

Social Studies Key Themes: Grade 4

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 grade 4.
2. **Sample Assessment Item:** This section compares an old end-of-year assessment item to a new item for grade 4. 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 grade 4 use the features of maps and globes to construct and interpret maps of the United States and the world. They identify the geographic regions in the United States, as well as the states within each, and compare their distinguishing physical characteristics. They recognize how those differences have influenced colonial settlement patterns, local and regional economic development, internal immigration patterns, and economic imbalances among regions. Finally, students explain how the environment has been historically affected both by human factors (i.e., population growth, human migration, and technological advancements) and natural processes (i.e., coastal erosion, severe weather, and natural disasters).



Migration and Settlement

Students in grade 4 describe the reasons for European exploration (i.e., find alternative trade routes, increase national wealth, and spread of religion) and the risks they faced (i.e., disease, rebellion, and hunger). They explain the American Colonies' process of economic and social development as well as the political, economic, and social forces behind the United States' quest to fulfill its "manifest destiny." Students make connections among each region's diverse physical features, the migration of people to and through them, and the technological advances needed to facilitate that movement. They also describe the environmental and cultural impacts of that migration.



Economics and Trade

Students in grade 4 continue to explore basic economic terminology and the factors that impact economic decisions and then apply their understanding of these concepts to explain the economic decisions made by individuals and households (i.e., want fulfillment and budgets), businesses and jobs (i.e., profit, risk, and trade), banks (i.e., monetary exchanges), and governments (i.e., taxes and fees). They also describe how businesses and governments used labor, land, and capital resources to spur technological advancements and to encourage westward expansion and the Industrial Revolution.



Politics and Governance

Students in grade 4 explain the origins and evolution of American government. They identify the purpose of the Declaration of Independence, the key ideas embedded within it (i.e., equality among men, basic human rights, “life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness,” and popular sovereignty), and the roots of those ideas. They also explain the purpose of government, as articulated by the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, and the roles and responsibilities of each branch of the federal government, as outlined in the Constitution. Finally, students make connections between the development of the United States and the ideas expressed in our nation’s founding documents, including how those documents have been amended to meet emerging social norms.



Society and Culture

Students in grade 4 explain how interactions between European and indigenous peoples through exploration, colonization, trade, and migration led to the spread of North American culture and social norms across the continent and the marginalization of Native American groups. Students also describe how changing immigration patterns in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries contributed to the rich cultural mosaic of the United States, which at times contained many cultures that remained distinct (“salad bowl”) and at other times contained many cultures blended into one uniquely American culture (“melting pot”).



Conflict and Compromise

Students in grade 4 explain the causes and consequences of conflicts brought on by the expansion of the American colonies from 1620 through 1776 and the American nation from 1776 through 1850. They summarize the causes and effects of the American Revolution (i.e., French and Indian war, British control, taxation, lack of representation in government, desire for independence) and the social conflicts that resulted from westward expansion/Manifest Destiny, industrialization, immigration, and the Civil Rights Movement.

Continuity and Change

Students in grade 4 explain how technological innovations in communication, education, transportation, and manufacturing processes have impacted migration, settlement, economic development, and social values. They explain how government structures changed from the American colonies under British control to an independent democracy. They also describe how the ideas described in the Declaration of Independence and the rights guaranteed to citizens of the United States in the U.S. Constitution have changed over time through Constitutional amendments and the Civil Rights Movement.

Old Assessment Item

Use the quotation below to answer the question.

“We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed . . . with certain unalienable Rights....”

The quotation in the box above comes from the

- A. Constitution of the United States.
- B. Declaration of Independence.**
- C. Mayflower Compact.
- D. Bill of Rights.

This item assesses GLE 59: Identify a document/speech/address significant to the development of the nation from an excerpt (e.g., Preamble to the U.S. Constitution), and identify the author/speaker of a particular document/speech/address.

Key Concept

Identify an excerpt from a document, speech, or address significant to the development of the nation.

This item asks students to identify the Declaration of Independence based on an excerpt. To prepare for this assessment in the classroom, teachers would need to ensure students recognize famous quotations from foundational U.S. documents.

New Assessment Item

Grade 4 Item Set: [The Boston Tea Party](#)

This item set assesses GLE 4.7.2: Explain the significance of key ideas contained in the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

Key Themes

- **Politics and Governance:** Students explain the origins and evolution of American government. They identify the purpose of the Declaration of Independence, the key ideas embedded within it, and the roots of those ideas.
- **Conflict and Compromise:** Students explain the causes and consequences of conflicts brought on by the expansion of the American colonies from 1620 through 1776, and they summarize the causes and effects of the American Revolution.
- **Continuity and Change:** Students explain how government structures changed from the American colonies under British control to an independent democracy.

This item set asks students to examine two images and a timeline to demonstrate their understanding of the American Revolution. They answer questions about events leading to the American Revolution and explain ideas which led to the foundation of the new nation’s government. To prepare for this assessment in the classroom, students would need to examine various sources to build an understanding of the causes and effects of the American Revolution.