

# Knowledge and the Knower: Personal Memory vs Shared Memory

## Lesson 1: Opening Debate

**Focus:** Which is more reliable: personal memory or shared memory, such as in historical records?

Objective	<p>Explore different perspectives on the reliability of memory and history, with attention to power, bias, and subjectivity.</p> <p>Analyze how commonly held memories differ from documented historical facts.</p> <p>Determine whether there are circumstances under which intentionally omitting certain memories from historical narratives can be justified.</p>
Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>1. Introduction (5 mins)</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Present the central question: "Which is more reliable: personal memory or official history?"</li><li>• Share a brief anecdote: For instance, a student's family memory of an event vs. a textbook version. Ask students what might cause these accounts to differ.</li><li>• Optional viewing <a href="#">What is the difference between history and memory? - YouTube</a> to give students contextual information regarding the topic.</li></ul></li><li><b>2. Debate setup (5 mins):</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use the Kialo discussion: <a href="#">Which is more reliable: personal memory or official history?</a> with these theses:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ "Official history is more reliable."</li><li>◦ "Personal memory is more reliable"</li></ul></li><li>• The discussion includes the following pros and cons beneath the theses:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ <b>THESIS: Personal memory is more reliable.</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ PRO: Personal memory is based on individual experiences.</li><li>■ CON: Personal memory is too subjective to trust.</li></ul></li><li>◦ <b>THESIS: Official history is more reliable.</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ PRO: Official history is systematically constructed.</li><li>■ CON: Official history is often shaped by power structures.</li></ul></li></ul></li><li>• Below is a list of claims and questions that you may wish to use with students to develop the discussion.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ "History is always written by the victors."<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Debate Prompt: Does this mean personal memory is more authentic, since it's free from official spin?</li></ul></li><li>◦ "If a memory is shared by enough people, it becomes history."<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Question: Is there a difference between commonly held memories and documented historical fact?</li></ul></li><li>◦ "All personal memory is too subjective to trust, while history is based on objective research."<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Pushback: Remind students that historians can also be subjective.</li></ul></li><li>◦ "Official history is just a collectively agreed-upon memory—no more valid than personal recollections."<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Challenge: Ask if official archives, historical methods, and cross-verification make history inherently stronger.</li></ul></li><li>◦ "Forgetting is essential to national unity—some parts of history must be left out."<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Moral/Ethical Angle: Should certain memories (genocides, atrocities, colonial abuses) ever be intentionally omitted?</li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li><li><b>3. Debate (15–20 mins)</b></li></ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students present initial arguments, referencing examples like false memories (Mandela Effect) or controversies in historical narratives (different countries' textbooks).</li> <li>Encourage counterarguments. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask: "Could memory capture truths that official history omits?" "Can historians be biased, too?"</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Reflection Questions</b>	<p><b>Reflection (10 mins):</b> Discuss the following reflection questions in open discussion or exit ticket format:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>What factors make personal memory convincing or unconvincing as a source of knowledge?</i></li> <li><i>How might historians' methods (archival research, cross-verification) challenge or support personal recollections?</i></li> <li><i>In what ways could power or authority shape both memory and history?</i></li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<p>Lesson Slides</p> <p><a href="#">Kialo discussion with the debate prompt</a></p>
<b>TOK Concepts</b>	<p><b>Perspectives:</b> How do commonly held memories differ from documented historical facts, and what implications does this have for our understanding of history?</p> <p><b>Power:</b> In what ways do power structures shape the "official" narratives of historical events, and how does this affect collective memory?</p> <p><b>Justification:</b> Are there circumstances under which intentionally omitting certain memories from historical narratives can be justified?</p>
<b>Critical Thinking Concepts</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Confronting Biases and Assumptions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying Authority Bias: Recognizing the assumption that "official = correct."</li> <li>Questioning Personal Bias: Reflecting on how our own experiences might skew our perception of events.</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>Exploring Contexts:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholder Analysis: Prompt students to consider who is impacted by impaired memory or revised history (pursuers of justice, narrative shapers, broader society).</li> <li>Cultural and Societal Influences: Show how values, norms, or local regulations shape our perceptions of knowledge and identity.</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>Responsiveness and Flexibility of Thought:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adapting Arguments: Remind students to refine or adjust their positions when new information emerges.</li> <li>Comparing Contradictory Perspectives: Have them weigh opposing viewpoints critically to see if, or how, their stance might change.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>