

Reflections:

It was very interesting to learn while researching the history of probability that the foundations of the field can be traced to such a small handful of events and an even smaller group of people. Though it is debatable, I found that many sources attributed the bulk of the discovery of probability as we understand it today to Blaise Pascal. I found it difficult to believe that the subject took so long to emerge, especially with the evidence that so many cultures before the time of Pascal developed mathematics as well as practiced gambling. It would seem as though with the mathematical developments of the Greeks, Indians, and even early cultures such as the Babylonians that a mathematical analysis of chance would have been addressed much earlier than the 17th century. Also surprising to find was that such a seemingly simple problem as the problem of points (explained in the worksheet) opened a whole new world of mathematics, one which has an infinite number of practical applications to the real world. Though when explained it seems obvious, Pascal's manner of approaching the problem of points is stimulating at least. It was also interesting to learn that the binomial coefficient triangle or Pascal's triangle was not first conceived of by Pascal; rather it dates back to the 11th century and only Pascal's extensive work on the subject earned him the connection of his name to the triangle. This project without question significantly aroused my interest in the history and mathematics of probability.