

The Strange Case of Silas Deane

Reflection questions

As students read the article, they should answer the following questions:

1. Explain why the authors believe that the view that “history is what happened in the past” is, in their words, a “profoundly misleading” view of history. Do you agree with their view?
2. How do the authors define the word “history”?
3. How does this text differ from or compare with other history texts that you have read?
4. Identify from the reading at least 6 general tasks the historian must face if he/she is to produce history.
5. “The Strange Death of Silas Deane” is a secondary historical source. What makes it a secondary source? What is a primary source? What is a tertiary source? Identify any primary source(s) the authors used in constructing their argument in this chapter.
6. What in your opinion does the case of "The Strange Death of Silas Deane" demonstrate regarding the techniques of historical research? The authors assert “like all good couriers, historians are expected simply to deliver messages without adding to them.” Is this even possible?
7. How and why was this case re-opened and has it been "solved"?
8. What do you think actually happened to Silas Deane and why? What evidence would you cite?
9. How did the authors of the article use this case to demonstrate how “history” is created? How does the story of Silas Deane’s death illustrate the “difference between ‘what happened in the past’ and what history really is”? What do you think... is history ever “complete”? Why or why not?
10. How did this article change your perception of history?