

Brainstorming

To write an historical research study, one first needs a subject. You can make your search for and decision about a subject easier by collecting initial ideas in a brainstorming session. You can then organise your ideas in a "cluster." Brainstorming means thinking creatively for a time and collecting all ideas on a subject.

It goes like this:

1. Brainstorming (ca. 5 to 10 minutes):

What occurs to you when you think about the general theme?

- Sit down together in a circle; place a pile of index cards or note papers in the middle. All participants should write down everything that occurs to them. Use an individual card for each idea. Write in large, block letters. All ideas are allowed: experiences, facts, titles of books, films or songs, names of streets, artworks, people, etc.
- Collect the printed cards and pin them to a presentation wall.

Collecting ideas

2. Cluster (30 to 40 minutes):

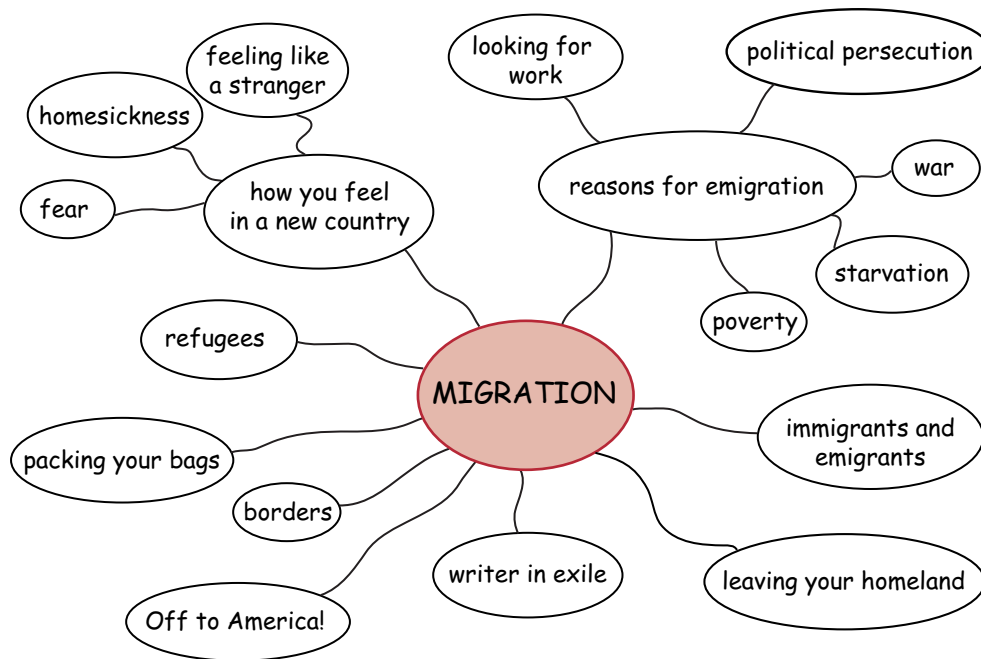
Organise your ideas!

You will quickly establish that many of you had the same idea or wrote down suggestions that go together well, but that there are also cards without a "partner." "Clustering" can help make this easily recognizable and visible. To do this, you hang all cards with the same title or a shared generic term together in "thought bundles." Leave aside those cards or ideas that can't be assigned in this way.

Organising ideas



For example, a cluster on the general theme of “migration” could look like this:



3. Choosing a topic

Maybe you already have thought of a subject that you would like to research. If not, you should listen and look around more.

- Consult people – for example, your relatives, friends, acquaintances, neighbours, experts ...
- Look around in your area for old photos, local maps, monuments, place names or street names, buildings ...
- Visit historical “treasure houses” such as attics, cellars, archives, museums, libraries, local history clubs, government agencies ...

Further research

Add any new suggestions that you find to your “thought bundles” or reorganize the bundles. Maybe then you will have several themes at your fingertips. In that case, the work sheet “Idea salad” will help you choose.