

# Curriculum Overview

## 8<sup>th</sup> Grade US History: Pre-Columbian to 1977

This year-long, fully revised 8<sup>th</sup> grade US history course is designed to introduce the modern Civil Rights Movement in the context of the history of the United States. The traditional 8<sup>th</sup> grade US history course ends in 1877, this one is extended by 100 years to 1977. This change was made based on feedback from the teachers in McComb who expressed concern that children never got to 20<sup>th</sup> century US history until high school. This draft curriculum is in its second year of being field-tested in McComb, MS public schools.

While several weeks of the curriculum are dedicated to the modern Civil Rights Movement (1954 – 1968), the entire context of the yearlong course is on the movements of all peoples for democracy and civil rights throughout the history of the United States, pre-Columbian through 1977. This history comes alive for students by linking the past with contemporary issues and events. Teachers are asked to use a variety of instructional methods to engage students actively in learning. Therefore, not only do students learn about the additional 100 years – but the entire span of US history is more meaningful. Students learn and remember history and the related skills better when introduced in the context of people’s history and contemporary issues.

The course emphasizes the experiences of all the peoples of North America. This includes people of color who are often left out of the curriculum, women, and working-class whites, especially as told through the stories of their labor.

Many of the lessons were created by Teaching for Change in close collaboration with the faculty and staff of McComb Public Schools and the William Winter Institute. Understanding by Design was used as a reference, with particular emphasis on helping students grasp Enduring Understandings and engage with Essential Questions. There is a combination of original, adapted and reprinted lessons. Permissions still need to be secured for the reprinted texts once the curriculum is adopted.

This is one of a number of approaches that the McComb School District is taking to address the 2006 legislation on the teaching of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi.

### Overall Objectives

The objectives for this course conform to Mississippi and national social studies standards. At the end of this course, we expect 8<sup>th</sup> grade students will be able to:

1. Explain how geography, economics, and politics have influenced the historical development of the United States in the global community.
2. Analyze the development of the foundations of American democracy.

3. Evaluate the impact of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Civil Rights Movement on the United States.
4. Analyze spatial and ecological relationships between, people, places, and environments using social studies tools (e.g., timelines, maps, globes, primary and secondary resources, charts, political cartoons, graphs, a compass, technology, etc.).
5. Identify how the government established by the Constitution embodies the purposes, values, and principles of American democracy.
6. Analyze the ideals, principles, and practices of citizens in a democratic society.
5. Analyze the civic contributions and responsibilities of Americans to the ongoing democratic process.
7. Examine the interaction of individuals, families, communities (microeconomics), businesses, and governments (macroeconomics) and the potential costs and benefits to the United States economy.
8. Describe the impact of science and technology on the historical development of the United States and its ecology.
9. Explain how politics have influenced the domestic development and international relationships of the United States since 1877.
10. Describe the relationship of people, places, and environments through time.
11. Recognize the role of “ordinary” people in history, in making democracy function, and Appreciation for the history of their town
12. Recognize key historical events, concepts, and the sequence of events for the US history from the pre-Columbian era to 1980

### **Skills**

1. Recognize that we are all a part of history
2. List the challenges of negotiation and consensus building
3. Understand the relationship between rights and responsibilities
4. Recognize personal biases and develop a habit of asking to see the big picture
5. Be able to work and brainstorm effectively in a group – listening to peers and contributing ideas
6. Synthesize and communicate information
7. Compare and contrast different versions of history
8. Utilize visual clues and video images to gather information on historical figures
9. Name key people, dates, and events from pre-Columbian period through the 1970s

## **Units**

Throughout the curriculum, the role and experiences of ordinary people are highlighted, particularly working people, youth, women, people of color, and white allies.

The course **units** are listed below.

- Course Overview
- Community Building, Orientation, Groundwork
- Pre-Columbian
- Encounter
- Colonization
- American Revolution and Founding Documents
- Antebellum Period and Slavery
- The Changing West (Trail of Tears and U.S. Mexican War)
- Civil War and Reconstruction
- Spanish-American War
- Organized Labor
- WWII Era
- Modern Civil Rights Movement

## **Textbook**

There is no single book that contains all the history for the time period covered by this course that includes a variety of points of view and the role of “ordinary people.”

Therefore, this course will use various texts as references, and also use primary documents, film excerpts, interviews with real people, artifacts, biographies, and more.

## **Instructional Approaches**

The instruction in the course is based on research about how students learn best. One key part of that research says that we learn more from what we do than what we hear. In fact, we only remember 10% - 20% of what we hear, but we remember 90% of what we do. Ideally, the teacher for this course should be familiar with pedagogical practices such as literature circles, Socratic seminar, process-based writing, cooperative learning, and role plays because students in this course will be involved in:

- Small group discussions
- Socratic seminars
- Writing
- Simulations
- Research
- Presentations
- Reflection

- Role-plays
- Interviews
- And much more.

In order to interact in all the ways described above, the seats are rearranged frequently and students have a chance to interact with each other, the instructors, and special guests.

## **Instructional Responsibilities**

The success of this curriculum relies on a classroom where there is a positive sense of community, respect for all cultures, where all children are supported in their social and academic development, and in which the pedagogy is primarily interactive.

Teachers can promote this success in the following ways:

- Preparing the classroom for all the instructional needs of the class: (1) making space available for students to regularly engage in small group work and to form their chairs in a circle; (2) providing shelf space for the in-class literature and reference library; (3) making wall space available for maps, a historic time line, and student work.
- Ensuring student academic progress on Mississippi State language arts and social studies competencies
- Being willing to engage in professional development to deepen content knowledge and to learn or refine pedagogical practices, including keeping and sharing a reflective journal, being open to classroom observations, meeting with professional development specialists, and working collaboratively with other teachers.

## **Assessments**

The unit assessments are used to determine what prior knowledge students bring to the units and the extent to which students grasp the Enduring Understandings identified at the beginning of each unit/lesson. These may be used to partially determine grades for each unit (in addition to class participation, written assignments, research, and other projects), but are intended to guide teachers in content review and making adjustments to instruction. The assessments include both multiple choice and essay questions that reflect student learning of names, dates, concepts, and a critical depth of knowledge.

## **Capstone Project**

There will be an end of the year assignment in which students will research a question they have of history. They will have three weeks to work on this project. Once complete, it will be presented to peers and adults. They will learn more about this assignment at the beginning of the spring semester, but in general it will require a visual presentation and a written report, will require that they draw on historic information to respond to a contemporary question of personal interest, and will form a significant portion of the second semester grade. Students can start thinking about questions early in the year, but

are likely to find that their question may change or be refined as the school year progresses.