

## Lesson Plan: Exploring the Complexity of History's Patterns

**Essential Question:** How do different models of historical analysis (e.g., linear, cyclical, spiral) help us understand the past, and how might they shape our understanding of the future?

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### Objective

**Students will:**

1. Analyze and critique traditional and alternative models of historical analysis.
  2. Apply Sartwell's arguments to historical examples.
  3. Synthesize their understanding by creating a visual representation of history's patterns and justifying their interpretation.
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### Standards

1. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2**  
*Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.*
  2. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7**  
*Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.*
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### Lesson Flow

#### 1. Warm-Up Activity (10 minutes)

- **Prompt:** "What do you think the shape of history looks like? Why?"
  - **Task:** Students sketch a quick diagram or write a short explanation of their interpretation of history.
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#### 2. Brief Lecture: Overview of Historical Models (15 minutes)

- **Content:** Introduce the four historical models (linear, cyclical, spiral, dialectical) with definitions and examples. Use the Civil War as a case study to demonstrate how each model can interpret the same event differently.

### 3. Guided Analysis of Sartwell's Article (10 minutes)

- **Task:** Analyze key excerpts from Sartwell's article. Students work in small groups or pairs to discuss his critique of traditional models and his "Spirograph theory."
  - **Discussion Questions:**
    - *"What similarities or differences did you notice between the historical models discussed in your excerpts?"*
    - *"Why do you think Sartwell is skeptical of traditional models like the linear timeline or the cyclical approach? Do you agree with his perspective?"*
    - *"Which historical model do you think best explains the Civil War? Why?"*
    - *"Sartwell's spirograph theory suggests that history revisits old themes while becoming more complex over time. How might this idea help explain the Civil War and its aftermath?"*
    - *"Sartwell mentions that the shape of history might depend on human decisions rather than impersonal forces. How does this idea challenge the way we think about events like the Civil War?"*
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### 4. Activity: Draw Your Version of History (30 minutes)

- **Task:**
    - Students will draw their own interpretation of history, using the Civil War as a case study.
  - **Reflection Questions:**
    - *"What shape did you draw to represent history, and why?"*
    - *"How does your drawing reflect the Civil War's causes, events, or outcomes?"*
    - *"Does your shape align with one of the historical models we discussed? If so, how? If not, explain how your interpretation is different."*
    - *"What are the strengths and limitations of your shape in explaining history?"*
    - *"What does your drawing reveal about how you understand the patterns of history?"*
  - **Purpose:** Encourage creativity, synthesis of ideas, and critical thinking about historical patterns and interpretations.
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### 5. Sharing and Discussion (Optional)

- **Class Discussion:** Invite volunteers to share their drawings and explanations. Use guiding questions to highlight different perspectives:

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- *"How do different shapes show different ways of understanding the Civil War and history overall?"*
  - *"What did you notice about similarities or differences in your classmates' interpretations?"*
  - **Purpose:** Foster collaborative learning and provide an opportunity to reflect on diverse historical interpretations.
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**Exit Reflection (Optional, 5 minutes)**

- **Prompt:** "Which model of history do you think best explains the past? Why?"
- **Purpose:** Gather insight into students' takeaways and reinforce critical thinking.

## Lecture Outline

### Introduction to Historical Models

- **Opening Question:** How do we make sense of history? Does it move forward in a straight line, repeat itself, or unfold in more complex ways?
  - **Framing the Lesson:**
    - *Historians use different models to interpret history, each offering a unique perspective.*
    - *Today, we'll explore four models: linear, cyclical, spiral, and dialectical.*
    - *We'll apply these models to the Civil War to see how they help us analyze one of the most significant events in American history.*
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### Linear Model

- **Definition:**
    - History is viewed as a straight line of progress, where events build on each other to move toward a goal.
    - Example of general use: Technological advancements during the Industrial Revolution.
  - **Key Features:**
    - Highlights achievements and causation.
    - Commonly used in timelines and textbooks.
  - **Civil War Example:**
    - The Civil War is a milestone in America's march toward justice and equality.
    - Key achievements: Emancipation Proclamation and 13th Amendment.
  - **Critique:**
    - Oversimplifies setbacks, such as the failures of Reconstruction and the persistence of racial inequality.
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### Cyclical Model

- **Definition:**
  - History follows recurring patterns or cycles, such as the rise and fall of civilizations or economic booms and busts.
  - Example of general use: The Great Depression echoes earlier financial panics.
- **Key Features:**
  - Reflects recurring themes in history.
  - Emphasizes similarities across different periods.
- **Civil War Example:**

- The Civil War as part of recurring sectional tensions in U.S. history.
  - Earlier cycles: Missouri Compromise, Nullification Crisis.
  - **Critique:**
    - While patterns exist, the Civil War introduced unprecedented changes, such as emancipation.
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## Spiral/Loop Model

- **Definition:**
    - History revisits old themes while adding new complexities, moving forward in a spiral rather than a straight line.
    - Example of general use: The Civil Rights Movement revisiting themes from Reconstruction.
  - **Key Features:**
    - Combines progress with repetition.
    - Accounts for layers of historical development.
  - **Civil War Example:**
    - The Civil War revisited debates about equality and federalism from the Revolutionary War and Constitution.
    - Expanded ideals: Abolition of slavery and redefinition of citizenship.
  - **Critique:**
    - Difficult to map growing complexity in a tangible way.
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## Dialectical Model

- **Definition:**
    - History progresses through resolving opposing forces, with outcomes resulting from conflict (thesis + antithesis = synthesis).
    - Example of general use: The Cold War as a conflict between capitalism and communism, leading to globalization.
  - **Key Features:**
    - Focuses on conflict and resolution.
    - Explains change as a process of opposing ideas clashing.
  - **Civil War Example:**
    - Conflict: Union (thesis) vs. Confederacy (antithesis).
    - Synthesis: Preservation of the Union and abolition of slavery.
  - **Critique:**
    - Oversimplifies outcomes, ignoring unresolved conflicts (e.g., systemic racism, failures of Reconstruction).
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## Conclusion

- **Summary:**
  - *"We've explored four models of historical analysis: linear, cyclical, spiral, and dialectical."*
  - *"Each model offers a different lens for understanding the past, with its own strengths and limitations."*
- **Reflection Question:**
  - *"Which model do you think best explains the Civil War? Why?"*
- **Closing Thought:**
  - *"Historical models are tools for interpretation. The way we analyze history shapes how we connect it to our present and future."*

## Excerpt 1: Sartwell's Critique of the Linear Model

<p><b>Philosophy of History:</b> <i>The study of the underlying forces, patterns, and meanings in history. It explores whether history has a specific structure, direction, or purpose—or if it is shaped by random events or human choices.</i></p> <p><b>Basic Timeline:</b> <i>A visual representation of historical events placed in chronological order. It is often used in classrooms to show how one event leads to another, creating a simplified picture of historical progress.</i></p> <p><b>Inevitable Progress:</b> <i>The belief that history moves forward toward a specific goal, such as greater justice, equality, or technological advancement, regardless of obstacles or setbacks.</i></p> <p><b>Skeptical:</b> <i>Doubtful about the truth or validity of an idea or concept.</i></p>	<p><b>Excerpt:</b></p> <p><i>"The fracturing of global alliances and the rise of hard-right movements... have caused many of us to question the inevitability of what we generally call progress."</i></p> <p><i>"The philosophy of history...set itself the remarkably ambitious project of describing the forces that shape human events: history's structure, its direction, its aim, its point and even its end. There are good reasons to be skeptical of such a project...and it is possible that history has no coherent shape or direction, or many. It may be, too, that the shape of history depends on our decisions and not on impersonal forces. But the philosophy of history is also a seductive project because, among other things, it seems to promise an understanding — even an approximate one — of what might happen next."</i></p> <p><i>"The basic timeline of history, which still ornaments elementary-school classrooms, remains the way many of us picture how we got to where we are. Its ubiquity suggests that drawing history, trying to capture the shape of time graphically, on a page or in our imaginations, is fundamental to how we understand both the past and the future."</i></p>
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## Discussion Questions

### 1. Understanding the Excerpt:

- What does Sartwell mean when he says, *"There are good reasons to be skeptical of such a project"* (referring to the philosophy of history)?
  - **Hint:** *Why might it be difficult to describe history as having one shape, direction, or purpose?*
- Why does Sartwell say that the "basic timeline" remains popular despite its simplicity? What makes it "fundamental" to how people imagine history?

**2. Connecting to Historical Models:**

- How does Sartwell's critique of the "basic timeline" challenge the linear model of history?
  - *Hint: Does the linear model account for complexity, uncertainty, or setbacks in the way Sartwell suggests history works?*
- In your own words, why might the belief in "inevitable progress" be misleading?

**3. Applying to the Civil War:**

- How might the Civil War support the idea of history as inevitable progress? What achievements or milestones might fit this view?
- How might the Civil War challenge the idea of inevitable progress? Think about the setbacks and conflicts that persisted after the war (e.g., failures of Reconstruction).

**4. Broader Reflections:**

- Sartwell says, "*It may be, too, that the shape of history depends on our decisions and not on impersonal forces.*" How does this idea change how we think about historical events like the Civil War?
  - *Hint: If history is shaped by decisions, not inevitability, what responsibility does this place on individuals or societies?*

## Excerpt 2: Alternative Models (Cyclical and Dialectical)

<p><b>Cyclical View of History:</b> <i>The idea that historical events and themes repeat over time, with patterns such as the rise and fall of empires or economic cycles recurring in similar ways.</i></p> <p><b>Dialectics:</b> <i>A process of historical change where opposing forces or ideas (thesis and antithesis) clash, and their conflict is resolved in a new synthesis, leading to further development.</i></p> <p><b>Tension and Resolution:</b> <i>The idea that progress or change arises from struggles between opposing ideas, groups, or systems.</i></p> <p><b>Struggle and Crisis:</b> <i>Periods of intense conflict or challenge that force changes or new developments in history.</i></p>	<p><b>Excerpt:</b></p> <p><i>"Many theorists and many traditional cultures have envisioned time as circular or at least cyclical, which is even suggested by the rhythm of day and night or of the seasons. The cyclical view of history proposes that certain patterns—such as economic booms and busts, or the rise and fall of empires—repeat themselves over time, with only the details changing."</i></p> <p><i>"The most ambitious accounts of history in the 19th century were Hegel's and Marx's, which described the structure in terms of 'dialectics,' or opposites that were reconciled at a higher level in the next phase: conflicting cultures or classes or spirits of the age that were merged and transcended at the dawn of the next period. The dialectical approach sees history as a process of tension and resolution, with new ideas or systems emerging from the clash of opposites."</i></p> <p><i>"These views challenge the simplicity of the linear model by emphasizing repetition and conflict. They also suggest that progress, when it happens, is neither inevitable nor smooth—it emerges through struggle and crisis."</i></p>
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### Discussion Questions:

#### 1. Understanding the Excerpt:

- How does the cyclical view of history explain historical events?
  - **Hint:** *What examples does Sartwell give to describe patterns in history?*
- What does Sartwell mean by "dialectics"? How does this approach explain change in history?
  - **Hint:** *What role do conflict and resolution play in this model?*

#### 2. Comparing to the Linear Model:

- How do the cyclical and dialectical models challenge the simplicity of the linear model?
  - **Hint:** *Think about how these models describe progress versus how the linear model does.*
- Why might the idea of "progress through struggle and crisis" better reflect history than inevitable progress?

#### 3. Applying to the Civil War:

- How can the cyclical model explain the Civil War? Consider recurring themes like sectionalism, federal power, and slavery.

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- How might the Civil War be understood using the dialectical model? What opposing forces clashed, and what resolution emerged?
- Do you think the Civil War's resolution (e.g., abolition of slavery, preservation of the Union) supports the dialectical view of history? Why or why not?

4. **Broader Reflections:**

- Sartwell suggests that progress is not smooth or inevitable. How does this idea challenge how we typically view events like the Civil War?
- Can you think of other historical examples where struggle and crisis led to significant change? How do these examples fit with the cyclical or dialectical model?

### Excerpt 3: Spirograph Theory

<p><b>Spirograph Theory:</b> <i>A model of history that sees it as a spiral, revisiting earlier themes or challenges while expanding outward with new complexities. Events cross and recross themselves but are never exactly the same.</i></p> <p><b>Accretion of Events:</b> <i>The accumulation of past events and their impact on the present, adding complexity over time.</i></p> <p><b>Revisitation and Transformation:</b> <i>The idea that history returns to earlier themes or issues, but each return brings new layers or changes.</i></p> <p><b>Unpredictability of History:</b> <i>The concept that history cannot be fully predicted because it evolves with unique combinations of past patterns and new developments.</i></p>	<p><b>Excerpt:</b></p> <p><i>"If I were trying to draw history, I'd draw it as a loop spiral: all on a single timeline, but crossing and recrossing itself, not making any particular progress forward or upward, but blossoming or expanding outward, more complex with each spiral because of the accretion of events."</i></p> <p><i>"This approach rejects the idea of history as linear progress or repetitive cycles. Instead, it captures the way history returns to earlier themes or challenges, but with new layers and complications. Each spiral represents a revisitation and a transformation—never exactly the same as before, but not entirely new either."</i></p> <p><i>"Such a view acknowledges both the patterns of history and its unpredictability. It allows for growth and change while admitting that struggles or themes we thought resolved may arise again, albeit in different forms."</i></p>
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#### Discussion Questions:

1. **Understanding the Excerpt:**
  - a. How does Sartwell describe his "loop spiral" theory of history?
    - i. **Hint:** *What does it mean for history to "cross and recross itself"?*
  - b. How is the spirograph different from the linear and cyclical models?
    - i. **Hint:** *Does it involve forward progress, repetition, or something else?*
2. **Connections to Complexity:**
  - a. What does Sartwell mean when he says that the spiral becomes "more complex with each spiral because of the accretion of events"?
    - i. **Hint:** *How do past events shape or influence future ones?*
  - b. How does the idea of "revisitation and transformation" explain why history is not entirely new but also not repetitive?
3. **Applying to the Civil War:**
  - a. How could the spirograph theory be used to explain the Civil War?

- i. **Hint:** *What earlier themes (e.g., federalism, equality, sectionalism) were revisited during the Civil War?*
  - b. How did the Civil War add new layers or complexities to those earlier themes (e.g., abolition of slavery, Reconstruction)?
  - c. What unresolved issues from the Civil War era (e.g., systemic racism, regional tensions) have "spiraled" back into later periods of U.S. history?
4. **Broader Reflections:**
  - a. Sartwell says the spiral model acknowledges history's patterns and unpredictability. How does this view challenge more rigid models like the linear or cyclical approaches?
  - b. Do you think the spirograph theory helps explain the complexity of history better than the other models? Why or why not?

## Activity: Drawing the Shape of History

**Objective:** Students will create a visual representation of history, using the Civil War as an example, and explain their reasoning through guided questions.

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### Step-by-Step Plan

#### 1. Introduce the Activity

- **Explain the Task:**
    - *Now that we've examined different historical models and Sartwell's ideas, it's time for you to create your own interpretation of history.*
    - *You'll draw the shape of history as you see it, using the Civil War as an example. This could be a line, a loop, a spiral, or something entirely different.*
    - *Your drawing should reflect how you think history works—not just for the Civil War, but as a broader concept.*
  - **Set Expectations:**
    - Include key elements (e.g., major events or themes of the Civil War) in their drawing.
    - Encourage originality—students can combine or adapt models.
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#### 2. Drawing the Shape of History

- **Distribute Materials:**
    - Provide blank paper, colored pencils, markers, or other drawing tools.
    - Provide a worksheet with space for the drawing and the reflection questions on the back or in a separate section.
  - **Guidelines for the Drawing:**
    - Students should illustrate:
      - The flow or shape of history (e.g., linear, cyclical, spiral, or another form).
      - How the Civil War fits into this interpretation (e.g., as a turning point, recurring theme, or evolving complexity).
    - Label key elements or events (e.g., "Union vs. Confederacy," "Emancipation Proclamation").
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#### 3. Guided Reflection Questions

- After completing their drawings, students will respond to these questions, either on a provided worksheet or as part of their drawing:
  1. **Describe the Shape:**

- *"What shape did you draw to represent history, and why?"*
  - 2. **Connecting to the Civil War:**
    - *"How does your drawing reflect the Civil War's causes, events, or outcomes?"*
  - 3. **Evaluating Models:**
    - *"Does your shape align with one of the historical models we discussed (linear, cyclical, spiral, dialectical)? If so, how? If not, explain your unique interpretation."*
  - 4. **Strengths and Limitations:**
    - *"What are the strengths of your shape in explaining history? Are there any limitations?"*
  - 5. **Personal Insight:**
    - *"What does your drawing reveal about how you understand history and its patterns?"*
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#### 4. Sharing and Discussion

- **Class Discussion:**
    - Invite a few students to share their drawings and explanations with the class.
    - Use guiding questions to highlight the variety of interpretations:
      - *"How do different shapes show different perspectives on the Civil War?"*
      - *"What did you notice about the similarities or differences in how your classmates approached this task?"*
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#### Deliverables

- A completed drawing with key elements of the Civil War labeled.
- Written responses to the reflection questions.