

If you only have 15 minutes ...

You have probably studied history before. But really, what *is* history? It's too simple to say, "History is stuff that happened in the past." As the article "Adel Abidin Preserves Historical Memory" suggests, history—even defining it—is complicated. Consider this quote from the article: "[Abidin's mural] aims to capture the fragility of history and question the accuracy of recorded history."

Working alone or with a small group, look up a definition for the word *fragile*. Write its definition in your own words. List some things that are fragile. ¹

Of course, history is not an object, and so fragility in this case is a metaphor. What historical event does the mural *Aan* suggest is fragile? What makes it so, according to the artist?² Do you agree with the artist's assertion that this event is historically fragile? Why or why not?

Based on your knowledge of the past, see if you can come up with an example of history being fragile, where it is told from only one side. What do you think makes it fragile?³

If time permits, shift your focus to the second part of the quote. Why would someone question history's accuracy? Again, think about the accuracy of the recorded history *Aan*

explores. Why does artist Adel Abidin question its accuracy? Do you agree? Why or why not?⁴

Common Core Standard Met:

CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

RH.11-12.8 Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

1 Answers will vary. Fragile: easily broken or damaged. Examples of fragile items: objects made of glass or ceramics, the bones of elderly people, eggs.

2 Answers will vary. "Aan" is based on the ninth-century Zanj rebellion in Basra, Iraq. The artist suggests that oral storytelling often lacks documentation, and it is prone to conflicting interpretations. More conventional depictions of the rebellion do not focus on the experiences of those who lost. Agree or Disagree?

3 Answers will vary. One common example is that in the United States historians refer to the American Revolution. In Great Britain, it is called the American War for Independence. Fragility suggests that these differing interpretations can obscure what actually happened, omitting some points of view in favor of others.

4 Abidin says history is told from the victor's point of view. Omitting other points of view can raise questions about the accuracy of the story being told. Students may or may not agree. They might suggest that including a variety of points of view would enhance accuracy.