Objectives:

- Students will understand that historians often disagree about how the past should be interpreted.
- Students will understand some of the main areas of disagreement between historians.
- Students will understand that perspectives of the past are based in evidence.
- Students will understand that historical debates often occur over different periods of time.
- Students will form their own tentative conclusions about how to interpret the past.

Pre-Museum Activity

1. Tell the students a story about Mr. Jones, a history teacher in central California.

Mr. Jones had two different administrators come into his room to observe his teaching in order to evaluate him. They saw him teach a lesson on the civil rights movement. They noticed that when students came into class tardy, he did not punish them or make any comments. He began the class by asking students to pass up their homework and asking them if anything was difficult. Two students asked questions, but the rest were silent. Only half the class turned in their homework.

Mr. Jones insisted that everyone pay attention because he was going to begin the unit on civil rights. He gave a 15-minute lecture on Dr. Martin Luther King. When he finished, he asked students to turn to page 420 in the textbook and to read what was written about the civil rights movement. Students were supposed to answer four questions at the end of the chapter. All the students did what they were told to do, and they passed their assignment up at the end of the period. There was almost no talking during the class.

When class was ending, he explained the homework for the night and told them that the next day they would be moving on to another topic—the Vietnam War.

Mr. Jones was pleased with his students because they were doing very well on the state standardized tests this year.

When the two administrators left the classroom, they each wrote an evaluation of Mr. Jones. Ms. DuPont thought Mr. Jones was an outstanding teacher. Ms. Clarke thought he was a very poor teacher.

List three pieces of evidence you think Ms. DuPont used to prove that Mr. Jones was a good teacher.
List three pieces of evidence you think Ms. Clarke used to show he was a poor teacher.
1. 
2. 
3. 

How would you evaluate Mr. Jones as a teacher? Explain.

_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________

2. Explain to students that when they go to the Oakland Museum of California they will be doing a similar activity. Point out that historians often disagree, and they will be looking to see what evidence historians use to prove their points.

**Before the Visit**

Assign students to groups. There are four conflicts—or areas where historians disagree. These conflicts are in different parts of the History Gallery. It would probably be best to divide the class into four groups and assign each group a different place to start. Once students have finished one area, they could go to another, and they would complete all four areas before leaving the Museum. You might want to create a rotation that is clear to students before they start this activity. Using the map provided by the Museum would be helpful in setting up this rotation.

Go over the different conflicts between historians:

**Conflict 1—Melting Pot or Salad Bowl?**
This conflict asks students to decide to what extent different groups in the United States have become assimilated into a common culture. This is probably a theme you’ve taught throughout the year, but students may not be familiar with the terms “melting pot” and “salad bowl.” It would help to introduce these terms before this activity.

**Conflict 2—Negative or Positive Change?**
In this conflict, students will look at the section titled “The Railroad Brings People” to see if there is evidence that the arrival of the Transcontinental Railroad was positive or negative. Clearly there were aspects of both. The goal here is for students to pick out the pieces of evidence that would support each side and then to draw their own conclusions.

**Conflict 3—The Good War?**
This conflict looks at different historical interpretations of World War II. Although some historians refer to this period as “The Good War,” others have a less benign view. As in the other sections of the
History Gallery at the Museum, students will look to see what evidence would support the argument for either side.

**Conflict 4—Prosperity or Problems?**
The period after World War II is a fascinating one to study because of the contradictions embedded within it. On the one hand, there was increasing prosperity and relief that the war was over. On the other hand, there were continuing issues of racial discrimination and the growing Cold War. In this section, students are asked to look at the evidence from both sides and ultimately make their own interpretation of the time period.

*Make sure students understand the perspectives and that neither Historian A or B in any scenario is completely right or wrong.*

**Vocabulary**
Make sure students understand and are familiar with the following words and ideas that they may see in the Gallery and on the worksheet:

- Historical interpretation
- Melting pot
- Salad bowl
- Prosperity

**Museum Visit**
Give each student his or her own copy of the worksheet, even if they are working in groups. If you feel the activity may be too difficult for some students, you could model one example at the Museum by doing a “think-aloud” in front of the exhibit.

Make sure students understand that they will rotate and ultimately cover all four conflicts.

*The Museum prefers that students use pencils rather than ink pens for recording so please remind students of this before they get started.*

**After the Visit**
Have a class discussion on the different controversies. Discuss if there is any agreement about which historical interpretation the class favors.

This is a time when you could have pairs of students argue the questions in mini-debates. Divide the students into groups of three. Then pose one of the conflicts—for instance, Were the 1950s a time mostly of problems or of prosperity? One student would argue prosperity, using his or her notes; the second student would argue problems; and the third student would ask questions of both sides and then determine the winner of the debate. In the next round, a new conflict would be addressed (Did the railroads bring positive changes?) and students would rotate roles. The student who argued for Historian A would now argue for Historian B, and the person who was the judge would now argue for Historian A, etc.