

SCALE – TIMELINES AND PERIODIZATION

Preparation

- Download “Dmitri Mendeleev”
- Download “Marie Curie”

Purpose

This activity revisits timelines as analytical tools, with a specific focus on what historians call *periodization*. You will add two more scientists to the class timeline, which will help you think about how the time period you choose to analyze influences the perspective you might take on a specific historical event or process.

Process

You are going to add two scientists to the timeline you created in Lesson 2.1. You will use the same method you used when looking at our understanding of the Earth, the Solar System, and the Universe.

Do the following:

1. Read the articles on Mendeleev and Curie.
2. Add to your timeline from Lesson 2.1, and include the following information about each of the scientists:
 - Birth and death dates of the scientists
 - The major contributions they made
 - Who and what influenced their thinking
3. Look at your timeline and note how some scientists appear to be clustered on it. Now, do the following:
 - Break these clusters of scientists into at least three distinct time periods.
 - Come up with a name for each time period. The name has to be representative of something about that cluster of people. In other words, each time period should have a theme.

Be prepared to share your method for breaking up and naming your time periods. This process of dividing your timeline into new time periods is called periodization. Periodization is the dividing of history into distinct and identifiable periods. Some examples are geologic periods, such as the Jurassic and Cambrian eras; cultural time periods, such as Gothic and Baroque periods; and geographic categories, such as the dynasties in China.

Historians periodize all the time, because it helps them organize and represent the past in different ways. They might focus on particular topics or interests, or periodize in a way that highlights and supports a specific historical argument. Historians also periodize to de-emphasize some historical information. Imagine if your timeline had only men – or only women. You’d be missing part of the story! As we know, when we zoom in and out on history, or look at the same thing from close up versus far away, our understanding of that thing can change pretty dramatically. Periodization uses different time scales to help us frame the past in different ways.

Look at the timeline again, this time comparing the views of the scientists you just added to those that were already on the timeline. Then, answer the following questions.

1. After adding Curie and Mendeleev to the timeline and comparing their views to the previous scientists, does it make sense for them to be on one timeline, or should there be two?
2. What are other examples of periodization where we focus on shorter or longer periods of time in history?
3. What things should you consider when establishing the period of time you are analyzing?