



THE HIDDEN LANGUAGE OF HUMANITIES

More than stories – a language to understand people, places and ideas.



THE IDEA

Humanities subjects (History, Geography, Global Perspectives and related areas) have a distinctive language.

Students need vocabulary, concepts and text structures to understand sources, interpret information, make connections and build arguments.

EAL learners often understand the content but find the language of analysis, comparison and evaluation challenging.

Making this language visible helps all learners engage more deeply with people, places and ideas.



IN THE CLASSROOM

Pre-teach key terms and concepts.

Use timelines, maps, images and sources.

Provide sentence frames for analysis and comparison.

Model how to use the language when discussing, writing or presenting.

Give opportunities for structured talk, debate and extended writing.

Revisit and recycle the language regularly.

THE 3 STEPS

1



IDENTIFY THE LANGUAGE

Find the key language.

Look at the topic, source or task.

Identify important vocabulary (e.g. cause, consequence, primary source, reliable, perspective, migration).

Highlight useful phrases and structures (e.g. "this suggests ...", "on the other hand ...").

Consider the thinking skills required

(e.g. describe, compare, analyse, evaluate).

"What are the key words here?"

"What does this phrase mean?"

"What kind of answer is expected?"

2



MAKE IT VISIBLE

Teach and model the language.

Pre-teach key terms in context.

Use visuals (timelines, maps, images, source examples).

Model how to use the language when interpreting sources or building an argument.

Provide sentence frames and scaffolds.

"This source suggests ..."

"On the other hand ..."

"A key consequence of this was ..."

3



USE AND DEVELOP

Give opportunities to use it.

Build the language into discussions, group work and writing tasks.

Encourage students to explain, compare and justify.

Provide feedback on both content and language.

Revisit and extend the language with new topics and more complex tasks.

"I think this because ..."

"This is similar to ... but different because ..."

"Overall, this suggests ..."



WHY IT WORKS

- Helps EAL learners access complex ideas and sources.
- Builds confidence in discussing and writing about people, places and events.
- Develops critical thinking as well as language skills.
- Supports success in essays, presentations and exams.
- Benefits all learners, not just EAL students.



EAL UPGRADE

- Create a humanities word bank.
- Use source-based examples.
- Provide sentence frames for analysis.
- Include visual supports (timelines, maps).
- Build in structured talk before writing.
- Revisit key language regularly.



TRY IT TOMORROW

- Choose one upcoming lesson.
- Identify 5 key terms or phrases.
- Create a simple visual glossary.
- Use a source and model the language with the class.
- Ask students to discuss or write using a sentence frame.



TEACHER LANGUAGE

"Let's look at what this term means."

"How can we use this in a sentence?"

"What does this source suggest?"

"Can you explain your idea using this phrase?"

"Let's compare these two perspectives."

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