



## Unit 1 Overview: Our Big History 3.82 Billion Years Before Present to the Future

History is made up of accounts of the past. Most of these accounts deal with humans. But humans emerged in an environment—our Universe, the ecosystem of our planet, and other species. This environment began to form long before humans evolved, and it continues to affect our story today. Big history is an attempt to understand this environment. A better understanding of our past can help us comprehend the world today.



**0:04**

*Series of cave paintings found in France, Indonesia, Brazil, and Southern Africa*

32,000 years ago, human hands reached into the dark and left behind evidence of their world. These drawings from a cave in southern France are among the oldest evidence of human art.

At the same time, people in other places were creating art and documenting their worlds. All these images were drawn thousands of years ago by humans using tools and materials like charcoal and ochre.

**0:35**

*AI rendered image of a cave painting; montage of photos depicting famous post-Paleolithic artworks and creations such as the Mona Lisa and the Terra-Cotta Warriors*

This image was created on June 21st 2024 using the artificial intelligence tool known as Dall-E.

In the millennia separating these images countless humans left their mark on the world leaving behind evidence of our shared connections, astonishing diversity, and boundless creativity.

**0:57**

*Montage of additional famous artworks, such as Starry Night and The Great Wave*

Art is one type of evidence that can help us understand history, It can tell us about the innovations people made, the tools they used, the connections they forged with each other, and what they valued in their communities. By comparing evidence from different places around our world and at different times we can make new discoveries about history and what it means to be human.

**1:27**

*Map of the world*

This video introduces Unit 1 of the World History Project. But what is world history? At its most basic, world history is about drawing connections, identifying the stuff that has linked humans across the globe, and through our long history as a species. It's about how we're similar and different, how we change over time, and how we interact with our environments.

**1:54**

*An individual sorting through family photos; a group of students discussing an assignment; side-by-side images of a cave painting and a train*

But world history is also about you. It's the meaning you make of the past. No matter where you live, you and your ancestors are part of world history. But you also have a role to play in interpreting the past. It's your job to use evidence to craft historical narratives that are meaningful and significant. Whether your evidence is cave art from the deep past, or the technologies that made our modern world.

**2:27**

*Japanese scrolls; a young girl looking through a book in a library*

History is an account, a story we tell about the past that's supported by evidence. Historians want the histories they create to be usable. They want the people who encounter their histories to be able to use them to explain the present and prepare for the future.

*A large group of people crossing a busy intersection*

But there are a lot of people out there all with different perspectives. There's also a lot of stuff in world history which covers hundreds of thousands of years and an entire planet of people. That's why there isn't just one history—there are many. Every



historical account changes depending on the perspective of the person writing it and the evidence they use to support their claims.

**3:18**

*Visual representation of scale: the animation starts with a view of a field and then quickly zooms out further and further until the field becomes a city, the city becomes a continent, and the continent becomes one of many from outer space*

When historians are deciding how to write their historical account one of the first decisions they make is about the scale of their narrative. From the life of an individual to the history of the entire Universe, all histories are written at different scales of geography and time.

*Montage of photos including: a young student hidden behind a stack of books, students walking through the hallway of a school, and the capital building*

Consider you. You're the only subject in the history of you. But your life is connected to bigger histories. Each student and every teacher who has ever passed through your school is part of the history of your school. Each person in your country is part of your national history. And everyone in the world is part of world history.

**4:01**

*Animation of the connections that form between states, nations, and continents; montage of artworks from all over the world*

But world history isn't just a history of everything. It's a history of us and all the stuff that ties us together, including the connections that brought ideas, people, plants and animals, diseases, religions, all from one part of the world to another. These histories—both big and small—helped shape your life. The story of how you're connected to the person sitting next to you in class, on the other side of the country, or halfway around the world.

**4:41**

*Animation of the three frames: communities, networks, and production & distribution*

But these history stories are vast and complicated which is why historians often organize them into themes, or frames, for understanding the past. Frames are like lenses for helping us to concentrate on one thing at a time. In this course, you will use three frames: communities, networks, and production and distribution.

*Flags of many nations flying together*

Communities include the history of towns and nations and fandoms and Discord servers. This frame focuses on all the diverse ways that people organize the societies they live in and the groups they form.

**5:19**

*Montage of animations and videos describing the three frames*

Networks are the ways that people make connections and exchange goods and ideas. Networks include everything from ancient sea routes to the internet. Production and distribution is the history of making, trading, and selling everything that people use and consume, from charcoal used on Paleolithic cave walls to the microprocessor powering AI.





Are there other frames we can use to view the past? Absolutely! Can you think of some?

**5:55**

*An individual sorting through family photos; montage of photos depicting how we celebrate and connect to the past, including a lantern lighting ceremony, a Jewish family celebrating Shabbat dinner, and site of remembrance*

You're not just learning history, you also have a role in creating it. Lots of people, including you, already create accounts of the past. Our communities and families have lots of ways to celebrate and connect to the past. Traditions, holidays, sites of remembrance. These accounts of the past and ways of remembering are important. But they're slightly different from history.

**6:22**

*Montage of photos of famous historical sites, including the Colosseum and the Great Wall of China*

In this course you're going to learn how to be an historian. Historians use evidence from the past to create their historical accounts. They evaluate this evidence to better understand the world we live in and how it might change in the future. This is the opportunity you have in learning how to think historically. In this course, you won't only consume histories others tell you, you will seek out and use evidence as you write historical accounts that are important to you.



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