Handout 6-a
Questions From a Worker Who Reads

Who built Thebes of the seven gates?
In the books you will find the names of kings.
Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?
And Babylon, many times demolished
Who raised it up so many times? In what houses
of gold-glittering Lima did the builders live?
Where, the evening that the Wall of China was finished
did the masons go? Great Rome
Is full of triumphal arches. Who erected them? Over whom
did the Caesars triumph? Had Byzantium, much praised in song
only palaces for its inhabitants? Even in fabled Atlantis
the night the ocean engulfed it.
The drowning still bawled for their slaves.
The young Alexander conquered India.
Was he alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Did he not even have a cook with him?
Philip of Spain wept when his armada
went down. Was he the only one to weep?
Frederick the Second won the Seven Years' War.
Who else won it?
Every page a victory.
Who cooked the feast for the victors?
Every ten years a great man.
Who paid the bill?
So many reports.
So many questions.

—Bertolt Brecht (1935)

Discussion:

1.) Explain the meaning of the poem.
2.) Whose voices are usually 'amplified' in history? Whose voices are usually 'muted'?
3.) Who makes history?