

Unit 1: U.S. Government - Past & Present
8th Grade Social Studies
16 Class Meetings

Revised October 2025

Essential Questions

- Why study the past?
- What are individual rights?
- How is our government organized and what roles do citizens play in representational government?

Enduring Understandings with Unit Goals

EU 1: History gives us the tools to analyze and explain problems in the past.

- Distinguish between the how and why questions – that is, interpret key historical events to better understand how they unfolded and why they occurred.
- Evaluate historical perspectives to better understand and solve current problems.
- Examine uniquely American patterns that might otherwise be invisible in our modern society with a focus on the Native American experience.

EU 2: Individual rights are the rights needed by everyone to pursue their lives and goals without interference from other individuals or an unjust government.

- Describe how the idea of rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as stated in the United States Declaration of Independence were new and revolutionary.
- Connect how changing attitudes about human rights in the enlightenment were a foundation of our democratic ideals in the creation of the U.S. Constitution.

EU 3: The philosophy of the Founding Fathers was to create a republic rather than a direct democracy.

- Summarize how the Federal Government is composed of three distinct and equal branches: legislative, executive, and judicial, whose powers are vested by the U.S. Constitution in the Congress, the President, and the Federal courts, respectively.
- Critique the idea that an American Republic was created to avoid the common man from being directly involved in creating laws and passing decisions.

Standards

CT Elementary and Secondary Social Studies Standards 2024: <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/social-studies/socialstudiesstandards.pdf>

- 8.Inq.1.a. Explain how compelling and supporting questions represent key ideas in the study of United States history.8.Inq.4.a. Construct arguments using evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging the strengths and limitations of the arguments.
- 8.Inq.2.a. Apply disciplinary knowledge and practices to demonstrate an understanding of United States history content.

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- 8.Inq.4.b. Construct explanations using reasoning, correct sequences, examples, and details with relevant information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanations.
- 8.His.1.a. Explain the events and developments that led to the establishment of colonies in the Atlantic and Pacific Worlds (e.g., desire for religious liberty, natural resources, economic opportunities, technological advancements).
- 8.His.4.a. Analyze factors that influenced perspectives about national identity both during and as a result of the American Revolution (e.g., social contract, individual liberties, tyranny, economic and political sovereignty, citizenship).
- 8.His.6.a. Analyze the perspectives of both enslaved and free Black people through the historical sources they created (e.g., Venture Smith, Phyllis Wheatley, Olaudah Equiano). 8.His.4.a. Analyze factors that influenced perspectives about national identity both during and as a result of the American Revolution (e.g., social contract, individual liberties, tyranny, economic and political sovereignty, citizenship).
- 8.His.1.b. Analyze the impact of United States' treaties on the sovereignty of Native nations (e.g., Ordinance of 1787, Treaty of the Creeks, Treaty of Greenville, Louisiana Purchase, Treaty of Fort Wayne).

Common Core State Standards:

- RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- RH.6-8.3 Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).
- RH.6-8.5 Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).
- RH.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
- W.8.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
- W.8.5: With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.
- WHST.6-8.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

ISAAC Vision of the Graduate Competencies

Competency 1: Write effectively for a variety of purposes.

Competency 2: Speak to diverse audiences in an accountable manner.

Competency 3: Develop the behaviors needed to interact and contribute with others on a team.

Competency 4: Analyze and solve problems independently and collaboratively.

Competency 5: Be responsible, creative, and empathetic members of the community.

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Unit Content Overview

- 1. The United States is a representational republic, rather than a direct democracy.**
 - Summarize how the three branches of the federal government are designed to work, encourage compromise, and limit power.
 - Critique our system of government, specifically – who were not considered eligible to participate in it.
- 2. Introduction to historiography and worth of the individual.**
 - Explore why history is a social science with rules and processes to correctly evaluate key events in the past.
 - Evaluate the notion that “history is written by the victors” and how this may skew the reporting of key historical events, especially for Native Americans.
 - Examine early American life, to include the pre-history of our country, and look to understand why social / political change in the colonies was inevitable.
- 3. How the idea of individual freedom rights guided the Founding of the United States.**
 - Describe how the idea of rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as stated in the United States Declaration of Independence were new and revolutionary.
 - Connect how changing attitudes about human rights in the enlightenment were a foundation of our democratic ideals in the creation of the U.S. Constitution.

Vocabulary and Key Terms:

- Theory, Enlightenment, Human Rights, Bicameral, Legislation, Compromise, Federalism, Tyranny, Ratify, Legislative, Executive, Judicial, Bill of Rights, Veto, Constitution.

Interdisciplinary Connection:

1. Language Arts – reading informational texts and written responses

Daily Learning Objectives with *TWPS*

Students will be able to ...

- Initiate exploring and learning about the subject known as “social studies,” with the specific focus on United States history.. **
 - *What do you think we will talk about in social studies class this year? Please list three (3) examples.*
- Summarize how the Federal Government is composed of three distinct and equal branches: legislative, executive, and judicial, whose powers are vested by the U.S. Constitution in the Congress, the President, and the Federal courts, respectively. **
 - *What is the purpose of the U.S. Government? How does it help us in our daily lives?*

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- Critique the idea that an American Republic was created to avoid the common man from being directly involved in creating laws and passing decisions. **
 - *Should students at school have “a right to privacy” just like adults? Please give at least two reasons why or why not.*
- Compare and contrast the differences between Articles of Confederation and the U.S Constitution, specifically the Bill of Rights. *
 - *Thinking back to 7th grade, please describe the different types of government with examples.*
- Connect how changing attitudes about human rights in the enlightenment were a foundation of our democratic ideals in the creation of our country and government. **
 - *How can the way we view old primary sources, like the Gettysburg Address, change over time?*
- Examine early American life, to include the pre-history of our country, and look to understand why social and political change in the colonies was inevitable. **
 - *Please list some words / phrases / ideas about the topic of European Colonialism? Or start with what is a colony?*
- Examine early colonial life, to include the pre-history of our country, and look to understand why Native American tribes & cultures suffered because of colonialism.. **
 - *Please list towns or regions of New England that have Native American names.*

Instructional Strategies/Differentiated Instruction

- Whole group instruction
- Guided notes
- Paragraph frames and sentence starters
- Student-led instruction
- Teacher modeling
- Written feedback
- Think-pair-share and small-group discussions
- Graphic organizers
- Cornell notes
- Accountable talk
- Homework
- Word walls with visuals
- Anchor charts
- Small group instruction
- Conferencing
- Text and video chunking with guiding questions
- Close reading with text-dependent questions

EL Differentiated Instruction

- Word walls
- TWPS (Think, write, pair, share)

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- Pre-reading strategies
- Culturally responsive teaching
- Explicit modeling
- Key Vocabulary
- Graphic organizers
- Strategic grouping
- Non-verbal Assessments

Assessments

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS:

- Do Now
- Question and response
- Exit Slips (Explanatory Ps)
- Accountable Talk Discussions
- Completed notes
- Completed graphic organizers
- Revision worksheets
- Homework
- Performance Task
- ISAAC Rubrics
- AIMS Web
- CNN10 Quizzes (2)

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS:

- Pear Assessment Unit 1 Test – EU3
- WebQuest – Native American Tribes (New England Region) – EU1
- Essay – Native American Tribe Historical Essay – EU2

Unit Task

Unit Task Name: Native American WebQuest & Presentation – EU 1

Description: Students will examine and research Native American tribes to better understand their culture and the effects they suffered because of colonialism. These tribes will be from the New England region and represent significant cultural and local influences that is still relevant today. Each presentation is chosen at random from a list of ten (10) tribes and the students complete research based on a list of requirements. A Google slide presentation will be the vehicle used to organize and deliver the information that students find and synthesize.

Evaluation: Scoring Guide

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Unit Resources
• Crash Course U.S. Government & Study Hall U.S. History • Preamble to the Constitution • Newsela text on the Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances • I-Civics: Columbus to the Colonies • Primary Sources: Gettysburg Address • <i>Everything You Need to Ace American History in One Big Fat History Notebook</i> • CommonLit