History A-level

Year 11 into 12 Transition Module

Unit 2M – Wars & Welfare: Britain 1906-57

British History Transition Module Stages

1. **A-level source technique (based on the GCSE topic of the Vietnam War)**
2. **An introduction to Britain in 1906**
3. **A-level source practice on Britain in 1906**

Introduction

History A-level is made up of three units:

Unit 1H -	**Tsarist and Communist Russia 1855-1964**	(worth 40% of the A-level)
Unit 2M -	**Wars and Welfare: Britain 1906-57**	(worth 40% of the A-level)
Coursework -	**Tudor Rebellions 1509-1603**	(worth 20% of the A-level)

Units 1H and 2M will be assessed by formal exams. Each exam will be 2.5 hours long. There are two sections in each exam:

Section A - a compulsory question about sources worth 30 marks, which will take 1 hour

Section B - you have to answer two essays (worth 25 marks each) from a choice of three questions. Each essay will take 45 mins to write, so this section will take 1.5 hours overall.

The **coursework unit** involves an assignment of 4500 words. You will be given two textbooks and some printed notes to get you started, but you will have to do some independent research of your own about Tudor rebellions. Your teacher will help you during the coursework period, but this is mainly your independent work.

A-level Source Technique (using the GCSE topic on the Vietnam War)

Unit 2M – Wars and Welfare: Britain 1906-57

This unit is a depth study. This means that you are expected to know about a shorter time period in detail. The questions in the exam will focus on a period of about 5 to 10 years. The course is divided into four main themes:

- The political development of Britain
- The economy
- Social and cultural change
- Crises and challenges facing the governments of the period

In section A of the exam for Unit 2M, you will have to look at three primary sources. These are sources written at the time, or written by people who were alive at the time. You will be asked to assess how valuable the sources are to an historian studying the period.

You have already answered similar questions as part of your GCSE studies, for example you may remember this question from your Year 11 course:

How useful are Sources B and C to an historian studying the outbreak of the Korean War?

You may also remember that when answering a question like this for GCSE, you needed to refer to:

- the content of the source
- your own knowledge
- the provenance of the source (i.e. who wrote it, when and why)

Answering the A-level questions about primary sources is very similar. You need to consider the content and provenance of the sources in relation to your own knowledge. In addition, you should comment on the tone of the source (this is the attitude or emotion in the source).

As part of your GCSE course, you studied three depth topics. These were: Norman England, Germany 1890-1945 and Conflict in Asia 1950-75. On the next page is an extract based on your GCSE topic on the Vietnam War, but written in the style of an A-level question. An example answer – in an A-level style – is given underneath.

Source A

From a speech made by President Nixon in January 1973 to the American people.

Throughout the years of negotiations, we have insisted on peace with honour. In the settlement that has now been agreed, all these conditions have been met. The conditions include the release of prisoners of war within 60 days and all American forces to be withdrawn within the same time.

To the people of South Vietnam, we say by your courage you have won the right to determine your own future. To the leaders of North Vietnam, as we have ended the war through negotiation, let us build a peace of reconciliation.

Assess the value of this source to an historian studying the American withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973.

As for the unit on Russian history, in the British history exam you would have 20 mins to assess an extract such as this (which is not very long!). Therefore, it is important to keep the structure of your answer simple:

- Points and evidence that suggest the source is valuable to an historian
- Points and evidence that suggest the value of the source is limited
- A conclusion to provide your overall judgement on how valuable the source is

Points and evidence suggesting that the source is valuable:

- The content of the source is valuable because it accurately reflects some of the terms of the Paris Peace Accord. Nixon had been under pressure in America to secure the release of all the US servicemen held prisoner in Vietnam, and he achieved this in return for agreeing to remove US troops from Vietnam.
- The provenance of the source is valuable as it is a speech from January 1973 by President Nixon himself. Therefore, it is the president's immediate communication of the deal to the American people, emphasising what he though was most important at the time.
- In some ways, the tone of the source is valuable because it gives the impression of how long the negotiations had been going on for and the relief felt by President Nixon, and the American people, that the war in Vietnam was now finally over.

Points and evidence against the arguments in the extract:

- The provenance of the source may limit its value because Nixon is trying to give a very positive impression of the negotiations and the agreement reached in Paris. He is trying to convince the American people that the two sides in the war have both made compromises and America has got a good deal.
- As a result of the points regarding provenance above, it could be argued that the tone of the source is misleading. Nixon tries to give the impression that America was in control of the negotiations, e.g. using the word 'insisted' and the phrase 'these conditions have been met'. He also tries to communicate a very positive tone about the future prospects of South Vietnam.

- The content of the source, therefore, is not that convincing. Nixon claims to have achieved 'peace with honour' but the reality of the American withdrawal is that they were admitting defeat against the forces of the Vietcong (VC) and North Vietnamese Army (NVA). America may have secured the release of its POWs, but it had total failed in its primary mission to defeat the VC in South Vietnam. When Nixon states that the South Vietnamese people had won the right to determine their own future, this is wildly optimistic and ultimately wrong. This was shown when the NVA took over the whole of South Vietnam in 1975.

Conclusion

- This source is valuable to an historian studying President Nixon's communications strategy around the American withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973, as it shows how he tried to put a positive spin on events. However, it is not valuable when considering the reality of the Vietnam War in 1973, which was essentially an American defeat and resulted in the US abandoning South Vietnam to its fate, which inevitably happened with the fall of Saigon to the NVA in 1975.

Exam technique tips

- *You should aim to make about three points supporting the value of the source and three suggesting that the value is limited (use words such as 'valuable' or 'of limited value' throughout your answer)*
- *You always need to use evidence from your own knowledge to back up the points you make*
- *You need to give some clear judgement in conclusion as to how valuable you find the source overall*

Having read through the example above, have a go at a similar question about the source below. If you want to email your answer to your teacher (or share it through Google Docs), they will provide you with some feedback.

Source A

From an account given by Fred Widmer, a radio operator with Charlie Company at My Lai.

When we first started losing members of the company, it was mostly through booby traps and snipers. We never got into a main conflict where you could actually see who was shooting and you could actually shoot back. We had heard a lot about women and children being used as booby traps and being members of the Vietcong. As time went on, you tended to believe it more and more. There was no question they were working for the Vietcong. You didn't trust them anymore. You didn't trust anybody. And I would say that, in the end, anybody who was still in that country was the enemy.

Assess the value of this source to an historian studying the My Lai Massacre of March 1968.