
World History: Age of Discovery to Present Syllabus

World History Class Overview

- The course is a survey course covering events from the Age of Discovery to the Present.
- Emphasis will be on connecting the people of the past to our lives, to make history come alive for the students so that they can understand the sacrifices and struggles of our ancestors to make us who we are today.
- We will have major areas of focus such as on ancient Age of Revolutions, World War I & Russian Revolution, and World War II etc., where we will spend several weeks delving deeply into the period.
- For areas of a major focus, students will be asked to do group research on an aspect and present their results to the class utilizing the SMARTBoard and PowerPoint. Classes without this technology may use standard student presentations.
- The class utilizes the resources of the textbook, PowerPoints, outlines, published articles, the library, and Internet research.
- The course runs in cycles for each area of focus:
 1. Brainstorming & introduction
 2. Ongoing discussion, & lecture
 3. Ongoing reading and activities
 4. Group research & presentations as an authentic assessment tool
 5. Intermittent review and final exam

Semester Outline

- Age of Discovery & Scientific Revolution
- English Civil War
- Absolutism & Enlightenment
- Age of Revolutions
- 19th Century Changes
- World War I & Russian Revolution
- Rise of Totalitarianism & World War II
- The Cold War Begins
- Later 20th Century Changes
- Current Issues & Events

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Class Cycles:

For each class, I have an opening quote on the board for the students to write and respond in their journals. They may write what they think the quote means and/or if they agree with it. This allows me during this time to take roll and other school business. The quote may have to do with the specific subject being taught or be general in nature. There are a number of good Web site quote pages on the Internet. I may also use quotes from current events and work back to the relevance to the past. It is important to know that the cycles interact, for example students may be giving presentations for part of the class while studying for a unit exam in the latter part of the class.

Cycle 1:

Introduction and brainstorming serves to get the students thinking about the topic. Its objectives are to stir up existing knowledge and interest, connecting it towards further studies. This can also demonstrate the need to study as students may have covered the areas in previous grades, but not as in depth and eliminate the “we’ve studied it before” attitude that is common in teaching English.

I ask the students to respond to the topic and write their answers on the board, circling the responses that hit upon terms or events that we will be learning. Once a healthy amount of terms are on the board, it is usually full, I start with the unit notes.

Cycle 2:

The discussion and notes are ongoing, with a heavy emphasis the first few days to give the students the unit’s foundational information. Social Studies lends itself to discussion. I use a discussion format where the students develop a polite conversational style to give their input, points of confusion, and insights. I ask them questions to generate responses that connect them to the topic.

The level and length of student response varies and is hard to consistently estimate. Important variables are the classroom chemistry of personalities, mood levels around the holidays, and school event interruptions when they can be distracted. The challenge is to overcome these hurdles and know when to switch gears. It is always important to keep in mind that teaching and learning are collaborative efforts not just among the students, but also between the teacher and students.

Cycle 3:

The ongoing reading and worksheets provide students with reinforcement, additional information, and the skills to deepen their knowledge. I give the students the opportunity to work on them in groups, but closely monitor that one is not doing all the work while the others simply copy. The group work is very useful for ESL students. Ultimately, the students that do not put in an equal amount of effort will see the results on the exams. A number of the activities require their opinions, which they need to support.

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Cycle 4:

Group research and presentation is an authentic assessment tool. It is true that not all students do well on standardized tests, even though they may know the material well. This provides them with an opportunity to demonstrate their content knowledge and communication skills. It is also more individualistic in that it allows students to utilize their own unique skills on a sub-topic of their choice. Artistic students do drawings, the class clowns tell jokes, and the computer oriented do amazing things with PowerPoints.

In having a SMARTBoard, my students are able to show the entire class their PowerPoints and interact with it. This platform greatly increased the quality of student presentations. The challenge is getting the students to not simply cut and paste then reading right off from the board word for word. The PowerPoint presentation guidelines and assessment in Tab 5 addresses these issues, which includes citing their sources and providing at least 5 viewer questions to ask the class after the presentation. Another challenge is that the myth that all young people are computer literate. The classroom application of technology brings out the actual weaknesses and the discrepancies of student knowledge. Computer lab availability is another variable.

The research and presentations are time consuming; hence there is not time to do one for each of the units. One can adjust the number of them and pacing, depending on your schedule and comfort level. The time spent can be very worthwhile as the students gain greater knowledge in becoming a teacher rather than a passive learner and helps prepare the class for the unit test.

Cycle 5:

The activities and exams cover the central information the students should have learned in the unit. It provides feedback regarding areas of confusion as well as student progress, and achievement. I review all the concepts covered on the unit test the class they take it. I also, if time allows, like using a college bowl format. The students in groups of 3—4 generate 10 questions that they think will be on the test. I collect the questions and randomly mix them up. In this way you could either get the overly easy or hard question or you opposing group could get it. Overtime, students learn to write pretty good middle of the road questions and in turn the process of just writing the questions becomes a review.

Once the questions are collected, the groups face of against each other until there is a champion group. I give each team member a free video rental pass. I've found that the students really enjoy this type of review and are better prepared for the tests. I host the contest as a game show format, with even "cheesy" commercials while each group takes their seats and chooses an APPROPRIATE group name. Once ready, I ask each member to introduce themselves and do a short interview. The first group to score 5 points wins and moves to the next round with tie-breaker questions utilized as necessary.