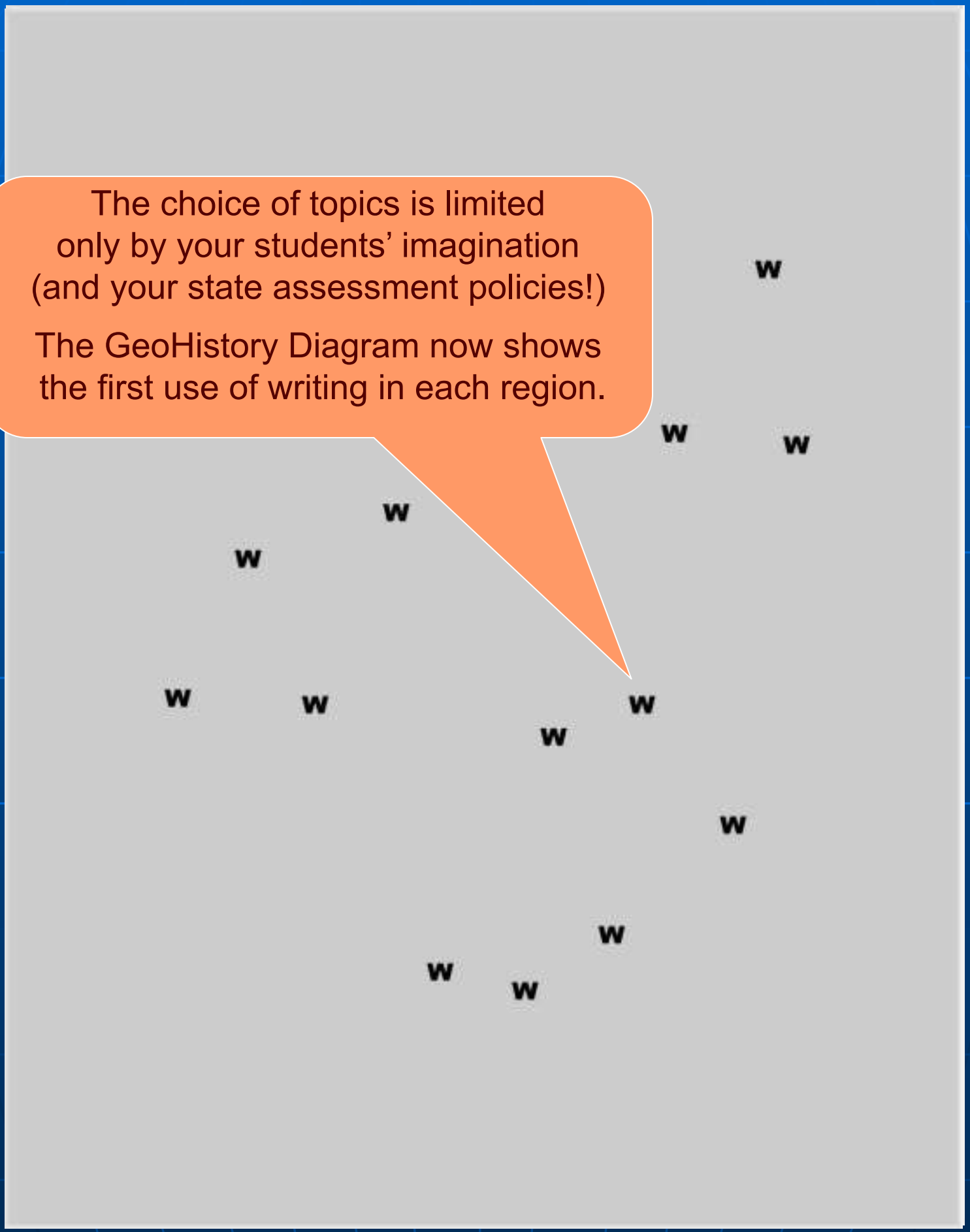
(And yes, you can substitute other letters or symbols – if you would rather have your students remember the word Reformation instead of Protestantism, by all means use an R rather than a P.

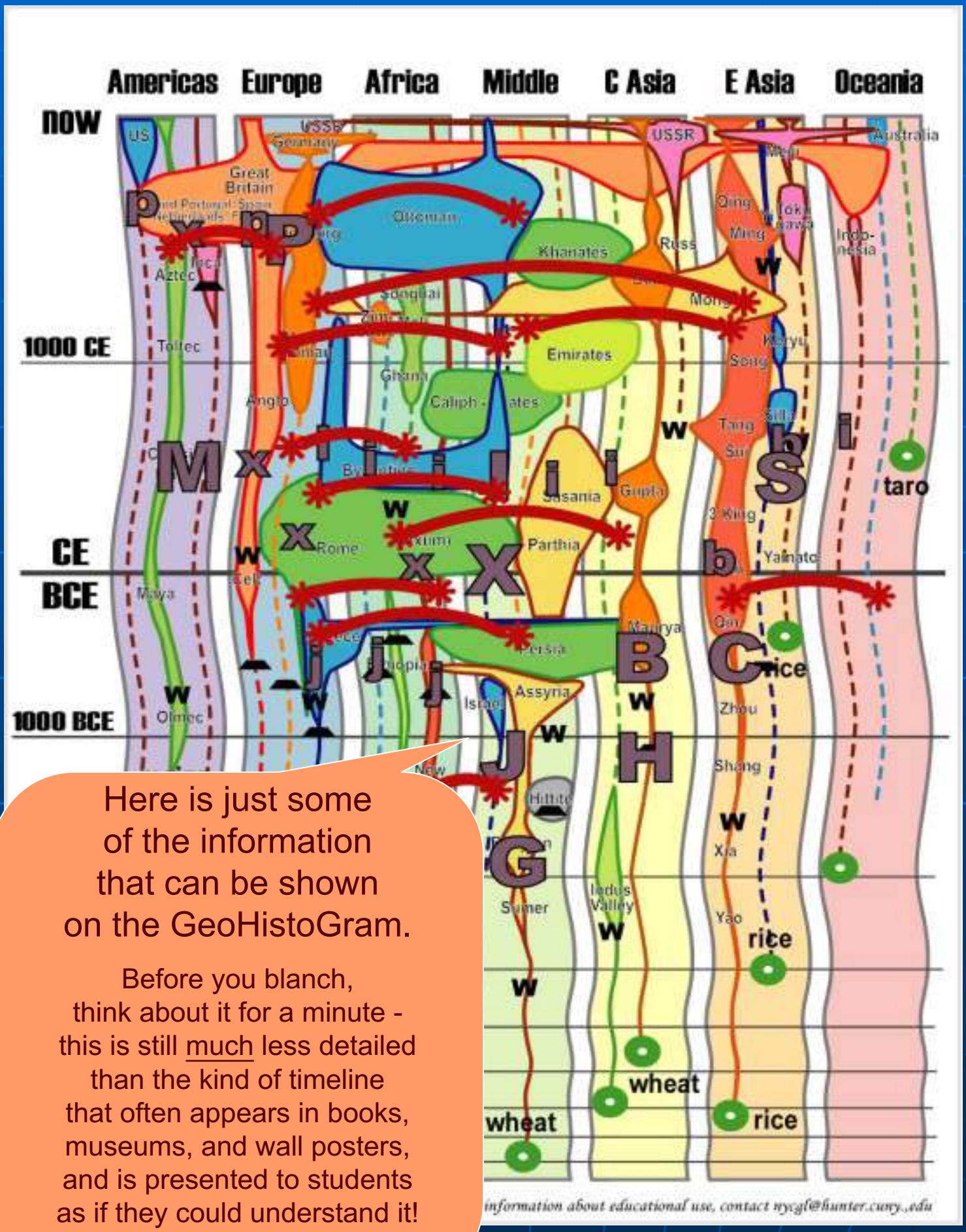


Removing the mnemonic clues
can turn the diagram into a quiz.
You can ask about just one religion
and mark it with a question mark,
or several with a matching question.

The choice of topics is limited only by your students' imagination (and your state assessment policies!)

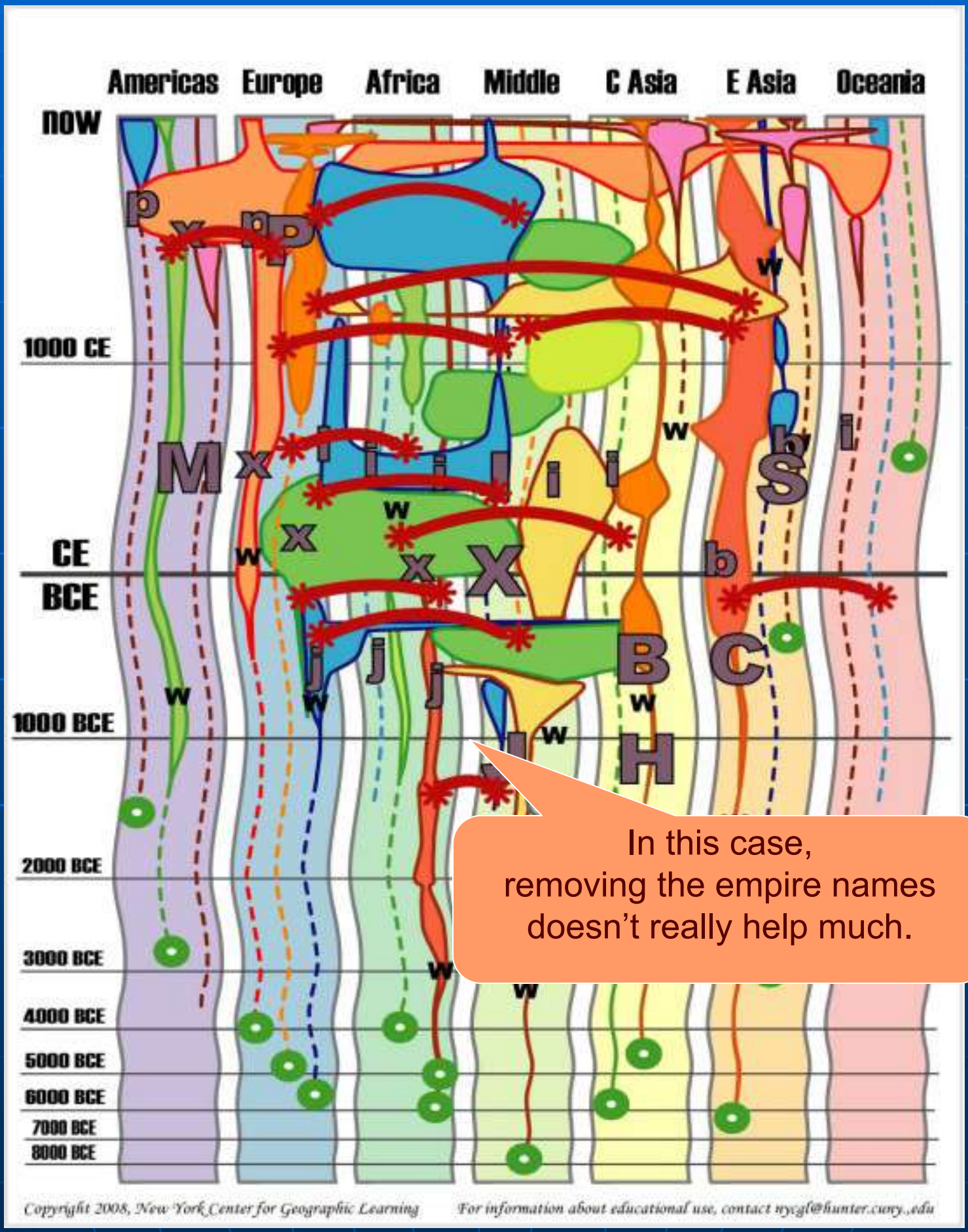
The GeoHistory Diagram now shows the first use of writing in each region.





Here is just some of the information that can be shown on the GeoHistoGram.

Before you blanch, think about it for a minute - this is still <u>much</u> less detailed than the kind of timeline that often appears in books, museums, and wall posters, and is presented to students as if they could understand it!


Americas
Europe
Africa
Middle
C Asia
E Asia
Oceania
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2000 BCE
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5000 BCE
6000 BCE
7000 BCE
8000 BCE
In this case,
removing the empire names
doesn't really help much.
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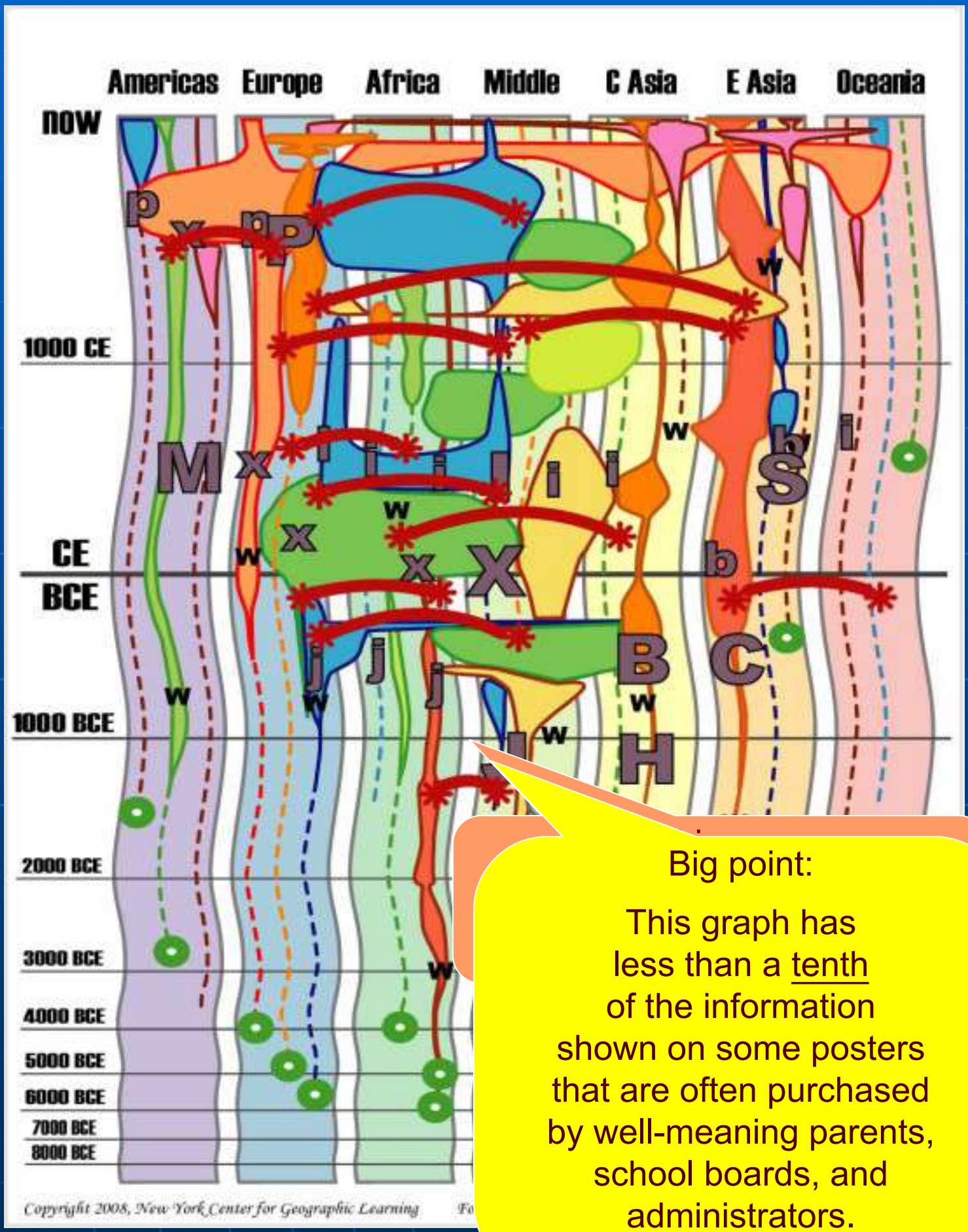

Big point:

This graph has
less than a tenth
of the information
shown on some posters
that are often purchased
by well-meaning parents,
school boards, and
administrators.

Even a cluttered diagram, however, can have some pedagogical value.

For example, it can show that American history is quite a small part of the global whole!

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SUMMARY

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A geo-history diagram like this
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It is not a way to transmit knowledge,
except in little pieces at a time.

It is best used for just a few minutes,
as a recurring part of other lessons.

Another good use is as a means
of reviewing (e.g., “test-prep”).

The Geo-History Diagram
will be available
in 8-1/2x11 color pages,
11x17 color desk mats,
bulletin-board posters,
reproducible masters,
and an interactive
electronic “laboratory”
suitable for projection.

Please contact the
Michigan Geographical Alliance
for more information.