

## **The Story behind *Lessons on Time***

I was teaching a small group of eight to twelve-year-old homeschooled children about timelines. The year was 2000, and I thought my students would be intrigued by the fact that most of the world celebrated the third millennia one year too early. Most of my readers will remember Y2K as the talk of New Year's Eve parties on December 31, 1999, rivaled only by the buzz surrounding the third millennium. Y2K was a non-event, as was the third millennium; it was still a year away.

Explaining to my students why our class was taking place in the last year of the second millennium and not the first year of the third was not easy. Since millions of adults didn't get it either, I determined to come up with a new way of teaching the counting system used by the timeline. It's not just a new millennium that is confusing. Every time a historian refers to a particular century, many kids have the wrong numbers floating in their heads. The problem all stems from the Romans. Of all the great things they gave to the world, their zero-less timeline wasn't one of them. This really messes up us Arabic number-users, who take zeros for granted.

The following week, I was on my way to teach another timeline class. Inspiration hit. Stopping in the parking lot of the local drug store, I ran inside for some toothpicks and rubber bands. Though my class began a few minutes late, those toothpicks and rubber bands became a fantastic teaching tool for the timeline's numbering system. As we spread a toothpick timeline across the kitchen table, mental light bulbs turned on.

While none of us will be around for the next millennium party, we all should be able to teach our children the relationship of centuries and millennia to the actual years they denote. Perhaps our children will pass on their knowledge to our grandchildren, who may actually celebrate the correct fourth millennium. More importantly, we will have equipped our kids with the vocabulary that historians use for centuries and millennia and a working knowledge of the how the timeline tracks time. These are things every young historian should know.