



EduTrend Contents

W4C · HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY · PRIMARY

Timeline Detectives

Put the past in order using objects and pictures

Ages 7–10

Level: Foundation

60 minutes

Groups of 4 · up to 30

Activity 01

Inside: activity at a glance · step-by-step session plan · facilitator notes · 3 pupil worksheets · assessment checklist

ACTIVITY 01 · AT A GLANCE

Timeline Detectives

Pupils examine picture cards and real objects from different periods, such as a candle and a torch or a letter and a phone. They look for clues that show whether something is old or new, place everything on a class timeline and explain their reasoning.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session pupils can:

- sort objects and pictures into older and newer, giving a reason;
- place items in order on a simple timeline using the words before, after, then and now;
- describe clues such as materials, technology and style that show when something was made;
- explain how one everyday thing has changed over time.

KEY WORDS

past · present · timeline · decade · century · old · new · change · evidence · clue

CURRICULUM LINKS

History: chronology and change within living memory. C3 Framework, Dimension 2: change, continuity and context. Maths: ordering years.

1

QUESTION

What do we want to know?

2

FIND

Gather sources

3

OBSERVE

Look closely

4

INFER

What does it suggest?

5

CHECK

Compare sources

6

EXPLAIN

Tell the story

Materials (per group)

- Set of 12 picture cards showing objects, clothes, transport and homes from different periods
- 3–4 real objects if available (old coin, key, photo, toy)
- A long strip of paper or string for the timeline, with pegs
- Sticky notes and pencils
- Magnifying glasses
- Worksheets 1, 2 and 3

Before the session

- Print and cut the picture cards; add the approximate date on the back of each card.
- Mark a class timeline on the wall or a washing line with “Long ago”, “When grandparents were young”, “When parents were young” and “Now”.
- Ask families in advance if pupils may bring a safe, unbreakable old object.
- Choose one pair of objects (for example a candle and a torch) for the opening.

SAFETY

Handle old objects gently over a table. Avoid glass and sharp items; borrowed objects are handled only with the owner's permission.

ACTIVITY 01 · SESSION PLAN

Step by step

Keep the pace brisk. The key moment is when pupils justify their order with a clue, not just a guess.

Time	What happens	Say or ask
0–10 min Hook	Show a candle and a torch. Ask which is older and how pupils know.	<i>"What clue tells you this is old?"</i>
10–25 min Sort	Groups sort their picture cards into old, in between and new, then order them within each pile.	<i>"What changed between these two pictures?"</i>
25–40 min Timeline	Each group adds cards to the class timeline and writes one clue on a sticky note beside each.	<i>"Could this go anywhere else? Why not?"</i>
40–50 min Check	Groups turn cards over to see the dates and move any that are out of place.	<i>"Which clue was most useful?"</i>
50–60 min Explain	Each pupil chooses one thing that has changed and completes Worksheet 3.	<i>"What has stayed the same?"</i>

CHALLENGE CARD (print or copy onto the board)

Put 12 pictures and objects in order from oldest to newest and explain at least three of your choices with a clue you can point to.

ACTIVITY 01 · FACILITATOR NOTES

The history in brief

Historians put events and objects in order, or chronology, before they explain them. Clues include materials (wood and metal before plastic), technology (candles before electric light), style and fashion, and how worn or faded something is. A timeline makes the order visible and shows that some things changed quickly while others changed slowly.

Young children often think “old” means “very long ago”. Linking the timeline to people they know, such as grandparents and parents, helps them understand how long a lifetime is. Dates on the backs of cards let pupils check and correct their own thinking, which is how historians work: they revise their ideas when new evidence appears.

Common ideas to listen for

- “Everything in black and white is from the same time.” Black-and-white photos were used for many decades.
- “Old things are always broken or dirty.” Some old objects are well kept; the clue is how they are made.
- “People long ago had nothing.” They had different things that did the same jobs.

Adapting the activity

Support

Give pupils only six cards and two categories, old and new, with an adult asking “What do you notice?” for each card.

Stretch

Pupils research one object at home, find out roughly when it was made and add it to the timeline with a written label.

WORKSHEET 1

Old or new?

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Look closely at each picture. Write the clue that helped you decide.

My sorting

Picture	Old, in between or new?	My clue

WORKSHEET 2

Our timeline

Draw or write your items in order from oldest to newest.

Timeline



Oldest on the left, newest on the right. Add a label under each item.

The biggest change I noticed

WORKSHEET 3

Then and now

Choose one thing that has changed over time.

Then



Draw it long ago.

Now



Draw it today.

What changed and why?

FOR THE TEACHER

Assessment checklist

Use during the session. One sheet covers up to eight pupils; copy as needed.

Pupil	Orders items with reasons	Uses time vocabulary	Explains a change over time

Suggested codes: W = working towards · E = expected · G = greater depth

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Timeline Detectives is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents W4C History & Archaeology programme (primary, level: foundation). Every activity in the programme follows the same format: a practical challenge, a clear session plan, facilitator notes and ready-to-print worksheets, so that teachers, club leaders and parents can run it without extra preparation.

Full 15-, 20- and 32-week programmes are available from EduStore at edutrend.org.

© 2026 EduTrend Contents. This activity may be printed and copied for use with pupils in your own school, club or home. It may not be resold or published elsewhere. Photos: Karina Syrotiuk / Unsplash.