

Name: _____

Modern European History

Date: _____

Unit 1- Renaissance

Why Study History?

NEXT YEAR HAVE THEM RANK THE TOP THREE 1, 2, AND 3 RESPECTIVELY

DIRECTIONS: Read the following handout thoroughly, using a highlighter to identify the author's arguments in favor of the study of history. Then write "agree" or "disagree" in the margin next to the highlighted text.

A knowledge of history can enable the student to avoid being misled by government officials, religious leaders, and others who twist and misuse history. Policy-makers and leaders often attempt to provide their ideas with validity by turning to history, often saying, "history proves" as support for or against a particular idea, lifestyle, or government policy. However, the student who acquires a sound knowledge of history will be able to both identify a demagogue's factual errors and understand that the lessons of history are always based on interpretations, human-made opinions, of historical facts. The student will realize that when someone says, "history proves," the speaker is merely giving the speaker's own valid or invalid opinion of history; the speaker has disguised his or her opinion as a historical fact.

Historical study is of value because it enables the student to learn from past human errors and successes. As the individual can learn from the individual's own past mistakes and successes, so too can one learn from one's ancestors' mistakes and successes. History is for society what memory is for the individual. Humans make intelligent decisions by reasoning based on experience; this experience, this history, is the ground from which sound generalizations grow.

The discipline of history provides students the opportunity to learn lifelong thinking skills which can be applied to reading today's news, evaluating the arguments of contemporary political candidates, critically examining contemporary society, and numerous other areas.

Historical study can help the student develop a fuller understanding of the causes of contemporary social, political, and economic problems. Many of society's ills will never be successfully cured without the necessary aid of the historical study of the causes of these troubles.

The study of history increases the student's sensitivity to people with different cultural backgrounds. A thorough understanding of a culture from another time period helps the student transcend the beliefs and assumptions of his or her own time period and culture and thus provides a needed sense of humility. Thus knowledge can replace stereotypes and dangerous myths about people from different cultures.

Through the study of history, the student can examine numerous role models. The student, through biographies and historical study, is provided with a multitude of role models to select from, many of them of truly noble character - some even inspirational.

Through the study of history students learn to expect change; they discover the inevitability of change. The student of history will avoid the common mistaken notion that life and society can be frozen and that time can be stopped. After all, the heart of the historical perspective is a sense for the flow of time.

Adapted and revised from “VIEWPOINT: In Support of Clio” by Dr. Rod Farmer, Ph.D., Associate Professor of American History and Social Science Education, University of Maine at Farmington.

In Greek mythology, Clio, also spelled Kleio, is the muse of history.