

PURPOSE

To help students see the crucial role traces play in the construction of history

ACTIVITY: I Left a Trace

Ask students to jot down everything that they have done in the last 24 hours (and that would be appropriate for classroom discussion). After describing what a trace is, ask students to

1. make a list of traces that might have been left of their life in the past 24 hours (including digital traces)
2. identify which traces were purposeful and which were accidental
3. offer an opinion about whether the traces are likely to be preserved³

Student answers will provide concrete reference points to introduce words such as *historical record*, *relic*, and *testimony*, as well as add to their understanding of *trace*.

Use the following questions to build from this concrete example to consider broader questions of historical knowledge and the role played by traces:

- Were there any things you did that left no trace or that left only traces that would not be preserved? What does this suggest about the historical record?
- What would future historians think about you if they were able to study your traces? What if they were able to see only those traces that you left *purposefully*?
- What if all the traces of everyone on Earth disappeared and your traces were the only ones to survive? How much would future historians be able to learn about our society by studying only your traces?
- What other kinds of traces, relics, testimony, and records would help historians learn about our society?
- What if historians were trying to study you? What materials—other than those actually created by you—could they use?

³ The idea for this exercise comes from Using the familiar to introduce students to the study of primary and secondary sources. (2002–12). *Designed Instruction*. Retrieved from <http://www.designedinstruction.com/learningleads/teacher-support-traces.html>. Designed Instruction, LLC provides blackline masters and graphic organizers designed for elementary students. This content is used with permission.