

Using Historical Reasoning Process to Develop Effective Historical Arguments: CAUSATION

Reasoning Process #2

Students should be able to:

- **Describe causes or effects** of a specific historical development or process.
- Explain the **relationship** between causes and effects of a specific historical development or process.
- Explain the **difference** between primary and secondary causes, and between short and long-term effects.
- Explain how a **relevant context** influenced a specific historical development or process.
- Explain the **relative historical significance** of different causes and/or effects.

Underlying Questions:

- What were the reasons for this event? What factors contributed to a specific pattern or trend? What prompted this person/group to act/react this way?
- What resulted from this event, pattern, or action? What were the short-term effects? What were the long-term effects?
- What cause seemed to be the most significant? What effect seemed to be the most significant and why?
- How do the assessments of historians concerning causation differ from those who experienced the event, pattern, or action?
- How might the chain of cause and effect have changed and at what point? What causes were contingent on previous effects? What individual choice(s) made a significant difference in the lead up to a particular event or trend? Was there a moment of chance that influenced the chain of events?

Why are the questions significant for analysis?

- Every event, pattern or trend, or action has a cause—a reason or set of reasons why it happened.
- Historians **do not simply arrange events in chronological order**; instead, they seek to understand why things happened, as well as what effect an event, **pattern or trend**, or action had. Most events, actions, or trends **have many causes**.
- Historians seek to identify the most significant **short- and long-term causes and effects**. Significance can be understood in different ways.
 - Sometimes, the most significant causes and effects are those that are the most direct.
 - Sometimes, they are defined as those that contributed the most.
 - Other times, historians look for specific types of causes and effects, such as political causes or economic effects.
- Additionally, historians understand that events are **not the result of predetermined outcomes or inevitable progress**.
 - Events are **contingent** on many factors, from individual choices to unforeseeable events—change one of these factors and history could have been very different.
 - Focusing on contingency, historians explore concepts of agency and individual action when discussing the significance of a particular cause or effect.