Time Has Labels

Read how historians name periods and number years.

SS24.7.3a "Describe multiple methods for organizing and labeling periods of time, including differentiating between the BC/AD and BCE/CE notations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the four letter labels for numbered years, circle each pair that names the same years, and write 1 beside a named period and 2 beside a numbered date.

Dating a Clay Oven

1 Imagine an archaeologist uncovering a clay oven at Çatalhöyük, a settlement in what is now Türkiye. People there lived in tightly packed houses around 7000 BCE. To place the oven in time, the archaeologist can give an approximate numbered date or name a period. The Neolithic, or New Stone Age, was a long period when farming and settled village life spread in many places. A period name points to broad patterns, while a numbered date gives a more specific place in time.

2 One way to label numbered years is BC, meaning "before Christ," and AD, from a Latin phrase meaning "in the year of the Lord." Another way is BCE, meaning "Before Common Era," and CE, meaning "Common Era." BC and BCE label the same years before the dividing point. AD and CE label the same years after it. The two systems use the same numbers. For example, 2400 BCE and 2400 BC name the same year. Changing the letters changes the wording, not the date.

3 Numbers also tell which event came first. In the years labeled BCE or BC, a larger number is earlier: 6800 BCE comes before 6400 BCE. In the years labeled CE or AD, a smaller number is earlier. The sequence goes from 1 BCE, or 1 BC, straight to 1 CE, or AD 1. These systems have no year zero. Historians can say a settlement belongs to the Neolithic without claiming its houses were built in one exact year. An approximate date and a period name answer different questions.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. One catalog lists 2300 BC, and another lists 2300 BCE. Do the dates name different years? Explain.

2. Which date comes first, 5900 BCE or 5500 BCE? How do you know?

3. Which comes first, 150 BC or AD 150? Explain using the dividing point.

4. Why might a historian give both a Neolithic label and an approximate numbered date for a settlement?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Make two museum labels, one for a farming tool dated 4500 BCE and one for a harbor stone dated 120 CE; show each date in both notation systems. Then write two sentences explaining how a named period such as the Neolithic differs from a numbered date.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the four letter labels for numbered years, circle each pair that names the same years, and write 1 beside a named period and 2 beside a numbered date. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	One catalog lists 2300 BC, and another lists 2300 BCE. Do the dates name different years? Explain.	**No. BC and BCE use the same numbers for the same years; only the wording differs.**
2	Which date comes first, 5900 BCE or 5500 BCE? How do you know?	**5900 BCE comes first because larger BCE numbers name earlier years.**
3	Which comes first, 150 BC or AD 150? Explain using the dividing point.	**150 BC comes first because BC years are before the dividing point and AD years are after it.**
4	Why might a historian give both a Neolithic label and an approximate numbered date for a settlement?	**Neolithic names a broad period linked to patterns such as farming and settled life. The numbered date places the settlement more specifically in time.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Farming tool: 4500 BCE, or 4500 BC.
Harbor stone: 120 CE, or AD 120.
A named period such as the Neolithic describes broad patterns of life over a long time. A numbered date places an object more specifically in time.

Accept AD before or after its number. For the final task, check that each pair of notations keeps the same number and that the two sentences distinguish a broad period from a numbered date.