

FROM DETAILS TO MAIN IDEA: CONCEPTUAL IDENTIFICATIONS

Often students are asked to identify certain terms, but these terms tend to be specific and lead to memorization without analysis. Conceptual identifications encourage students to actively read their textbook and to analyze and interpret what they read. Using conceptual identifications, both teachers and students can learn to use factual details to help comprehend broader concepts.

Conceptual identifications ask students to take a broad concept, define it, give an example of it, and explain its historical and general significance. At each level, there are challenges to be met using this technique. At the beginning level, students learn to use an example to support a broader term, and to make meaning out of discrete historical facts by determining their significance. At the AP level, students are challenged to organize many historical elements from non-essential elements, making the students active and discerning readers.

Directions for the Students

- Write each conceptual identification on one side of a note card (or piece of paper)
- On the other side of the notecard, write:
 - Definition
 - Example
 - Historical Significance
 - General Significance
- As you complete your reading, do the following
 1. Define the broad concept.
 2. Find an example in your textbook.
 3. State the historical significance of the example you have chosen.
 4. State the general significance or the overall importance of this conceptual identification.

PRE-AP EXAMPLE OF CONCEPTUAL IDENTIFICATION

“**Rebellion**” is an example of a conceptual identification that appears frequently throughout different time period of U.S. History. A notecard on rebellion could look like this:

- **Definition:** an organized challenge to established leadership outside of normal political channels.
- **Example:** Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676 challenged the royal governor in Virginia.
- **Historical Significance:** Because, many indentured servants participated in Bacon’s Rebellion, Virginia planters became more interested in slaves as a potential source of labor.
- **General Significance:** In general, “Rebellions” are significant because they are one method of trying to bring about change sometimes with deadly and unpredictable results

When the curriculum reaches the 1770s, the same term rebellion is used again. While the definition and the general significance would not change, students would need to find a new example and demonstrate an understanding of the historical significance of the new example

- **Example:** The Regulators uprising in North Carolina as an example of a rebellion.
- **Historical Significance:** Although ultimately unsuccessful, the Regulator Rebellion temporarily focused attention on the issues of backcountry settlers and limited North Carolina's ability to unite and challenge British authority.

AP EXAMPLE OF CONCEPTUAL IDENTIFICATION

"Nativism" is another conceptual identification that appears frequently throughout different time periods of U.S. History. A notecard on Nativism could look like this:

- **Definition:** Nativism is a hostility to want a nonnative born people or immigrants
- **Example:** By trying to keep the Irish out of political offices and political power in the early 1850s, the Know-Nothing Party in the early 1850 exhibited support for nativism.
- **Historical Significance:** Nativism fueled anti-immigrant policies in the late 1850s.
- **General Significance:** Nativism generally arises when economic insecurity causes people to feel economically and culturally threatened by immigrants.

When the curriculum reaches the 1920s, the same term, Nativism, can be used again. While the definition and general significance would not change, students would need to find a new example and demonstrate an understanding of the historical significance of the new example.

- **Example:** The Quota Act of 1924 established national immigration quotas based on the number of immigrants from a specific country already living in the U.S. in 1890.
- **Historical Significance:** This act particularly restricted southern and eastern Europeans, part of a new wave of immigrants coming to America.

When students explore conceptual identifications, they develop an understanding of a concept as it applies to different time periods in history rather than a memorized definition applicable to only one situation. This allows students to examine people's motives and to assess whether the impact of their actions changed over time. Conceptual identifications require students at all levels to look at the "**Big Picture**" and deal with concepts as the main issue while using the specific events as support for a broader argument. Thus, the retention of the information increases for the student because it is linked to a specific event as well as a broader concept that appears again and again throughout the social studies curriculum.

Once students have developed a set of notecards, these notecards can also be used to help them make connections between different time periods and help them develop an understanding of important analytical categories.

Using different colored notecards for different categories such as political, economic, and social is one way to help students become more comfortable with organizational categories.

The process of writing conceptual identification is also a step toward good historical thinking and writing. When done correctly, each notecard has the beginnings of a topic sentence (definition), supporting sentences (examples), and a concluding statement (significance).