

History Elective: Significant Individuals in History

Madame Tussauds Sydney — Schools Resource

NSW Syllabus: History Elective 7–10 (2019) | **Stage:** Stage 5

Note for teachers: Outcomes below reflect the Historical Inquiry and Communication objectives of the syllabus. Please cross-check exact outcome codes (HE5-x) against your school's current syllabus documentation.

About this resource

This resource uses Madame Tussauds Sydney's collection of global figures as case studies for the History Elective focus on biography and significant individuals — exploring how historians decide who and what gets remembered.

Curriculum outcomes addressed

- **HT5-5** Identifies and evaluates the usefulness of historical sources in the historical inquiry process
- **HT5-7** Explains different contexts, perspectives and interpretations of the past
- **HT5-8** Selects and analyses a range of historical sources relevant to an historical inquiry
- **HT5-9** Applies a range of relevant historical terms and concepts when communicating an understanding of the past
- **HT5-10** Selects and uses appropriate forms to communicate effectively about the past for different audiences

Key inquiry question

How do historians decide which individuals are "significant" enough to be remembered — and whose stories are left out?

Exercise 1: What Makes a Life “Significant”? (Classroom - Pre-Visit)

Format: Classroom-based | 20 minutes

1. As a class, brainstorm criteria historians might use to judge someone "historically significant" (impact, reach of influence, controversy, longevity of legacy).
2. In pairs, apply these criteria to two people you already know something about — one widely celebrated, one more contested.
3. Discuss: Does significance always mean "positive"? Can someone be significant and controversial at the same time?

Exercise 2: Case Study Investigation (Excursion - In-Venue)

Format: Excursion-based | Individual worksheet

Select one figure from the gallery to investigate as a mini biographical case study.

1. Record what you already knew about this person before today, and what's new to you.
2. Identify three choices the exhibit makers made in how they represented this person (setting, expression, styling, placement) and explain what impression each choice creates.
3. Using your class's significance criteria from Exercise 1, write a short paragraph arguing whether this person meets the bar for historical significance.

Exercise 3: The Case for Inclusion (Classroom - Post-Visit)

Format: Classroom-based | Extended task

Write a 300–400-word historical argument nominating a figure (from your case study or elsewhere) for inclusion in a future exhibition. Your argument should reference at least two credible sources, address a likely counterargument, and use appropriate historical terminology.

Teacher note: This task supports assessment of source evaluation and historical communication outcomes and can be extended into an oral presentation or debate format.

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Exercise 1 Worksheet: What Makes a Life “Significant”? (Classroom - Pre-Visit)

Historians don't just record everything that happened. They make decisions about which people to study and remember. Evidence, perspectives, and the values of different times and places influence these decisions.

1. **Define** what makes someone historically significant (in your own words).

1. **List and explain** the criteria your class will use to judge significance.

Criteria 1: _____ Explanation: _____

Criteria 2: _____ Explanation: _____

Criteria 3: _____ Explanation: _____

Additional criteria (optional):

2. **Compare** a widely celebrated individual and a more contested individual. Use your class criteria to explain your comparison.

Widely celebrated individual: _____

Reasons they are seen as significant (linked to criteria):

More contested individual: _____

Why they are contested (linked to criteria, perspectives, or impacts):

Reflection: Does significance always mean “positive”? Explain.

Exercise 2 Worksheet: Case Study Investigation (Excursion - In-Venue)

At the venue, you will complete a mini biographical case study of one figure. As you observe the display, think like a historian: notice evidence, consider perspective, and evaluate how representation shapes meaning.

Chosen figure: _____ **Gallery location (if known):** _____

1. **What did you already know** about this person before today?

2. **What is new to you** after visiting the exhibit?

3. **Identify three exhibit-making choices** and explain the impression each choice creates.

Choice 1 (e.g. setting / expression / styling / placement): _____

Impression created: _____

Choice 2: _____

Impression created: _____

Choice 3: _____

Impression created: _____

1. **Write a short paragraph** arguing whether this person meets class criteria for historical significance.

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Exercise 3 Worksheet: The Case for Inclusion (Classroom - Post-Visit)

Write a historical argument nominating a figure for inclusion in a future exhibition. Your writing should use evidence from credible sources, apply historical terms, and acknowledge that different people may interpret significance differently.

1. **Which figure are you nominating?**

2. **What is your main argument** for inclusion? (Write one clear claim.)

3. **List at least two credible sources** you will use (author/organisation + title + year).

Source 1:

Source 2:

Additional source (optional):

4. **What is one likely counterargument**, and how will you address it?

Counterargument:

Your response / rebuttal:

1. **Write the full 300–400 word argument** with evidence, historical terms, and a counterargument.

[illegible]

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