

SOCIAL SCIENTISTS

DETECTIVES OF THE PAST PRESENT AND FUTURE



The study of history has often been seen as falling into two categories at the same time, Art and Science. If we think of history as the written story of what has happened in the past, we might see it as closer to art. For this reason, history is often considered part of the **humanities**, disciplines that study the products of human experience such as literature, art, language, and philosophy. But history is not written based on creative imagination. It is discovered through analysis of evidence, which makes it partly scientific. Therefore, history is also considered one of the **social sciences**, a group of disciplines that study different aspects of human interaction by collecting and interpreting different types of evidence in an attempt to explain the past, as well as to understand the present and, in some cases, to help prepare for the future.

The work of social scientists contributes to our understanding of history.

- **Anthropologists** study humans, especially human **culture** (*the way of life of a human society, including beliefs, values, and traditions*). Anthropologists often collect data by directly observing and participating in different cultures and studying their interactions and ways of life. They also compare different cultures to draw conclusions about human culture in general.
- **Archeologists** are anthropologists that specialize in the study human cultures of the past, especially of **prehistory** (*the time before written records*). Archeologists mainly study **artifacts** (*objects made by humans*) such as tools, weapons, pottery, and jewelry, which can be analyzed to help explain how people lived.
- **Linguists** study human language, spoken as well as written. Historical linguists study how and why languages have changed over time, and comparative linguists study different languages to connections and relationships between them, and their speakers, throughout history.
- **Geneticists** are biologists who study genes, the portions of our DNA that determine our physical traits. While genetics is actually a **natural science**, it can be applied to social science, especially history, in important ways. For example, genetics can help to trace the movement of people around the world throughout history, going back as far as the first human beings, by studying the genes of modern human populations.
- **Economists** study the production, exchange, and use of goods and services, as well as the systems within which these processes occur. Simply put, economics deals with anything relating to wealth, trade, and the use of resources. Economic theorists develop their own ideas about how people and governments should make economic decisions in the future.
- **Political Scientists** study systems and theories of government, political processes, and political behavior from the past and present. Political theorists develop their own ideas about how people and governments should make political decisions in the future.
- **Geographers** study everything about the earth, its physical and natural features, as well as human populations and man-made political features. Geographers also examine the interactions between people and the physical environment. Geography is much more than just studying locations on maps.
- **Historians** study the past, focusing mostly on the **historical past** (*since the first written records*). For that reason, historians mainly study written evidence, such as letters, tax records, inscriptions, or even works of history written by historians of the past. They must also determine whether the writings are accurate, or even real. Though less reliable, historians also study oral traditions (stories passed down verbally through generations) to learn more about cultures, especially in places where written records are rare or nonexistent. Historians also rely on other types of evidence from other social sciences, such as artifacts, language, and DNA to get a fuller and more accurate understanding of the past.

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QUESTION: Is history part of the humanities, the social sciences, or both? Explain.

INVESTIGATING THE PAST

Directions: The way historians investigate history by analyzing many types of evidence is similar to the way a detective investigates a crime. Below you will find examples of the actions of a detective. After reading the article on the other side of this sheet, pair each example with the social scientist whose job is most similar to the detective's actions, and explain your choice. Not all will be used.



1. A teenage girl has gone missing, and is assumed to have run away from home. Detective Sherlock Holmes is called to investigate. He begins by examining her bedroom, and he finds a **handwritten note** from the girl, saying that she hates her family and is running away to Arizona. The note convinces the police, but not Sherlock. He logs onto her computer and sees **Facebook posts she wrote** making plans with friends for later that week. Why would she make plans if she was running away?

This is most similar to the actions of a/an _____ because _____

2. Sherlock realizes that the **mouse for her computer** is on the right side. He examines the room further and finds two other **items belonging to the girl**, a guitar and pair of scissors, both made for a right-handed person. Looking back at the note, he notices smudges in the ink that would only be made by a left-handed person. He deduces that she did not write the note, and was therefore kidnapped!

This is most similar to the actions of a/an _____ because _____

3. Sherlock discovers a straight brown hair near the girl's desk. Since the girl and her whole family are blonde, it could not be hers. Sherlock sends the hair to the lab for testing, and the **DNA results** show that it belongs to a known criminal with a record of stalking and assault. They now have their suspect!

This is most similar to the actions of a/an _____ because _____

4. In order to figure out what the kidnapper is planning. Sherlock asks his partner, John Watson, to get access to the kidnapper's **credit card records**. Looking at his most recent **purchases**, they see that he bought rope, duct tape, bottled water, and protein bars. Sherlock deduces that the kidnapper is planning to keep the girl hidden somewhere for at least a few days. But where?

This is most similar to the actions of a/an _____ because _____

5. Based on the **location** of the store where the kidnapper bought his supplies, Sherlock investigates the **surrounding area** to find a place that the kidnapper might choose to hold his victim, somewhere away from the rest of the **population**. He notices an abandoned warehouse **on the outside of town**, and is convinced this must be the place. The police raid the warehouse, where they find and rescue the girl, and arrest her kidnapper. Another case solved for Sherlock Holmes!

This is most similar to the actions of a/an _____ because _____
