

Social Studies Key Themes: U.S. History

To be productive members of society, students must be critical consumers of information they read, hear, and observe and communicate effectively about their ideas. They need to gain knowledge from a wide array of sources and examine and evaluate that information to develop and express an informed opinion, using information gained from the sources and their background knowledge. Students must also make connections between what they learn about the past and the present to understand how and why events happen and people act in certain ways.

Thus, students must:

- Build an understanding of social studies content in the grade-level expectations (GLEs)
 - Examine authentic sources to build knowledge of social studies content
 - Explore meaningful questions about sources and content to build understanding
- Develop and express claims that demonstrate their understanding of content
 - Make connections among ideas, people, and events across time and place
 - Express understanding of content using evidence from authentic sources and outside knowledge

This document has two sections.

1. **Key Themes:** There are seven key themes across all grades. These describe the connections students must make to build and express their understanding of content. They progress from kindergarten to grade 12, as students build a more sophisticated understanding of content. The descriptions in this document are for U.S. History.
2. **Sample Assessment Item:** This section compares an old end-of-year assessment item to a new item for U.S. History. The new assessment items require students to make connections represented by the key themes to develop and express claims that demonstrate their understanding of GLE content.



Physical and Human Systems

Students in U.S. History examine the role of physical geography and the environment in the shaping the growth of the United States. Students analyze interactions between the environment and humans in their effort to survive and thrive through their analysis of historical periods using timelines, political cartoons, maps, graphs, debates, and other sources. They explore efforts to access, manage, exploit, and preserve natural and man-made environments, and the historical contexts in which interactions with the environment have taken place (e.g., Grange movement, industrialization, urbanization, imperialism, the Dust Bowl, conservation efforts, public works projects, etc.). Students explore the relationship between geography and the development of human communities in regards to climate, precipitation, and availability of natural resources, land use, and other factors.



Migration and Settlement

Students in U.S. History examine the reasons for and consequences of migration, both internal and external, and understand how migration and settlement patterns have influenced American society. They explain factors that have motivated migration within and to the United States (e.g., political instability, famine, economic restructuring, land ownership, job opportunities, living conditions, or political and/or religious freedom, etc.), as well as the economic, political, and social consequences of that migration (e.g., closing of the frontier, urbanization, the rise of nativist policies and groups, etc.). They also consider how migration affects the social, political, and economic systems of the United States, as migrants carry with them distinct traditions, ideas, skills, and knowledge that influences their new home and its culture (e.g., westward migration, Great Migration, immigration booms from Europe, Asia, and Latin America, etc.).



Economics and Trade

Students in U.S. History examine the major policies and innovations that influenced the growth of the economy and consider whether or not these changes have improved the lives of American citizens. They evaluate the effects of the Industrial Revolution on American society (e.g., production and management systems, impact on markets, etc.). Students analyze the development of diverse yet interdependent regional economies by comparing and contrasting the economic activities of each region. They examine ways that different economic and labor systems (e.g., domestic vs. factory, etc.), technological innovations (e.g., mechanization, assembly line, etc.), and government policies (e.g., regulation vs. *laissez faire*, etc.) have shaped American society. Students analyze the impact of

labor unions, boycotts, strikes, and labor disputes on businesses and workers. They understand that changes to the economy occur over time (e.g., end of the open range, industrialization, depression, and postwar consumer-driven economy, etc.). Students discuss the Great Depression of the 1930s as a global event with a multitude of causes (e.g., protectionism, stock market crash, etc.) and effects (e.g., unemployment, homelessness, etc.). They also illustrate the relationship between economic issues and foreign and domestic policies/events (e.g., labor unions, consumer culture, Truman Doctrine, Marshall Plan, OPEC, NAFTA, etc.).



Politics and Governance

Students in U.S. History examine the ways the United State influences and is influenced by other nations (e.g., Big Stick diplomacy, dollar and moral diplomacy, Paris Peace Conference, embargoes and sanctions, NATO and United Nations membership, etc.). They consider the ongoing debates over the role of the government and compare different ideologies (e.g., Populism, progressivism, isolationism, internationalism, liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism, etc.) along with their relative effectiveness. Students analyze the motivations for U.S. imperialism as well as its economic, political, and cultural impact at home and abroad. They examine the government's response to national security threats (e.g., unrestricted submarine warfare, attack on Pearl Harbor, September 11 attacks, etc.) and the effects on the United States and its people. Students also explore the impact of government action (or inaction) in social and economic affairs (e.g., civil liberties and voting rights, regulation/deregulation, immigration, Japanese internment, mobilization on the home front during wartime, economic recessions/depressions, integration/desegregation, prohibition, progressive reforms, public works programs, social aid programs, etc.).



Society and Culture

Students in U.S. History explain why social movements and special interest groups have developed, as well as the events/systems that have led to such their development. They describe the influence these movements and groups have had on government and the development and expansion of individual rights and freedoms. Students explain how various identities, cultures, and values have been preserved or changed in different contexts of U.S. history (e.g., Native Americans, woman's suffrage, progressivism, muckraking, labor movements, temperance, flappers, Harlem Renaissance, the civil rights movement, feminism, counter culture, etc.). Students explain how American identity has changed over time and how gender, class, religious, and regional group identities have changed in different eras.

Conflict and Compromise

Students in U.S. History evaluate the social and political antagonism between ethnic and cultural groups (e.g., Dawes Act, Dust Bowl and “Okies,” etc.). Students examine the effectiveness of attempts to prevent war and sustain peace (e.g., isolationism, alliances, League of Nations, United Nations, reduction of armaments, nuclear non-proliferation treaties, detente, economic sanctions, etc.). Students also explain how conflicts and compromises frame the political landscape during the Cold War era (e.g., Korean War, Vietnam War, proxy wars, promotion of social movements to weaken government, domestic protests, Middle East relations, nuclear treaties, Central American and Cuban military operations, etc.). Students explain how post-Cold War administrations have differed in both domestic and foreign policy, and describe the major accomplishments and impact of each administration.

Continuity and Change

Students in U.S. History use a broad variety of primary and secondary sources with varied points of view to examine how key events, people, and movements (e.g., women’s suffrage, Voting Rights Act of 1965, civil rights movement, Great Society, anti-Vietnam War movement) contributed to the expansion of democracy for Americans. They explain how innovations in media and technology influence society (e.g., national security and public safety, political campaigns, etc.). They describe how Americans’ views on government changed over time and how significant events and landmark Supreme Court cases have affected American society (e.g., Pentagon Papers, Watergate, *New York Times Co. vs United States*, *Plessy vs Ferguson*, *Brown v. Board of Education*, Warren and Burger Court decisions, etc.). Students explain how the threat of foreign and domestic terrorism has repeatedly influenced American society, often engendering strong reactionary sentiments (e.g., nativism, first and second Red Scare, McCarthyism, etc.) and national security policies (e.g., immigration quotas and bans, Japanese internment, PATRIOT Act, etc.) that raise civil liberty concerns among citizens.

Old Assessment Item

Use the excerpt to answer the question:

Mr. Rockefeller has not squandered his income. He has applied it for thirty-five years to accumulating not only oil property but real estate—railroad stock, iron mines, copper mines, anything and everything which could be bought cheap by temporary depressing and made to yield rich by his able management. For thirty-five years he has worked for special privileges giving him advantages over competitors, . . . for thirty-five years he has depreciated values when necessary to get his prey.

—Ida Tarbell, “John D. Rockefeller: A Character Study,” *McClure’s Magazine*, 1905

Based on the excerpt, which conclusion can best be reached?

- A. Ida Tarbell practiced yellow journalism.
- B. Ida Tarbell supported the interests of the wealthy.
- C. Ida Tarbell wrote muckraking journalism.**
- D. Ida Tarbell opposed government reforms of commerce.

This item assesses GLE 2.8: Identify the goals of Progressivism; describe the influence of the muckrakers, political leaders, and intellectuals; and evaluate the movement’s successes and failures.

Key Concept

Social reformers and government reforms in response to urbanization and industrialization -- e.g., muckrakers, suffragists, trustbusting, conservation, municipal and voting reforms.

This item requires students to identify an example of muckraking journalism from a quotation. To prepare for this item, teachers would need to present curriculum vocabulary as well as key individuals within Industrialization and the Progressive movement and students would need to be able to recognize an example of a key term in a primary source.

New Assessment Item

U.S. History Item Set: [Political Machines, Corruption, and Political Reform](#)

This item set assesses GLEs 2.6 and 2.8: Describe the challenges associated with immigration, urbanization, and rapid industrialization and evaluate the government’s response; GLE 2.8: Identify the goals of Progressivism; describe the influence of the Muckrakers, political leaders, and intellectuals; and evaluate the movement’s successes and failures.

Key Themes

- **Migration and Settlement:** Students examine the major policies and innovations that led to the growth of the economy and debate whether or not these changes have improved the lives of American citizens.
- **Economics and Trade:** Students examine the major policies and innovations that led to the growth of the economy and debate whether or not these changes have improved the lives of American citizens.
- **Politics and Governance:** Students analyze the ways in which individuals and groups organize to influence government and society.
- **Society and Culture:** Students explain why social reforms and special interest groups have developed, as well as the events/systems that have led to such reforms.

This item set asks students to examine two excerpts, a political cartoon, and a timeline to demonstrate understanding of the Progressive Era. Students are asked to reference the resources to answer a multiple select question, multiple choice questions, a technology enhanced question, and a constructed response. To prepare for this assessment in the classroom, students would need to examine a variety of sources on the Progressive Era to build their understanding of how individuals and groups in society organized and used media to public opinion and influence domestic policy.