

## Activity 5 – Interpretations of history

(‘An **interpretation** is an attempt to portray and/or make meaning of the past using evidence, that is, a deliberate construct created after the event(s). This can include both academic and non-academic interpretations.’ *Ofqual GCSE Subject Level Guidance for History*, February 2015)

### Analysing differences in interpretation

#### Option 31 Weimar and Nazi Germany, 1918–39

**Interpretation 1:** *From Germany 1918–45* by J Cloake, published in 1997.

Many young people were attracted by the exciting and interesting activities of the youth movements. There were many outdoor events such as camping and hiking as well as sports. Some enjoyed the military aspects of the youth movements, the uniforms, the marching and the discipline. Other young people liked the music that was a frequent part of cultural activities or the military parades. There was great comradeship among the Hitler Youth.

**Interpretation 2:** *From Germany 1858–1990: Hope, Terror and Revival* by A Kitson, published in 2001.

The movement became less popular towards the late 1930s as the activities became increasingly focused on preparations for war and the discipline became more strict when membership became compulsory. There was a growing resentment at the way Hitler Youth leaders acted as if they were better than members who were barely younger than they were. Some youngsters began to kick against the restrictions of the Hitler Youth.

The chart below analyses the two interpretations above.

	<i>Interpretation 1 emphasises positive attitudes</i>	<i>Interpretation 2 emphasises negative attitudes</i>
<b>Language and tone</b>	Exciting, interesting, enjoyed, liked, comradeship	Less popular, growing resentment, kick against
<b>Selection of information</b>	Outdoor events, sports, music, parades Some enjoyed the marching and discipline	Discipline became more strict, membership compulsory, resentment of HY leaders

<b>Points of emphasis</b>	Many young people were attracted; there was great comradeship	Movement became less popular towards late 1930s when focused on preparation for war Some youngsters began to kick against restrictions
---------------------------	---	---

(It is interesting to note that discipline appears in both – given a positive gloss in Interpretation 1 and a negative in Interpretation 2. Examples such as this could help students see that passages can be analysed in terms not only of the selection of information, but also the treatment of the material included.)

### Option 33: The USA, 1954–75, Interpretations 1 and 2

Read the two interpretations below and suggest what could be picked out for the following for each interpretation:

- Language and tone
- Selection of information
- Points of emphasis

**Interpretation 1:** *From GCSE Modern World History* by B Walsh, published in 1996

Public opinion was turning against the war even before the Tet Offensive. After it, the war became very unpopular. Many Americans felt deeply uncomfortable with what was going on in Vietnam. The Vietnam War was a media war. Television showed prisoners being tortured or executed or women and children watching with horror as their house was set on fire. There were anti-war protests all over the country. Thousands began to 'draft dodge' – refusing to serve in Vietnam when called up. There were thousands of demonstrations in universities across the USA against the war.

**Interpretation 2:** *From Vietnam 1950–75* by S Waugh and J Wright, published in 2010.

The opposition to the war was not as great as claimed. In 1964, 85 per cent of Americans supported the government policy on the war. Even as late as 1970, after the invasion of Cambodia, an opinion poll showed 50 per cent approved. There were a number of active and enthusiastic supporters of the war who were concerned about the spread of communism in Asia. For example, in May 1970, over 200 hard-hat construction workers were cheered when they attacked a peaceful crowd of anti-war protestors.