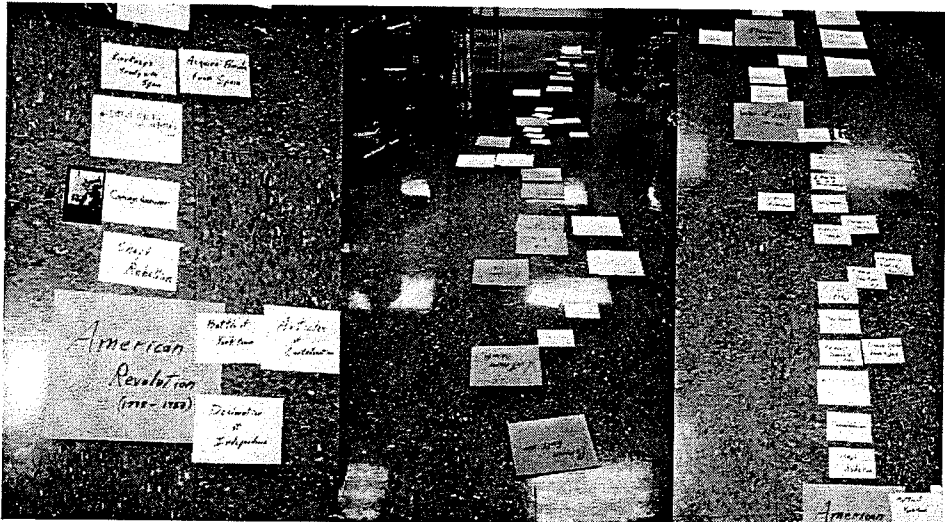


## Chapter Nine

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### Floor Timelines



Timelines are a terrific way to help students comprehend the correct sequence of historical events and eras, but a traditional timeline is not the most exciting “hands-on” teaching strategy. This teaching strategy is inspired by the concept of a traditional timeline, only with a more tactile and engaging approach. This strategy adds a new spin to the traditional timeline by

allowing students to directly manipulate the placement of events, individuals, and eras. All a teacher needs to prepare for this strategy are index cards, printer paper, and a magic marker.

### **Why timeline work is essential:**

Often students in a history class find it challenging to remember the correct chronological order of historical events. This difficulty becomes even more apparent if the social studies class uses a thematically-based curriculum. For example, many social studies curriculums teach the concept of individual freedom and equality, or details about the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights; but if students do not understand the chronology behind basic historical events, then some students may think that Martin Luther King was a slave or that the New England Puritans took part in the McCarthy hearings of the early 1950s.

Martin Luther King and the institution of slavery are relevant for any discussion of freedom and equality, but MLK and the institution of slavery occurred during different centuries! If students do not have a firm grasp of the historical sequence of events, then the full impact and connection of King's "I Have a Dream" Speech (1963) to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation (1863) is lost. In other words, unless students thoroughly know the chronological order of historical events and eras, they will confuse the chronological order of some very basic facts.

Another common theme often includes the historical principles of civil liberties and the rights that are embedded in the first amendment. A history class may explore and discuss the details of the Zenger Case (1735),

the Alien and Sedition Acts (1798), Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus (1862), and the Sedition Act of World War I (1918). The general theme in all of these events is the restriction of civil liberties in American history, but these events stretch across a 183 year time period!

If students do not know the chronology of the previously mentioned events, then they will fail to fully comprehend the historical impact and scope of these events. Even worse, they will create flawed cause and effect relationships which will lead to inaccurate conclusions. It is simple, students must know the order of events or they will not understand the historical foundations time period. A full understanding of a time period's chronology is required before any attempt is made to analyze and evaluate that time period.

**Directions for using the Floor Timeline strategy:**

1. Give each student one to four note/flash cards with various historical terms written on them (XYZ Affair, Trail of Tears, etc.).
2. The class works as a group and places the cards in the correct chronological order on the floor. Some topics span many decades and may not fit neatly under one specified date (the Enlightenment, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Awakening, the Great Migration, etc.). In this case, place these cards outside, or next to, the historical events that have a specific date (the American Revolution, the Missouri Compromise, the Sherman Anti-trust Act, etc.).

3. Set a time limit so that students stay focused. A stopwatch or kitchen timer works well here. Initially, allow students to ask each other questions while referring to the history wall or their classroom notes. The goal is for each group of students to create their own correct timeline on the floor.
4. Once all of the flashcards are placed on the floor in the form of a timeline, check the timeline's chronological order to make sure that it is correct.
5. Students should record the floor timeline into their notes while the teacher briefly explains the historical sequences and connections that exist between the various events.

Note: in order to encourage increased attention, inform students that there will be a quiz next class on this exact same floor timeline. The teacher can even tell the students that they can use all of their notes from today's activity on tomorrow's quiz. Any classroom activity must encourage student buy-in; otherwise students will feel that they are simply doing "busy work." If students feel that they are just spinning their wheels and waiting for the end of class, they will not engage in the activity. However, when students see the benefit of the floor timeline work they will engage in the activity at hand.

**\*Remember\***

Remind the students that learning takes practice. Just because they read the chapter . . . does not mean that they learned it.

**\*Remember\***

**Obtaining cards for the Floor Timeline:**

Teachers have a number of options when it comes to obtaining note or flashcards to use for this strategy, a teacher can either buy pre-made flashcards or make their own. Both types of cards offer advantages and disadvantages, but instructors need to consider the specific needs of their students as well as the demands of the course's curriculum. Many companies produce flashcards for courses such as the College Board's Advanced Placement curriculum that are easily purchased over the internet. In fact, there are now numerous online sources that offer free flashcards, individuals simply need to select the cards they need and print them off.

Teachers should spend some time investigating the kind of cards that will best suit their needs. Store purchased flashcards are convenient due to the fact that the definition for each term is already on the back of the card. They cover nearly every major time period in U.S. history and are ready to go right out of the box. However, many store bought cards present a major problem -- the writing on the flashcards are often too small to read from a distance.

The problem of flashcards with small print is readily overcome with a little time and patience, as well as access to a photocopier. Place the original store-purchased flashcards in the photocopier and enlarge the copy size to 200 to 400 percent. These enlarged flashcards are now much easier to use, organize, and place on the floor; and more importantly students can read the historical terms from a distance. In addition, once these cards are laminated or placed in page protectors; they become more durable and easier to use.



**Flashcards enlarged by a photocopier (8 x 11) next to the original store purchased flashcard (lower right)**

Teacher or student made flashcards take more time to create, but they provide greater educational flexibility. Individually made flashcards may look a little sloppy to the outside observer, but by having students make their own cards; they are actually practicing and reinforcing (myelinating) the historical information. Student made flashcards also more readily fit the demands of any given curriculum due to the fact that students can create specific timelines to fit their individual academic needs.

A teacher's ability to spontaneously create flashcards when and where they are needed is lost if one relies solely on store purchased cards. The next image shows examples of teacher and student made flashcards. Remember, the flashcards should fit the demands of the curriculum while simultaneously meeting the needs of the students.

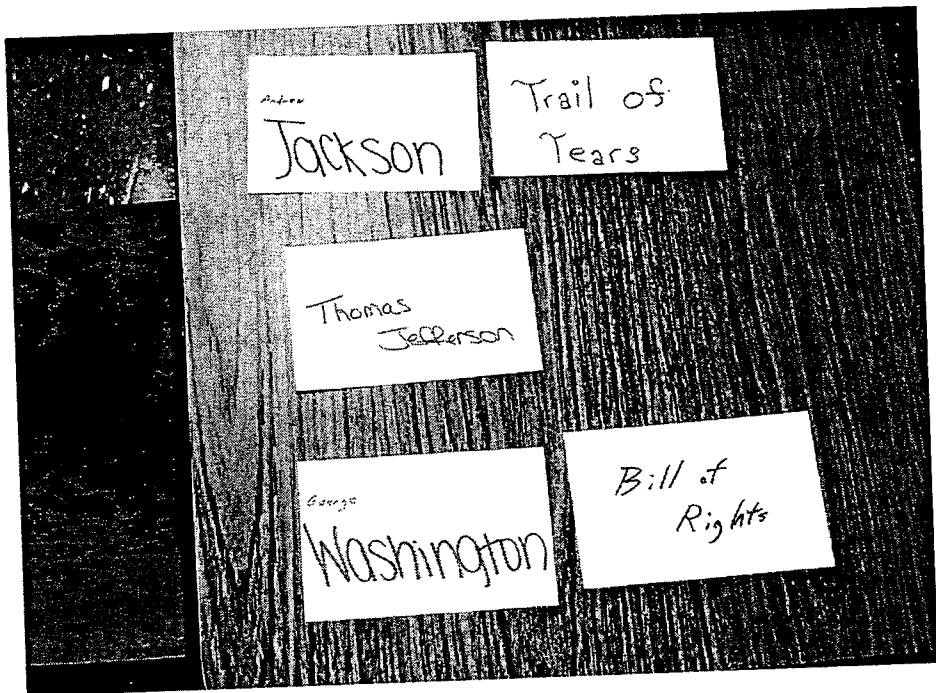


### Various student and teacher created flashcards

The previous picture displays a variety of student and teacher created flashcards. When constructing the cards for your timeline, initially focus on political, economic, and social topics. In the previous picture displays political occurrences of the 1820s such as the “Missouri Compromise” and the “Corrupt Bargain” are written on 5” x 7” and 3” x 5” index cards, while the 1950s artist Jackson Pollock are on half-sheets of computer printer paper (4.25” x 5.5”). The terms “Immigration – Southern European” and “Civil War” are on regular sized computer printer paper (8.5” x 11”).

Teachers can differentiate a floor timeline’s cards by both color and size. In the above picture, for example, the larger flashcards that were made from computer printer paper represent the historical themes of military conflict and immigration. Educators need to always consider the unique needs and demands of their particular classrooms – one size does not fit all.

The ability to tweak and alter the floor timeline strategy is essential to meet the needs of your students.



### General historical terms on 5" x 7" note cards

Notice that the above picture displays historical terms on 5" x 7" note cards and that the historical information placed in the correct chronological order. The logic behind this timeline is as follows: the Bill of Rights was finally ratified and put into effect during Washington's presidency (1789-1796), while the Trail of Tears occurred during Andrew Jackson's presidency (1828-1836).

Furthermore, Thomas Jefferson's presidency (1801-1809) occurred between the presidencies of Washington and Jackson. Once students have memorized the order of these presidential terms, additional information is easily added to the timeline.

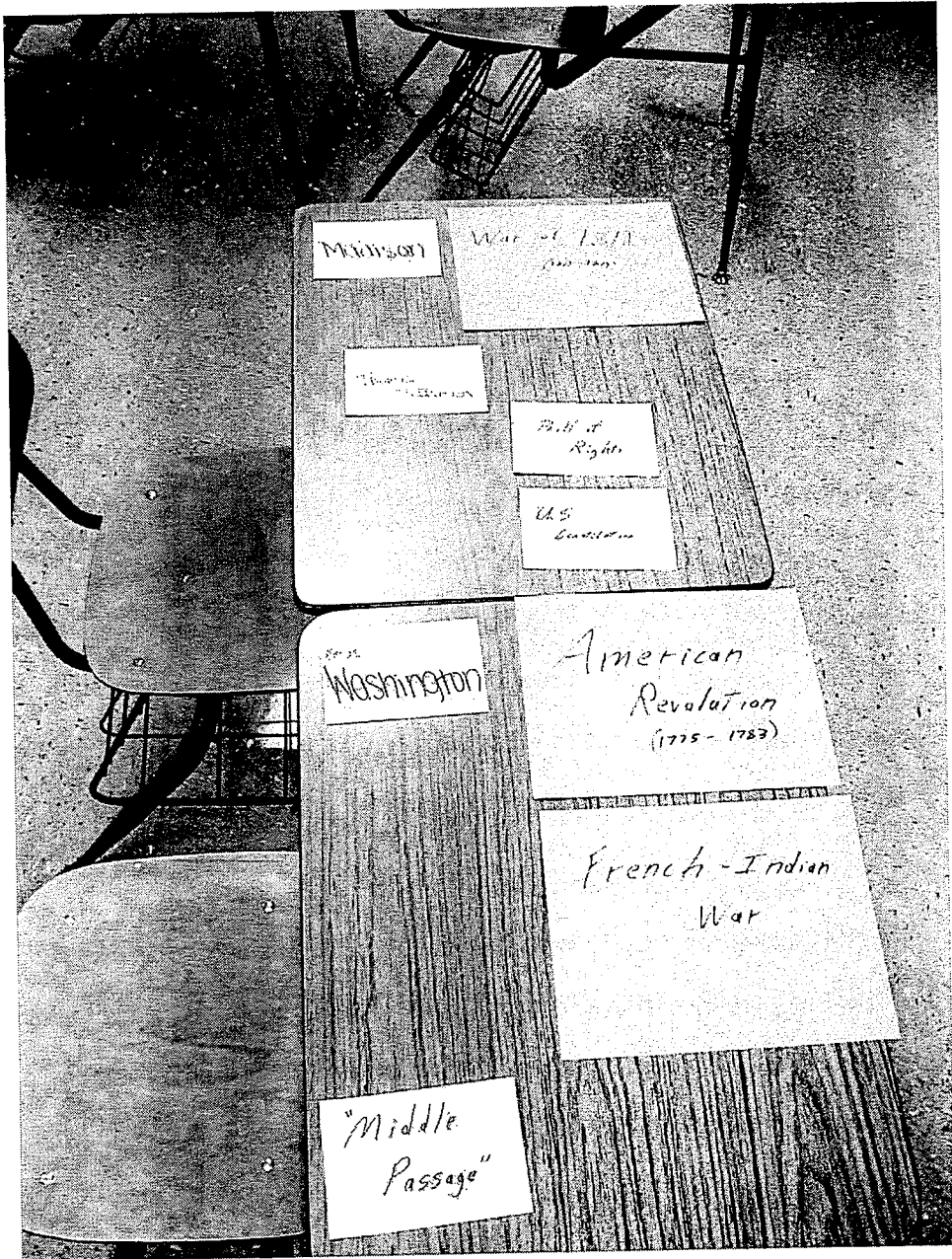


For example, students could include the presidency of John Adams, the XYZ Affair, the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and the Embargo Acts. However, further analysis is needed in order to fully understand the historical connections that existed between these previously mentioned events. So if a flashcard mentions the Lewis and Clark Expedition, the class should understand that the purchase of Louisiana from the French (1803) is the “cause” that creates the “effect”; which inspired Jefferson to order the Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804-1806).

The same historical analysis is applied to Jefferson’s Embargo Act. Without an understanding of the practice of “impressment” and the Napoleonic wars, students will not correctly comprehend why the United States was boycotting trade goods from Europe. In the end, a classroom discussion, with a quick question and answer session; is essential if a class is going to fully comprehend a more complex floor timeline. References to a history wall or comparisons through the use of an interactive Venn diagram strategy are yet one more way to prepare a class for a floor timeline activity.

For easier access, or a change of pace, a teacher could construct a floor timeline on the top of a student’s desks. Classroom desk are great to use for shorter timelines, and as new cards are added one simply needs to add another desk. Naturally, as more information is added, a larger surface is needed in order to display the expanded timeline. For example, the next image displays two desk shoved together with additional terms added to the original timeline from the previous picture. A desktop is a convenient way to introduce a class to the floor timeline strategy, but as the amount of

flashcards grow; students will eventually need to use the floor to display all of their timeline's cards.



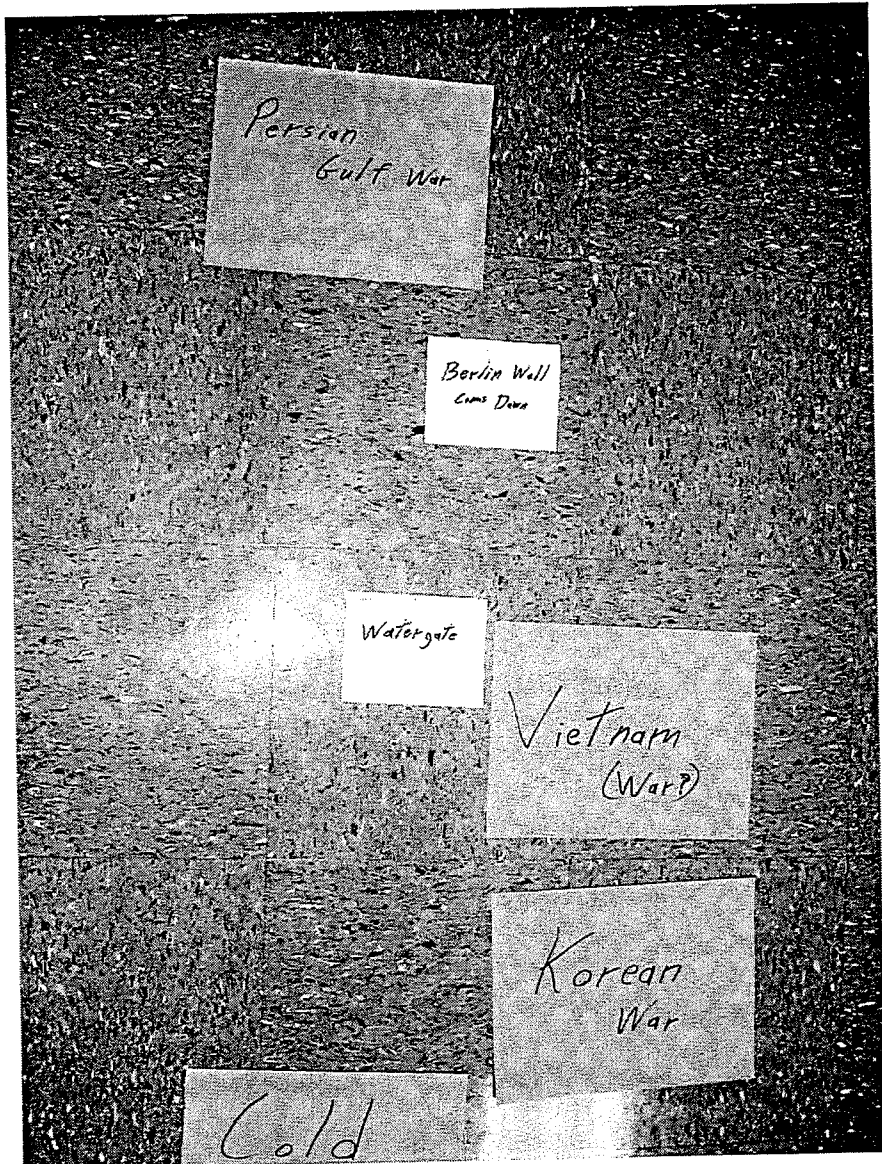
**A floor timeline placed on two desks**

The previous image shows a timeline built from a mixture of large and small student made flashcards. Notice that Andrew Jackson and the Trail of Tears have been left off, while additional historical terms have been included. If needed, a teacher could add a third desk to the original two desks, and then add the Andrew Jackson and Trail of Tears cards. In this example, the military events were written on 8" x 11" orange sheets of paper. Visual cues like this are a nice way to provide students with hints that help them process and recall specific historical themes. The floor timeline strategy is extremely flexible in its application, but in the end a teacher should do what is best for the students and the overall demands of the classroom.

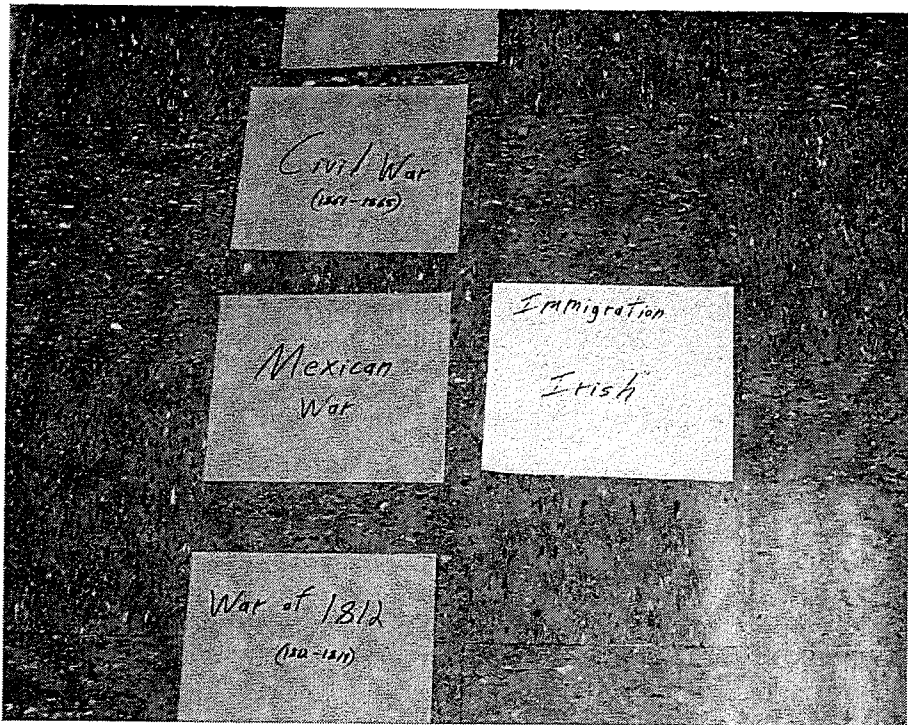
The next picture displays a single floor timeline created with 5" x 7" and 8" x 11" flashcards. In this timeline, one of the smaller 5" x 7" index cards (Watergate) is next to the 8" x 11" inch sheet of paper (Vietnam War). This horizontal order in and otherwise vertical timeline signifies the fact that the event known as "Watergate" occurred when the U.S. was engaged in a military conflict in the country of Vietnam. However, in the same timeline the student made flashcard for Vietnam has the word "war" in parentheses.

By placing the word "war" in parentheses, the student is referring to the fact that war was never officially declared by U.S. Congress during the Vietnam military conflict. Instead, Vietnam was considered a military police action. The differences between a military police action and a war, as well as the larger impact on constitutional limits and presidential power; could easily inspire a lively class discussion. When flashcards for a floor timeline are made by students, individual variations such as this will occur.

In fact, these variations tend to make for more interesting floor timelines. Student generated timeline cards can often create classroom discussions just by the wording that is used on the cards. For example, when discussing the voyages of Christopher Columbus starting in 1492, which is the best term to use: European exploration or European invasion?



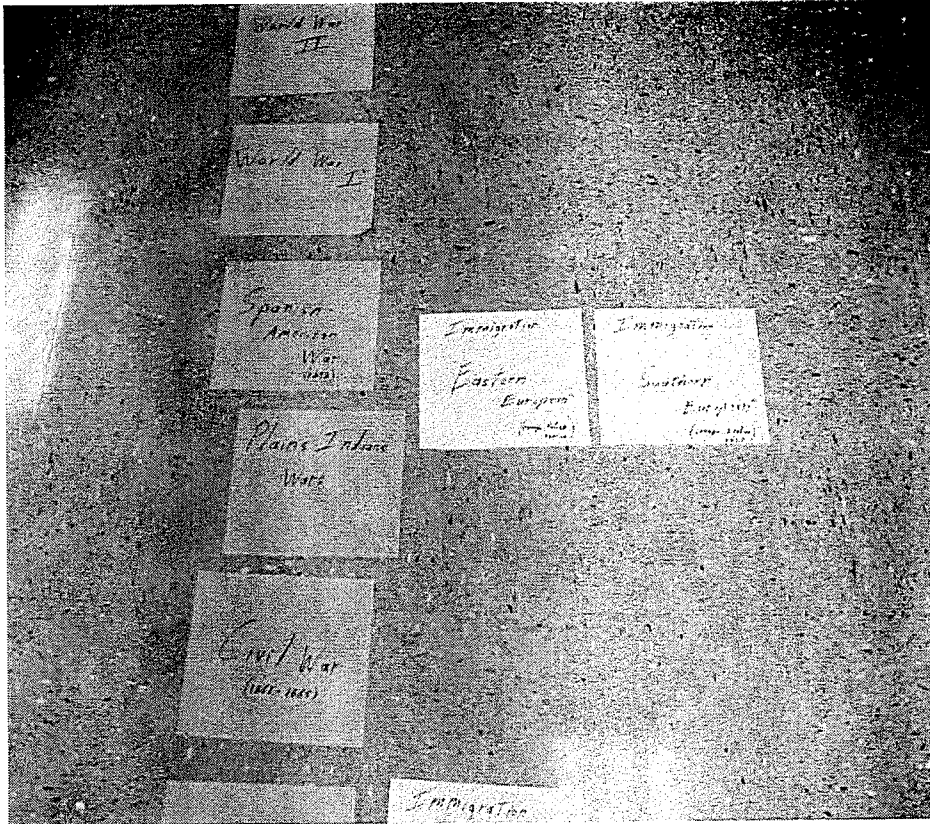
The previous image displays a floor timeline that was created by using a mixture of 8" x 11" computer printer paper and smaller 5" x 7" index cards. The next picture demonstrates the use of yellow paper to reinforce the theme of immigration. Notice that the major military events have been placed in the correct historical sequence. The card showing the period of heavy Irish immigration has been placed loosely in the 1840s, even though the years of heaviest Irish immigration were from 1820 to 1860.



**Floor timeline generalizing about the decade of the 1840s**

**\*Remember\*** The physical act of actually placing the cards in the correct sequence is encouraging myelination. This is developing the ability to quickly recall information!

**\*Remember\***



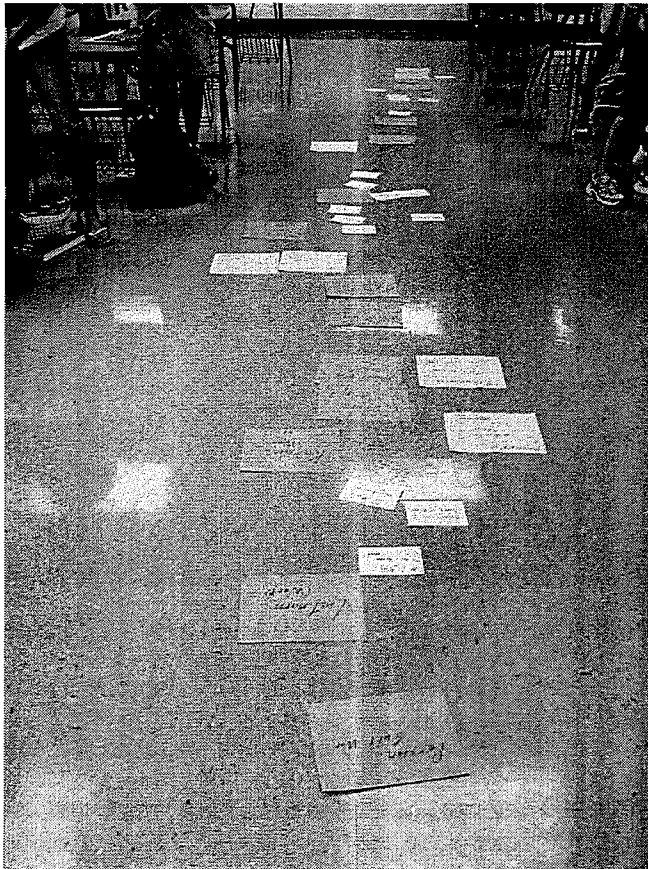
### A floor timeline showing the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century

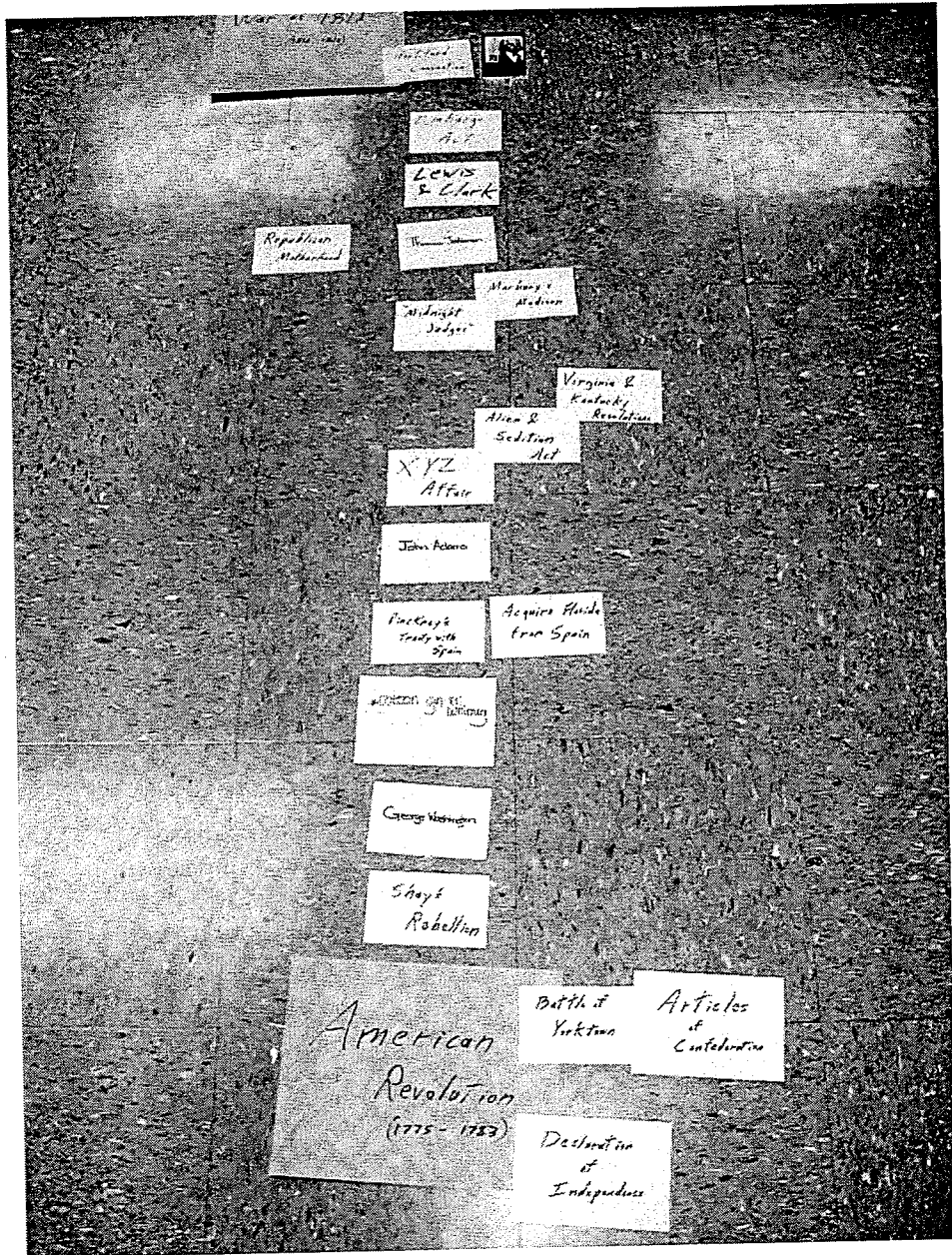
The previous image shows a floor timeline composed of orange paper, which displays military conflicts; and yellow paper to illustrate the major periods of peak immigration. In this example, the time period displayed is that of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was a period of heavy Eastern and Southern European immigration.

Understandably, the paper that represents the period of increased Eastern and Southern European immigration could move slightly in either direction on the timeline. Just so the date range stays in general vicinity of the years 1890 to 1910, it is historical correct. Since some historical

occurrences and concepts do not neatly fit under one exact date, these cards are positioned to the side of the timeline to signify a general range of time.

The picture below displays a floor timeline created from various sized flashcards with the Persian Gulf War placed as the most recent historical event. This floor timeline includes numerous historical events with the goal being to for students to understand the correct chronological sequence and correlations between topics such as *Brown v. Board of education* and Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream* Speech. Remember to include a wide variety of historical themes (political, social, economic, etc.) in a floor timeline in order to correct a richer understanding of the historical process.



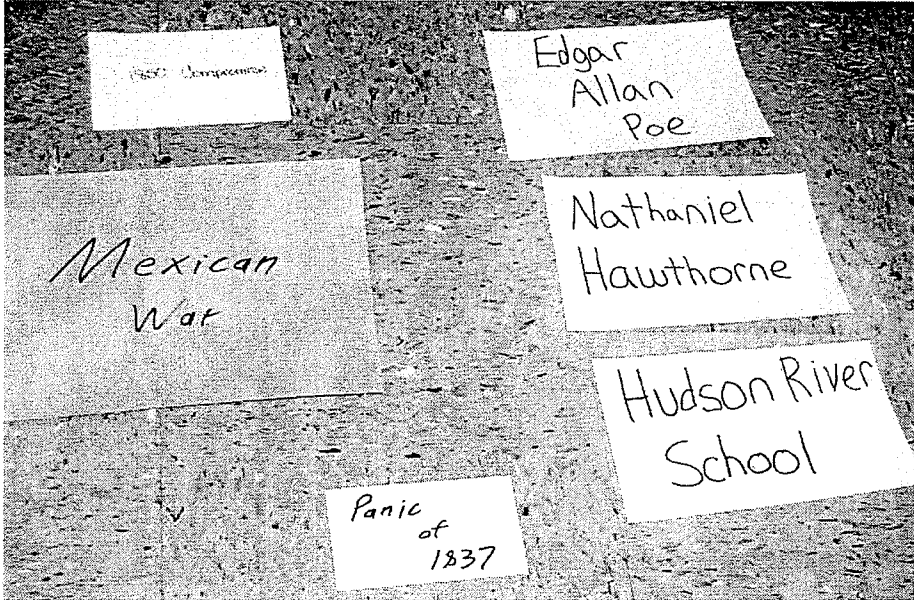


### A floor timeline with late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century topics

Teachers should remember that the floor timeline teaching strategy is a flexible and organic teaching method, which means that the timelines are never really finished and can easily expand in both length and complexity. It



simply depends on what the class is studying or what areas students are having a difficult time with, as well as how much instructional time is available.



As a floor timeline becomes more complex, there is an increasing chance that it may start to confuse some students. If this is a problem, then a teacher should have students create smaller floor timelines. As the essential concepts are learned, add additional facts to these smaller floor timelines. Remember, teachers should reinforce previously learned information in order to lay the foundation for the learning of new information.

**\*Remember\***

Facts are the foundation of sound historical analysis. Analysis without facts is just an opinion.

**\*Remember\***

**Floor Timeline Variations: "What If" (alternative history)**

Floor timelines work well for playing out "what if" historical scenarios. A teacher can delete certain key events from a floor timeline in order to produce an alternative sequence of historical events, with the deletion of these pivotal events creating an alternative chain of cause and effect historical relationships. A teacher can then check to see if students are able to logically predict the overall impact if certain historical events had never occurred.

For example:

- What if Native Americans had possessed a high level of immunity to the lethal diseases that Europeans brought to North and South America? Would the European powers still have been able to colonize/conquer the "New World?"
- What if the Cotton Gin had never been invented in 1793? Would the institution of slavery have ended sooner in the southern United States?
- What if Lincoln had not been assassinated in April of 1865? Would the policy of Southern Reconstruction have developed differently?
- What if European powers had openly allied with the Southern Confederacy during the Civil War? Would the Civil War have had a different outcome?

- What if President McKinley not been assassinated at the 1901 World' Fair? If Theodore Roosevelt had not become president, would the reforms of the Progressive Era have occurred differently?
- What if the Japanese had not bombed Pearl Harbor? Would the United States still have entered World War II?

The teacher should subtract pivotal historical events from the floor timeline in order to make things as interesting as possible. "What if" floor timelines borders on science fiction, but it is an excellent way to engage students and have them analyze and evaluate possible cause and effect relationships in history.

**\*Warning\*** Student should not confuse the alternative "what if" history with the correct history. The purpose of this strategy is for students to recognize *cause and effect* relationships.

**\*Warning\***

Have students look at the big picture and present their own "what if" facts followed by "what if" inferences and judgments. When students brainstorm possible outcomes due to alternative historical events timelines, they are accessing and analyzing previously learned information. The actual act of recalling and evaluating this information encourages myelination along

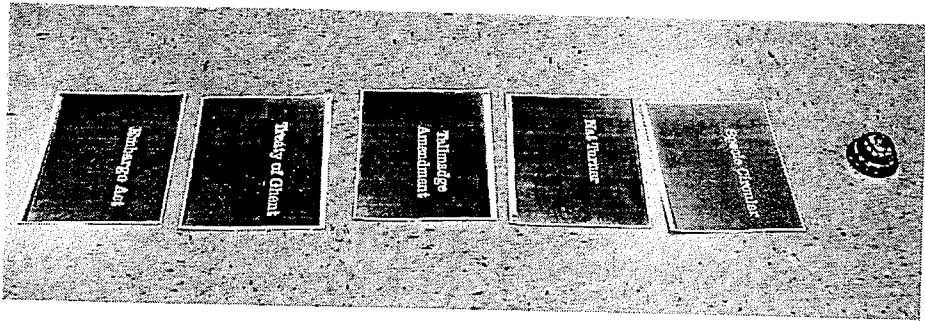
the synaptic pathways in the brain, while also providing an opportunity for a micro-assessment.

### **Floor Timeline Variations: History Races**

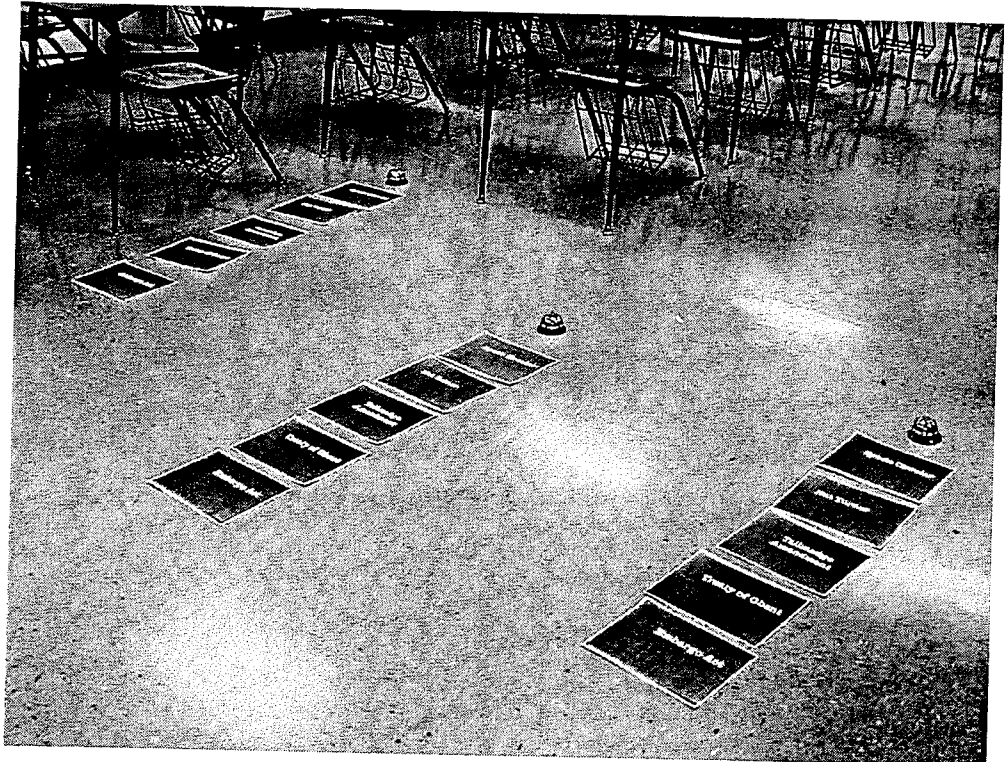
The teacher selects a couple of students and gives each student group 5 to 10 flashcards, with each student group having an identical set of flashcards. Next, have the groups compete against each other in order to see who can, in the shortest amount of time, create a correct floor timeline using all of the flashcards. The teacher can also have individual students compete against each other, with each student creating a correct floor timeline as quickly as possible. However, having students create their own individual floor timeline works better in a smaller classroom setting.

During this activity teachers need to set the tone of the classroom by reinforcing with students that this is a friendly competition and that the ultimate goal is for everyone to learn. Have other class members use their notes and textbook to judge the accuracy of each group's finished floor timeline. Remind the class that during the construction of individual floor timelines the observing class members are not allowed to help.

When using this strategy, instructors will need to pre-select flashcards that possess exact dates. A flashcard that simply says "the Enlightenment" will span many decades. Instead of giving a student a flashcard with the term Enlightenment, replace this card with a topic from the Enlightenment time period such as John Locke's Second Treatise of Civil Government (1690). Information that possesses a specific date produces a "cleaner" timeline while creating more uniformity with the finished products.



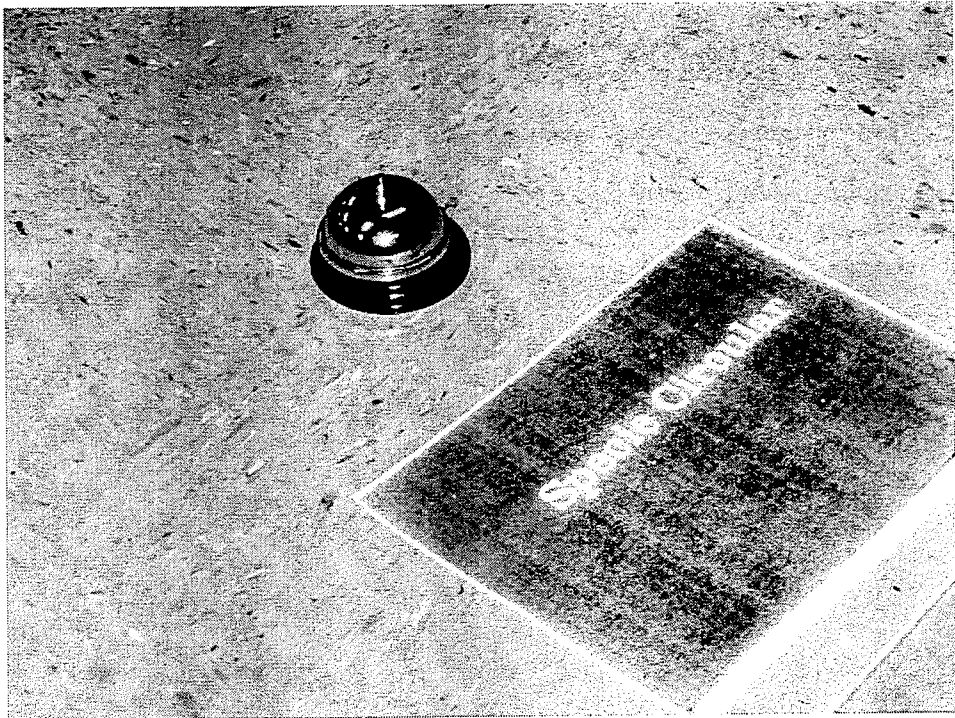
The picture above displays a finished timeline with the historical terms in the correct chronological order. Notice that the timeline starts with the Embargo Act (1807) and ends with the Specie Circular (1836), and includes political, social, and economic concepts.



**The first student(s) with a completed timeline – rings the bell!**

The image above displays the same timeline, only now it has been expanded into three identical but distinct sets of floor timelines. This is the

finished product after student pairs of students had just completed a “history race” with three identical floor timelines. Remember, the first pair of students to complete timeline that is correct -- rings the bell that is positioned at the end of the timeline. Again, if the order of the timeline is correct, that student(s) is the winner.



**The ringing of the bell signals that the timeline is complete.**

**\*Summary\***

- Based on the principals of a traditional timeline only more hands-on.
- Place flashcards on a desk or the floor in chronological order.

- Reinforces the recall of factual information and the historical sequence of events.
- Allows students to see cause and effect historical relationships.
- The complexity of the timelines can vary depending on the needs of the students.
- The manipulation of the cards reinforces previous learning and encourages myelination.
- Variations of the strategy include “what if” timelines and “history races”.

