

8. Dividing Time.



Historians are Time Travellers, **venturing** through the past, to uncover the mysteries that make up our **culture** and **society**, and ancient cultures and societies so that we can learn from them. To travel through the past we need an understanding of how time is measured and described.

The most important way historians, and our society, divide up time is into the periods known as A.D. and B.C. The calendar we use today is divided into these two sections and the year you live in is the number of years counted from the beginning of A.D.

The Western World has a long **Christian** tradition, and our calendar is based on dates that come from that **tradition**. A.D. is actually a **Latin** term, Anno Domini, meaning *In the Year of Our Lord* and indicates the years since Christians believe Jesus was born. B.C. means *Before Christ* and marks the years, counting backwards, from that time. Because not everyone is comfortable using Christian terms, we also use C.E. (which means *Common Era*) instead of A.D. and B.C.E. (which means *Before the Common Era*) instead of B.C.

We use a number of words to define common time periods

- **Year** 365 days, or 366 every leap year
- **Decade** 10 years
- **Century** 100 years
- **Millennium** 1000 years
- **Era** A long time period usually associated with an important person e.g. The Victorian Era.
- **Age** A long time period usually associated with a level of technology e.g. Iron Age.



When we talk about the past, we refer to centuries. To work out which century you are referring to, always do the following:

- for all numbers under 1000 and over 100, look at the first number only. (Example: 9 is the first number in 903). For all numbers over 1000, look at the first two numbers. (Example: 1 and 9 are the first two numbers in 1988.) Anything under 100 is in the first century.
- to calculate the century, count up one.

Examples: $9+1 = 10$, so the year 903 is in the tenth century.
 $19+1 = 20$, so the year 1988 is in the twentieth century.
AD and BC are exactly the same.

Activities



Comprehension Questions

Before you start, define the terms in **bold**.



1. Why are historians like time travellers?
2. What do we need to understand before we travel through the past?
3. What are the most important ways we divide time?
4. What tradition does the Western World have?
5. What do A.D. and B.C. mean?
6. What do C.E. and B.C.E mean?
7. Why do we use the different terms A.D. and C.E.?
8. Name six other ways we divide time.

Time Questions

1. What century are the following dates in?
 - a. 903
 - b. 903 BC
 - c. 2012
 - d. 4054BC
 - e. 1971
 - f. 5 AD
 - g. 3BC
 - h. 33

