

Eighth Grade History

Overview for Parents

Teacher: Peter Tenney

Content or Content Goals

The eighth grade year in history is a follow-up to that of seventh – part two, if you will, of the twentieth century world – as it may be viewed often though not exclusively from the perspective of the particular global situation and perceived responsibilities of the United States. The twenty-first century world is now upon us – in a more full-in-the-face manner than we might ever have imagined not that long ago – and our current events discussions will address the issues that arise and tie them in to what students have learned earlier in the Crossroads history curriculum.

Content areas this year begin with a study of World War II. This examination focuses primarily on causes and effects, including an examination of totalitarian regimes such as those of Hitler's Nazi Germany, Mussolini's Italian fascism, and the Japanese military-led government. We'll look at the build-up of Hitler's forces and the development of his strategy in Europe as a reaction against penalties imposed on Germany by the Versailles Treaty after World War I. Finally, we'll view the goals of Imperial Japan in the development of its prized goal of an East Asian Empire. In both the European and Pacific theaters, we'll focus on key turning points in the war such as the North Africa campaign, Leningrad and Stalingrad, the invasion of Normandy, the battles of Midway and Guadalcanal, and the culminating attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki with the use of the atomic bomb. The power of this new weapon, at least initially, puts the U.S. in a position of advantage as the war ends.

In the period of post-war standoff between the ascendant power of both the U.S. and the Soviet Union – the so-called Cold War era – eighth graders will investigate the demise by the mid-twentieth century of the great European empires – particularly that of Great Britain – and the rise of the Commonwealth of Nations and the United Nations. The effects of independence movements in the “developing world” will be examined both within the context of the bi-polar world of the Cold War, as well as the world since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. We will examine in detail the extraordinary case of Mohandas Gandhi's leadership to gain the independence of India in 1947, the Chinese civil war culminating in Mao's success with the Communist take-over of China's government in 1949, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the seemingly insoluble Israeli-Palestinian conflict. An understanding of the traditional cultures of emerging nations will be emphasized to gain a more complete picture of the motivating factors for many of these independence movements.

The context of the Cold War era will provide a framework for an examination of the American experience since World War II – in the military, economic, and social spheres. The prosperity of the U.S. economy and society of the post-war years provides a backdrop for the emerging social trends and dislocations of the '50s, '60s, and '70s, especially the Civil Rights movement and the revolution in popular culture.

Students will also be expected to improve their understanding of the U.S. political system and the forces that influence elections and create the politics and ideological trends that we're familiar with today. The political emphasis of that last part of the school year will give the class a chance to focus on civics and the import (and impact) of selected current events.

Expectations for Students

Class meets three 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 that's 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 are fun to present within the class or to a larger school assembly.

Contacting the Teacher

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