

Seventh Grade History

Overview for Parents

Teacher: Peter Tenney

Content or Content Goals

Part I: America and the World

In the seventh grade year, study begins with a focus on the growth of America as a world power. To set the stage, we examine a few topics on the domestic scene prior to the Spanish-American War:

- The struggle of immigrants to find their place in America, and the struggle of workers to have a say in their destiny in the industrial
- The role of the Supreme Court in succeeding or failing to provide justice in certain notable cases of the era.
- The role of journalism in the reform movements of the late nineteenth century: the “muckrakers” such as Sinclair Lewis, Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Steffens, and *McClure’s Magazine*

The advent of conflict with Spain over Cuba in 1898 gives us a chance to cover a U.S. major U.S. foreign policy decision with a terrific debate format that comes to us from the *Choices for the 21st Century* project at Brown University:

- Importance of a “blue water” navy (Alfred T. Mahan) and the advent of U.S. overseas possessions — annexation of Hawaii, Spanish-American War’s windfall acquisitions of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, and their effects on U.S. politics
- The rise of anti-imperialism, and its contrast with Teddy Roosevelt’s “big stick” diplomacy and his support for a strong U.S. profile around the globe.

A major component of the world history focus in the fall is the study of the “Great War” – World War I:

- Background causes — alliances, militarism, nationalism, and colonial rivalry among the great or emerging powers of Europe
- Immediate causes — assassination of archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, Austria’s ultimatum to Serbia, mobilization by Austria, Russia, and Germany
- Stalemate on the Western Front, unrestricted submarine warfare by Germany
- U.S. entry into the war — Lusitania, Zimmerman Telegram, “war to end all wars”
- Armistice, 11/11/18; Versailles Treaty — reparations, Wilson’s “Fourteen Points” and “peace without victory,” the League of Nations and “collective security”
- Russian Revolution, 1917 — abdication of Czar Nicholas, provisional government, Lenin and communism, Bolshevik successes, civil war, and the Soviet Union

Part II: American Civilization

Although events in American civilization are dealt with throughout the year in this course, special attention is paid to the following, through Joy Hakim’s *History of US* series and other resources:

- America in the Twenties — isolationism, “Red Scare,” restrictions on immigration, Sacco and Vanzetti, Ku Klux Klan
- “Roaring Twenties” — Prohibition, women’s suffrage, the “Lost Generation” (Hemingway, Fitzgerald), Harlem Renaissance, W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Marcus Garvey, the Jazz Age
- Economic and social change — Henry Ford, radio, movies, rural electrification, Lindberg and Earhart, urbanization

Part III: *The Great Depression and the Inter-War Years*

The seventh grade concludes the year with a look at both the Great Depression. We will learn about the stock market, its role in our economic system, and the Great Crash of 1929. Our goal will be to answer the question: How could a stock market “price crash” bring down the whole economy? From this we’ll move on to examine the “New Deal” — the election of Roosevelt in ’32, Eleanor Roosevelt, new social programs, Social Security, TVA, rise of labor’s political clout (CIO), the “imperial presidency,” and the “court packing” scheme. As we touch upon a few of the background causes of World War II, we will also note briefly how the U.S. build-up and mobilization for the war years (an eighth grade topic) played a big role in helping the U.S. out of the Great Depression for good.

Expectations for Students

Class meets four days per week, and students should be prepared for class each day. This means students need to have with them (1) the current history book(s) in use, (2) pencils, (3) a notebook containing a section for history, and (4) the ability to address issues raised in the assignment due on a given day.

Students receive a “Weekly Sheet.” It contains (1) a summary of the content and concept goals for the week, (2) two to three specific homework assignments, and (3) questions to consider that are intended to assist in guiding the students’ reading focus. Students are encouraged to answer each with brief, accurate notes in the spaces provided. Completing these is always a great strategy for success on quizzes. Students write the assignments in their Plan Book, an excellent tool for anyone, but especially for those who need practice in organizational skills. Skills emphasized throughout the year include critical thinking and discussion skills, as well as research and writing skills, and improvement in the taking of regular quizzes and tests. Student projects and team debates are used to emphasize and highlight students’ progress in these skill areas. The class will practice writing skills on various assignments through support of what is taught in their Composition class: developing a thesis statement, outlining, and writing both a rough and final draft.

Homework Requirements

Success in history at Crossroads relies to a great extent on doing the modest homework reading that is assigned. For faster readers, this may take no more than twenty minutes. For slower readers, reading assignments should not take much more than half an hour. The reading assignment sheets have “Questions for Consideration” for each of which students should write short answers. Completing these questions will maintain their daily level of preparation. On a regular basis, quick “facts check” reading quizzes will be given, as well as writing topics to be done in class or as homework. These exercises are intended to help students express their ideas on paper, and to help them improve their expository writing skills. Occasional projects and map work will be done in class, including preparation of performance pieces that would be fun to present within the class or to a larger school assembly.

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