

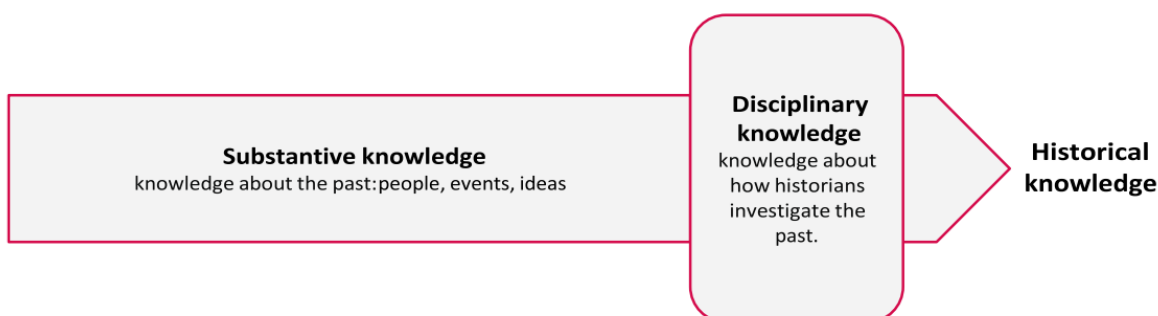
History Learning

Types of Knowledge

There are different types of knowledge in history:

Substantive knowledge	Disciplinary knowledge
<p>This refers to the content within history learning, the knowledge of the past: people, events, ideas and so on. This is regularly taught within primary school history with children learning about the key events and people of a variety of historical periods.</p>	<p>This refers to a knowledge of how historians investigate the past, and how they construct historical claims, arguments and accounts.</p>

This diagram below shows the complex interplay between understanding substantive knowledge and disciplinary knowledge which is referred to in the Ofsted research review: ‘knowledge of the past must be shaped by disciplinary approaches in order to become historical knowledge.’ We use an enquiry-based model so that children learn key substantive knowledge using the disciplinary knowledge and methods that historians use to find out about the past.



Key Substantive Concepts

Substantive concepts are key concepts, such as ‘empire’, ‘monarchy’, or ‘invasion and settlement’, which children learn about during their study of primary History. Substantive concepts are fundamental elements of children’s historical knowledge, however they are abstract and therefore children may find them challenging to understand. The 2021 Ofsted research review into history states that, to be able to use them confidently, children need to have a secure knowledge of substantive concepts in different contexts. We recognise the importance of developing children’s understanding of substantive concepts and consequently this is a strand which runs throughout our history curriculum. Our progression of skills and knowledge document clearly demonstrates how these substantive concepts are developed throughout the primary curriculum.

Initially, in Key Stage 1 children will begin to develop their understanding of the substantive concepts of power and the achievements of mankind in How did explorers change the world?; How did we learn to fly? and What is a monarch?

In Lower Key Stage 2 and Upper Key Stage 2, they deepen their understanding of these concepts and others while learning to identify changes in meaning in different time periods and contexts. For example, the concept of monarchy evolves over time; during the reign of Henry VIII the monarch enjoyed absolute power whereas by the 20th century the power of the monarch was devolved to the Government

Key Disciplinary Concepts – Our ‘Historical Skills’

1. Chronology (Chronology)

- Understanding when events happened and their order.
- Recognising terms like *past*, *present*, *future*, and *long ago*.
- Sequencing events, developing timelines, and grasping historical scale and duration.
- Making connections across periods — *continuity and change*.

2. Cause and Consequence

- Exploring *why* things happened (causes) and *what happened because of them* (consequences).
- Recognising that events often have multiple causes and effects.
- Developing early analytical thinking — understanding that people’s actions and choices shape history.

3. Continuity and Change

- Identifying what has stayed the same and what has changed over time.
- Comparing daily life, beliefs, technology, or society across periods.
- Building the concept of historical development and transformation.

4. Similarity and Difference

- Comparing experiences of people or groups in different times or places.
- Recognising diversity in the past — not everyone’s experience was the same.
- Understanding that context affects how people lived and thought.

5. Significance

- Understanding *why* some events, people, or developments are remembered or considered important.

- Recognising that significance can be judged differently (e.g., local, national, global).
- Beginning to form their own judgements about importance and legacy.

6. Evidence and Interpretation (Investigate & Interpret the Past)

- Understanding that we know about the past because of the *evidence* left behind (artefacts, pictures, accounts, etc.).
- Developing simple historical enquiry: asking questions, using sources, noticing bias or different viewpoints.
- Learning that historians interpret evidence and may disagree — history isn't just “facts”.

7. Historical Enquiry (Investigate & Interpret the Past)

- Asking and answering historical questions.
- Selecting and using sources to find out about the past.
- Developing curiosity, reasoning and communication — showing understanding through talk, writing, role-play, or creative responses.

8. Historical Perspective (Build an Overview of World History)

- Building awareness of the broader context — how people lived, what they valued, and how it fits into a wider story.
- Understanding connections between local, national, and global history.