

Organizing Time

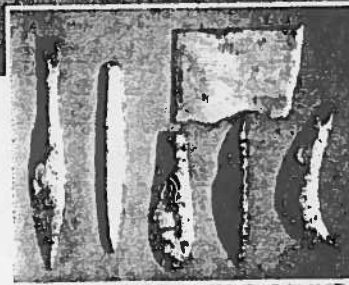
Main Idea

Historians organize history by dividing it into blocks of time.

Reading Focus Have you ever thought about the names given to a block of events, such as "summer vacation" or "the baseball season?" Read to see how historians use names to describe different stretches of time in history.

Periods of History Historians divide history into blocks of time known as *periods*, or *eras*. For example, a period of 10 years is called a *decade*. A period of 100 years is known as a *century*. Centuries are grouped into even longer time periods, which are given names.

The first of these long periods is called *Prehistory*. Prehistory refers to the time before people developed writing, about 5,500 years ago. This is followed by the period known as *Ancient History*, ending c. A.D. 500. (c., or *circa*, means "about"). Historians call the next thousand years the *Middle Ages*, or the medieval period. From c. 1500, *Modern History* begins



Tools made by prehistoric people



A young couple of ancient Rome

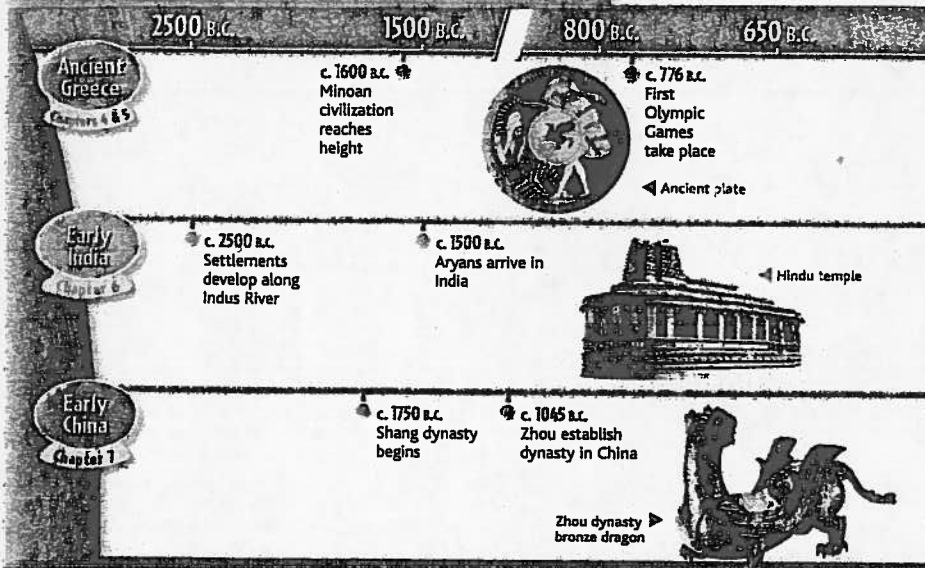


A woman of medieval Japan playing a musical instrument



Educated Europeans of the early modern period discussing new ideas

Three Ancient Civilizations



A time line also labels events. Each event on the time line appears beside the date when the event took place. Sometimes events and their dates are shown on a single time line. In other cases, two or more time lines are stacked one on top of the other. These are called multilevel time lines. They help you to compare events in different places at certain

and continues to the present day. In this book, you will study the history of the world from prehistory to the beginning of the modern period.

What Is a Time Line? Which came first: the American Civil War or World War II? Did the train come before or after the invention of the airplane? In studying the past, historians focus on *chronology*, or the order of dates in which events happened.

You might be wondering how to make sense of the flow of dates and events. An easy way is to use or make a time line. A *time line* is a diagram that shows the order of events within a period of time.

Most time lines are divided into sections in which the years are evenly spaced. In some cases, however, a spread of time may be too long to show all of the years in even spaces. To save space, a period of time may be omitted from the time line. Where this happens, a slanted or jagged line appears on the time line to show a break in the even spacing of events. For example, the time line above shows a break between 1500 B.C. and 800 B.C.

periods of time. For example, the multilevel time line above shows events in three ancient civilizations from 2500 B.C. to 650 B.C. The skill "Reading a Time Line" on page 711 will help you learn to work with time lines.

Thinking Like a Historian

- 1. Reading a Time Line** Look over the time line above to get an idea of what a time line shows. What is the title? When does it begin and end? What two features make this time line different from many other time lines? Why are they used?
- 2. Understanding a Time Line** Why do you think the dates on the time line are marked with a "c."?
- 3. Making a Time Line** Create a time line using the terms B.M.B. (before my birth) and A.M.B. (after my birth). Fill in the time line with five key events that happened before and after you were born. Illustrate the time line with copies of photos from your family album.