**Analysis activity 1.2: Historical interpretation**

In SACs and the examination you are required to write about historians’ interpretations of history. This is a difficult concept to grasp at first, but not impossible. Imagine that two people from the time of the American Revolution, a slave and a colonial elite, like George Washington, were both asked to recount their experiences of that time. Due to their varied experiences, as you might expect, both would give us very different accounts about the past – and both would be correct. That was their reality. You have to take into account a person’s biographical story to understand where they are coming from. The way a historian sees the world and puts their thoughts on paper works in the same manner. One’s life experiences, religious beliefs, political persuasion, education and so on flavour the way one sees the world. Historians are people and are affected in the same way.

The term ‘historical interpretations’ relates to the study of the writing and interpretation of the past by historians. (You may come across the term ‘historiography’ in your research for VCE Revolutions – this is the formal term for historical interpretations). That is, it looks at methods used by historians to determine what occurred in history and how it should be regarded. It tries to decipher a historian’s interpretation of a particular nation, group, person, event or fact to find the truth of what is being presented. The dominant perspective on the American Revolution by the bulk of the Western historians, especially Americans, is a very positive interpretation of what happened. In this view, America is a brilliant nation and the Founding Fathers are exceptional, beating the 18th-century world’s dominant political and military power. This can be termed a ‘right-wing’ interpretation. A ‘left-wing’ interpretation is more critical of America and the Founding Fathers, focusing on controversial issues of slavery, class inequality, gender inequality and the treatment of First Nations Americans. These two opposite poles of right wing and left wing are important concepts to understand as you continue through the course, and are discussed more fully in Chapter 10. After working through a range of sources in class and at home, you should begin to see some of these different interpretations emerge.