

# DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

## Identifying Cause and Effect

Understanding cause and effect makes history more interesting and helps people to understand it better. A *cause* is any condition, person, or event that makes something happen. What happens as the result of a cause is known as an *effect*. Identifying the relationship between the two is a part of critical thinking.

To learn how to recognize cause and effect, use the following guidelines:

1. Look for certain "clue words." These include *because, as a result of, led to, brought about, produced, so that, due to, therefore, since, and if . . . then.*

For example: *As a result of a shortage of land on which to grow food, Phoenicians turned to the sea to make a living.*

(The clue is *as a result of*. The cause is *a shortage of land on which to grow food*. The effect is *Phoenicians turned to the sea to make a living*.)

The word *and*, which sometimes takes the meaning of *therefore*, can also act as a clue word.

For example: *Persian farmers needed water for their crops and dug underground tunnels from mountain springs to their fields.*

(The cause is *Persian farmers needed water for their crops*. The effect is *dug underground tunnels from mountain springs to their fields*.)

2. When no clue words exist, look for a logical relationship between events.

For example, note these two related sentences: *Chaldean astronomers believed that changes in the heavens revealed the plans of the gods.* (cause) *Astronomers studied the stars, planets, and moon.* (effect)

Be careful not to confuse unrelated events with cause and effect. In some cases, neither event is a cause or an effect of the other. For example, speaking Bantu did not cause Zimbabwe to remain a strong kingdom.

3. Be aware that events sometimes have more than one cause.

For example: *Assyria's powerful army* (effect) *resulted from Assyrian weapons* (cause) *as well as strong Assyrian leaders* (cause).

On the other hand, a cause may have more than one effect.

For example: *Egypt's defeat of Kush* (cause) *caused the Kushites to learn to worship Amen-Re* (effect), *to work copper and bronze* (effect), *and to adapt Egyptian hieroglyphs to fit their own language* (effect).

For further practice in this skill, read the text in Chapter 7 under the subsection "Gods and Goddesses" on page 104. Then, write down two cause and effect relationships. Identify each cause and each effect and identify any clue words that pointed out these relationships.