

# Integrated Media Literacy Project

## Interactive Timelines (Intermediate to Secondary Grades)

### **Project Description**

When studying a historical event, students can use web-based application Timetoast ([www.timetoast.com](http://www.timetoast.com)) to chart relevant events into a timeline. Students can learn to describe and summarize history using their own words, draw connections and better understand cause-and-effect relationship amongst events occurring over long periods of time, and develop proper citation techniques through online research.

### **Before the Project**

- **Research and Learning:** Teachers can use Timetoast to track events over the course of a historical unit of study, adding events and tracing their relevance as students learn, or can instead wait until students have a basic understanding of studied events before beginning work online. In our project, students trace significant local, national or international events occurring alongside the events in the lives of relatives in their family trees; however, this approach could easily be used with any study of interconnected events, from local settlement histories to novel study events and their connection to real life history.
- We recommend that teachers prepare a list of research questions for homework, whose answers could be brought to the first online session. In our sample timeline project, students were required to research family members' life stories before starting their Timetoast projects. Questions could include:
  - What is your date and place of birth?
  - What schools did you attend?
  - Can you tell me what significant local or world events you remember that had an impact on your life choices or events? Please include dates and descriptions of the event.
  - What major life events (and their dates) can you share for this project? (e.g. weddings, divorces, children's births, careers started or ended)
- **Technical and Media Setup:**
  - Teachers should explore Timetoast to become familiar with this very easy-to-use tool before introducing it to the class. Teachers should note that students can create multiple "timespans" within the same timeline, and that the initial timespan (historical events) should encompass the entire period of time being studied. In the case of our family histories, this timespan starts with the birth of the eldest person, and continues into the present time.
  - Teachers should also ensure that each student is provided with either a school or district email address, or one of a teacher-created class set of emails (made in advance using Yahoo or Hotmail) so they will have an address to sign-up for Timetoast web accounts. Personal email addresses are not recommended for this purpose (especially for younger students) due to privacy and safety concerns.

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## First Online Session

- Teachers can start their session by reviewing the project outline, research criteria, and rubric with students. In our sample project, students needed to research three generations of their family tree (including only their nuclear family and grandparents, for project feasibility), and were asked to research and provide information about the context of each relative's life events (e.g. location in the world, significant local/world events unfolding nearby, etc.).
- After reviewing their initial research (brought in as homework), students can start their projects by creating Timetoast accounts; a username (pseudonym known to the teacher), and a valid e-mail and password are required for registration, and should be provided by teachers if school or district emails are not available. Caution students not use their Facebook account information to sign in, as there is a prompt to do so. This is also a good time to remind students about responsible use of online tools, and to collect student login information for later grading of timeline projects.
- After all students are finished creating their accounts, teachers can provide a basic demonstration of Timetoast to show students its functions:
  - Timelines can be created in each account, which can have several "timespans" occurring within the timeline. The first timespan created initially defines the first and last date of the timeline; added events are not necessarily connected to a specific timespan.
  - Once students create a title for their project, they can begin by first adding a historical timespan (starting at the birth of the eldest person and continuing into the present day) which is defined as the period in which all timeline events will occur.
  - Events are added by clicking "Add event," after which text, hyperlinks and images can be added to an event to enhance the description.
  - Students can alternate between viewing and editing mode to refresh new changes.
- Students should review their research and start to create timespans: the first that covers the full timeline (from the birth of the eldest person into the present day) and one more for each person's life, accurate to each person's dates of birth (and death, if applicable). Students can start by entering their own life events in their timespan, practicing writing events in such a way that they could not be identified (to retain confidentiality). Teachers may need to assist some students with this step.
- Teachers should review proper methods of referencing both online and traditional information sources, as well as techniques for confirming that information is both true and complete (e.g. cross-referencing event details among sites and offline, looking at the website's author to confirm reliability, reviewing the Wikipedia discussion tab).
- Students should then continue their projects by adding the important personal dates mentioned in their family members' life stories, as time permits; students may also continue this work at home, computer-access permitting.

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## Second Online Session

- Teachers can start this session by briefly reviewing the key elements of Timetoast and reminding the students of the assignment parameters and deadlines.
- Depending on students' experience with rephrasing researched information in their own words, teachers may choose a sample event (for example, the adoption of Canada's new national flag in 1965) to briefly research and summarize. Teachers should be sure to model the inclusion of images, links and references, as well as the ways that this event impacted individual people in his or her family, to showcase a well-rounded timeline "event" and to illustrate expectations for students.
- Students should then continue their projects by completing the addition of personal events for their family members, and by starting to research and add the significant local, national and international events mentioned in their family members' life stories as time permits. Rather than appearing in total isolation (as occasionally happens with those mentioned in life stories), teachers should emphasize that these broader events should be described with information about how they impacted the student and/or their family members.
- Students should also ensure that they include a bit of information in their family members' life events about how local, national or international events impacted them specifically.
- Teachers should be sure to allow time for questions and in-class work. As opportunities arise, we also recommend encouraging students to engage in peer editing, as spell check is not an option in Timetoast.

## Third Online Session

- Teachers can start this session by determining student progress, and by offering students more work time or the chance to share their work with other students as timelines near completion.
- Once student work is polished and finished, timelines can be published live on the Timetoast website for students to share amongst family, friends and classmates, and with teachers for review and grading purposes.
- To engage students in reflecting about their online learning, ask students:
  - What research strategies did you use to complete your project? How did you organize yourself and your family members?
  - How did you verify the information you were gathering? How were you able to confirm its truthfulness and completeness?
  - Did using Timetoast as a tool for your project assist you in learning and sharing your family history? Why or why not?
  - What other ways could you use Timetoast for your class projects?

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