

Reading a Timeline

4th Grade

How historians show time, and the traps in reading one.

A timeline turns dates into distance. Reading one has rules.

CHECK THE DIRECTION

1

Earliest on the left, latest on the right. Almost always.

CHECK THE SCALE

2

Is each gap ten years or a hundred? It changes everything.

READ THE GAPS

3

A big gap between events means a long quiet stretch.

WORK OUT DURATIONS

4

Subtract the earlier date from the later one.

CAREFUL WITH BC

BC counts backwards: 500 BC is earlier than 200 BC.

From 500 BC to AD 500 is 1,000 years — there is no year zero.

A century is 100 years. The 1900s are the twentieth century, which catches everyone out.