



**Limits of the Historical Record – Mind Walk**

***How can the historical record be both huge and limited?***

To find out about the limitations of the historical record, have your students do the following activity:

1. Think about ("**mind walk**" through) all the activities you were involved in during the past 24 hours. List as many of these activities as you can remember.
2. For each activity on your list, write down what evidence, if any, your activities might have left behind. To help you think of traces that might be left behind, review below:
  - Historical Evidence in Your Daily Life
  - Other Types of Historical Evidence
3. Review your entire list, and what you wrote about evidence your activities left behind. Then answer these questions:
  - Which of your daily activities were most likely to leave trace evidence behind?
  - What, if any, of that evidence might be preserved for the future? Why?
  - What might be left out of an historical record of your activities? Why?
  - What would a future historian be able to tell about your life and your society based on evidence of your daily activities that might be preserved for the future?
4. Now think about a more public event currently happening (a court case, election, public controversy, law being debated), and answer these questions:
  - What kinds of evidence might this event leave behind?
  - Who records information about this event?
  - For what purpose are different records of this event made?

Based on this activity, write one sentence that describes how the historical record can be huge and limited at the same time.

**Historical Evidence in Your Daily Life**

- Did you create any records of your activities (a diary, notes to yourself, a letter to a friend or relative, an e-mail message, a telephone message)?
- Would traces of your activities appear in records someone else created (a friend's diary, notes, or calendar entry; a letter or e-mail from a friend or relative)?
- Would traces of your activities appear in school records? in business records (did you write a check or use a charge card)? in the school or local newspaper? in government records (did you get your driver's license or go to traffic court)?
- Would anyone be able to offer testimony (or oral history) about your activities (who and why)?

**Other Types of Historical Evidence**

Other aspects of the historical record are not records at all, but may still offer evidence about our lives. Traces you left behind in your daily activities might include:

- The trash you have thrown away;
- Material objects you use every day (coins, paper money, stamps, computers);
- Objects in the place you live (especially in your own bedroom); and
- Items in your locker at school.

**Challenge Questions:**

If future archaeologists had the materials above, what could they infer or conclude about your life? What might the materials tell archaeologists about your family, community, region, and/or nation?