

## “What Do You Mean?” How Language Changes Over Time

**Background:** Historians read what people in the past have written. But how can we know if they used the same words we would have? Think of some words that have changed meaning over time. Ask people older than you or who come from other parts of the world to tell you about some words that can mean different things to different people.

**Goal:** Provide students with a simple introduction to historical thinking learning about the importance of contextualizing sources. Introduce domain-specific vocabulary (Common Core).

Have some of the students read the sentences that changed the most. Discuss how this affects the understanding of a historic document or other written primary source. How can archaeology help with this problem?

**Extension:** Have students write sentences using the historical and contemporary meanings of the words they studied.

Adapted from: <http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/lesson-plan-reviews/24682>

**Procedure/Materials:** Provide students with copies of an informational text from a period of history being studied in the classroom – either for individual or group work. Adjust length of piece to reading levels, time available and ease of reading. Have students read over the document and follow the instructions below. You can either pre-select the words they will investigate or let them choose their own (2-5 words each).

**For students:** You have in front of you an historical record from the past. In it are some words you may be familiar with since we use them today. However, their meaning may be different now from what they meant way back then! I want you to read the document and write down in the box below what you think the word meant when this document was created.

After you have completed that part, we will look and see what these words mean today and see what we find!

| Words used at<br>(place/event)<br>in (date) | What do YOU think<br>These words mean? | What do these words<br>mean NOW? |
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