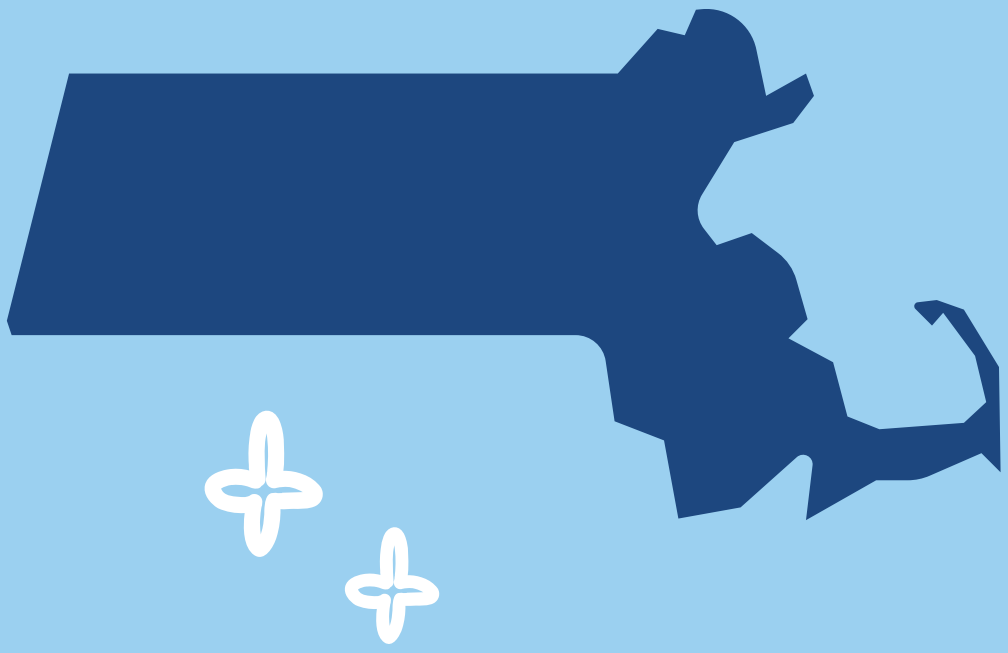
Investigating History



GRADE 3

Massachusetts, Home to Many Different People

dese MASSACHUSETTS Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

COURSE OVERVIEW | JUNE 2026

Copyright and Licensing

All original content in this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License and © 2026 by DESE. Third-party content including, but not limited to, images, illustrations, and photographs, are subject to their own license terms.

Reference in this curriculum to any specific commercial products, processes, or services, or the use of any trade, firm, or corporation name, is for the information and convenience of the public and does not constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Our office is not responsible for and does not in any way guarantee the accuracy of information in other sites accessible through links herein. For more information please contact: InvestigatingHistory@mass.gov.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements....4

Introduction to the Grade 3 Course....6

Preparing to Teach Grade 3 Investigating History....7

Year at a Glance....8

- Launching the School Year....8

Building Conceptual Understanding: Grade 3....10

Investigating History and the Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework....11

- Standards for History/Social Science Practice....11
- Priority Practice Standards by Unit....12
- Content Standards....13
- Literacy Standards for History/Social Science....14
- Assessing Standards Mastery....14

Instructional Principles....15

- Historical Inquiry and Investigation....15
- Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy....15
- Historical Empathy and Human Connections....16
- Civic Engagement and Current World Relevance....16

Notes....17

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.

Acknowledgements

Pilot Curriculum: *Educurious by NCEE*
Lead Authors
Claire Dann
Kristen Lutjen
Katherine Moran
Elaine Santelmann

Editor
Gayle Klim

Scholar Advisor
Siobhan Hart, *Skidmore College*

Revisions, 2025–2026: *Educurious by NCEE*
Writers
Katherine Moran

Reviewers
Kasha Browning
Sara Nachtigal

Editors
Danielle DeStefano
Gayle Klim
Clare Lilliston

Digital Media Specialist
Angela Rosenberg

Senior Advisor
Sara Nachtigal

English Learner Consultants
English Learners Success Forum

Note: ELSF does not rate or endorse materials. See the Curriculum Guidebook for more information.

Scholar Advisor
Benjamin D. Remillard, *Providence College*

Indigenous Curriculum Review
Native Education Council of Massachusetts

Est. 2019 by the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe Education Department

Note: The Native Education Council does not rate or endorse curriculum materials. See the Curriculum Guidebook for more information.

Additional Curriculum Revisions (Unit 3.3)
Lindsay Lyons
Kara Pranikoff
Eric Soto-Shed

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.

Additional Development Partners

Educurious by NCEE
Chris Carter
Jane Chadsey
Adrienne Dickinson
Nadine Ekstrom
Alex Goodell
N'Dia Parker-McWhorter

Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Tufts University
Sarah Burnham
Noorya Hayat
Kei Kawashima-Ginsburg
Jane Lo
Allie Maltzman
Kelly Siegel-Stechler

Investigating History Magnify (a program of the Civics and History Inquiry Partnership)
Reuben Henriques

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Office of Literacy and Humanities
Kathryn Gabriele
Dylan Geesey-Pearce
Reuben Henriques
Rebekah Judson
Miesha Keita
Julia Lucas
Katherine Tarca

Additional Support
Dimitri Christo
Jenny Cruz
Erin Hashimoto-Martell
Russell Johnston
Pedro Martinez
Heather Peske
Jeff Riley
Coleen Thomas-DeBari
Kendra Winner

Massachusetts Executive Office of Education
Sibel Alayurt
Genta Doko
Danielle Giovanni
Peggy Kraft
Donald Maruca
Anu Nattamai
Rangadoure Ramachandirane
Patrick Tutwiler
Dong Zou

Graphic Design and Publication
Brittany Arita, *TSM Design*
Edgar Fukson, *Learning Tapestry*
Elise Kohn, *Learning Tapestry*
Whitney Whealdon, *Learning Tapestry*

Co-Design Teachers and Teacher Fellows
Christina Cote, *Milford Public Schools*
Catherine Johnson, *West Springfield Public Schools*
Heather McCarthy, *Needham Public Schools*
Sherril Tjalsma, *Andover Public Schools*
Tiffany Tran, *Salem Public Schools*
Taylor Vercollone, *North Andover Public Schools*
Amanda Young, *Medway Public Schools*

Pilot teachers, administrators, and students in the following districts:
Boston, Brookline, Dartmouth, Foxborough, Hingham, Hoosac Valley Regional, Lynn, Medfield, Medway, Mendon-Upton, Methuen, Milford, Millbury, Mohawk Trail Regional, Needham, North Andover, Plymouth, Quabbin, Salem, Wakefield, West Springfield

Additional Feedback
We are grateful to the following organizations for providing informal feedback and consultation during the development process:
African Studies Center at Boston University
Discovering Justice
Massachusetts Historical Society
Norman B. Leventhal Map and Education Center at the Boston Public Library

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.

Introduction to the Grade 3 Course

In the Investigating History course for Grade 3, students explore northeastern North America and what is now Massachusetts, past and present. Students begin the year learning about the cultures and traditions of the region's Indigenous peoples. Students' learning then focuses on colonization in the area and the impacts that colonization had on Indigenous peoples, European colonists, and enslaved people. Students explore the themes of power, values, and beliefs to build understanding of how Massachusetts came to be and to build empathy for the ways these social dynamics have affected different groups. Later units focus on Massachusetts's role in the American Revolution, as well as civic engagement and forms of local government.

The Grade 3 course also introduces students to the foundational skills and routines that they will continue to develop throughout the entire Investigating History curriculum, including generating their own questions, analyzing primary and secondary sources, and synthesizing their understanding. Through the year, their learning is based on inquiry, discussion, and collaboration. Ultimately, Investigating History is designed to help students grow as readers and writers, as critical thinkers, and as empowered and engaged members of a diverse society.

Learning about the history of the United States from diverse perspectives presents opportunities for students to understand a more complete and nuanced version of events, which necessitates grappling with some of the more difficult chapters of our nation's past. For this reason, the teaching of "hard history" is supported throughout the curriculum with several strategies, including centering voices of oppressed peoples and bringing attention to their agency, activity, and resistance. Similarly, the curriculum's demands on teachers' contextual knowledge are significant. Gaining confidence and fluency in the experiences and contributions of the diverse groups who participated in the nation's development will require professional learning over time. The curriculum offers recommendations for high-quality educational resources to begin or continue this process.

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.

Preparing to Teach Grade 3 Investigating History

Investigating History strives to model the approach of inquiry-based, student-centered learning through the regular application of the Practice Standards and Literacy Standards outlined in the Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework. The curriculum aims to have students "do" history and geography for themselves, experiencing the joy of discovery and the satisfaction of critical thinking. This orientation places a premium on teacher facilitation skills as students are prompted to take risks with ideas and to voice their authentic questions and curiosity—even if these sometimes lead in unexpected directions. The routines and suggestions described in the **Curriculum Guidebook** will help facilitate this type of instruction, and we encourage teachers to begin the Investigating History journey by reviewing the guidebook. In addition, the **Investigating History Instructional Videos** provide rich examples of how teachers have brought these lessons to life in their classrooms.

As a social studies educator, you have likely already adopted many practices that are valuable and will fit well into this curriculum. Some of these might include routines around media literacy and current events, strategies for using literature to help students learn about the past and the experiences of diverse people, techniques for explaining timelines or developing map skills, methods for incorporating technologies or resources to which your district subscribes, or protocols for using models to introduce and reinforce vocabulary. As you get to know the lessons, consider bringing these pedagogical strengths into your work with Investigating History to enhance the lessons and make them your own.

The curriculum offers recommendations for high-quality educational resources for you to begin or continue this process. In particular, we encourage you to prepare to teach each unit by exploring the **Grade 3 Background Briefs**, which were designed to help you build content knowledge through a variety of resources. Each brief also highlights current perspectives and research—along with potential misconceptions and any debates you should know about—so you can present every unit with confidence.

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.

Year at a Glance

The Grade 3 curriculum, **Massachusetts, Home to Many Different People**, includes 113 30-minute lessons spread across five units, with the flexibility to adapt the pacing of lessons as needed. In general, lessons will take the longest the first time you teach them.

Unit 1: Indigenous Peoples of the Northeast	20 lessons
Unit 2: Indigenous Communities, European Colonizers, and the Plymouth Colony	22 lessons
Unit 3: Change in the Time of the Massachusetts Bay Colony	23 lessons
Unit 4: Massachusetts and the Revolution	26 lessons
Unit 5: The People and Governments of Massachusetts	22 lessons
Total	**113 lessons**

Please note that, due to revisions, lesson counts may differ from the pilot version of the Grade 3 curriculum.

Launching the School Year

Because Grade 3 is students' first exposure to Investigating History, Unit 1 begins with a skill-building cluster to provide a solid grounding in map skills and set the stage for the rest of the Grade 3 curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to be flexible about when and how they teach Cluster 1 lessons, based on their start-of-year schedule.

The beginning of the year is the time for building classroom community and introducing key concepts and routines. Students may benefit from focused attention on the following:

Identity, Community, and Classroom Culture

Building a strong classroom culture is critical for the type of collaborative, discussion-rich environment in which Investigating History will thrive. Open the year by building a sense of classroom community, getting to know your students as they get to know each other.

- Incorporate materials from Children Discovering Justice's **priming module on civic skills and dispositions**. These materials include lessons, slide decks, handouts, and tutorials on identity and democratic classroom skills.
- Many educators find it valuable to establish shared norms for respectful, inclusive, or **democratic classroom** discourse and behavior in a curriculum that emphasizes civic learning, cultural affirmation, and the value of diverse perspectives. Numerous organizations offer guidelines and supports for developing classroom norms or models that can be adapted, including **these strategies** from Learning for Justice.

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.

- Ensure students are prepared to engage with inquiry-based instruction by helping them build the appropriate skills while they learn how to work together productively. Learn why C3 Teachers suggest **starting small**, and review **inquiry task suggestions** from Edutopia; alternatively, practice elements of the instructional routines (such as generating questions) with students in a low-stakes setting or in a familiar context.

Geography

The Investigating History curriculum assumes students have been introduced to the geographic concepts in the Kindergarten through Grade 5 content standards. Lessons do present myriad opportunities for "just in time" remediation; but for students who are less familiar with these concepts, it may be helpful to spend several days in the first weeks of the year orienting them to major geographic features, such as continents and oceans.

- Programs online, such as **Seterra** or **WorldMap.io**, offer useful online map quizzes.
- Having students create hard-copy maps provides beneficial hands-on learning. Features of maps will be introduced in the lessons, but students might find it helpful to engage in a more concentrated map study early in the year.
- Demonstrate the use of and to allow students to practice with online geography tools such as **Google My Maps**, **Google Earth**, **National Geographic MapMaker**, or **ArcGIS StoryMaps**. This curriculum does not assume students are proficient in using these tools, but, as they are excellent resources, some of them are modeled at various points in both geography and history lessons. *Please note that some districts limit access to Google My Maps or Google Earth.*

Timelines

Investigating History provides a variety of timeline tools, embedded in the curriculum in the relevant lessons. However, it leaves the teacher to decide whether and how to create and leverage timelines across the entire school year. Such holistic class timelines, whether visual wall representations or digital tools produced with a timeline-creation program, may be helpful for developing third-grade students' understanding of how historical and geographic developments are sequenced, connected, and spaced over time.

Getting Organized

Throughout this course, students will need to refer back to their work from prior lessons when they are moving through a multiday inquiry or when Summative Assessments are open-note. Set the stage for their success by establishing a method to help them keep track of their materials, whether with binders or folders, a preprinted student workbook, or using a digital platform like Google Classroom. In addition, each unit has a Word Wall and three Inquiry Charts that students will need to reference throughout the unit. Decide where in the classroom to display these materials and how students will be expected to interact with them.

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.

Building Conceptual Understanding: Grade 3

In Grade 3, Investigating History takes an inquiry-based approach to the history of the Northeast and what is now Massachusetts. Content and practices are in alignment with the standards of the **History and Social Science Framework**.

Woven through the lessons are themes that appear in many of the Grade 3 Essential and Supporting Questions. They are:

1. **How maps can share information about people and places**: Students are introduced to foundational map skills and analyze different kinds of maps and tools throughout the year.
2. **How cultures, traditions, and values shape people and places:** Students use primary and secondary sources to investigate the cultures, traditions, and values of Indigenous peoples of the Northeast, of Europeans who colonized the Northeast, and of West African peoples forcibly brought to the Northeast, as well as the cultures, traditions, and values of their own communities.
3. **How groups, past and present, have governed and organized themselves**: Students learn about the leadership choices and governance models of the Wampanoag (past and present), Plymouth Colony, Massachusetts Bay Colony, and present-day Massachusetts.

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.

Investigating History and the Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework

Standards for History/Social Science Practice

Two or three key practice standards are explicitly taught in each Investigating History unit. Students receive multiple opportunities to apply the standards through activities and Formative Assessments before demonstrating their skills on the Summative Assessment. Practice standards that are not key to the unit are applied in lessons as opportunity allows.

Two types of skills are cultivated through the practice standards:

- **Work with sources, both primary and secondary:** The curriculum features a wealth of historical sources of many types, adapted, when necessary, to a third-grade reading level. Many of the practice standards focus on how to interact with sources by asking questions, gathering information, and analyzing and interpreting sources in their historical context.
- **Civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions:** Practice Standards 1 and 7 center civic thinking and action. In the Grade 3 curriculum, these are addressed at various points when different aspects of community and government are introduced. In Unit 3, students consider how the core values of different communities in the Massachusetts Bay Colony impacted the people there and the development of the area. In Unit 5, students focus on the purpose and function of local governments that exist in Massachusetts today (tribal, town, and city), along with how they can take action to make a difference in their communities.

The chart on the next page maps the progression of students' mastery of practice standards over the course of the third-grade year; this growth fits into students' broader trajectory of learning across each grade of Investigating History. Each practice standard has one to two more detailed, grade-specific descriptors that illustrate what mastery of the standard might look like in Grade 3; these descriptors have been written to intentionally align with grade-level descriptors across the rest of the Grade 3 through Grade 7 Investigating History curriculum. Educators are encouraged to use those descriptors as they set expectations for student mastery over the course of the year.

Other practice standards do appear in units where they are not defined as the priority standard but may not be the focus of deliberate practice and feedback.

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.

Priority Practice Standards

PS 1: Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Grade 3 Descriptor	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5
Identify how the particular core values of a student's community (e.g., a school or classroom) and/or other communities shape life for the people in them.			✔		
Explain the purpose and function of local and state governments, including the avenues they offer individuals for participation and influence.					✔

PS 2: Develop focused questions or problem statements and conduct inquiries.

Grade 3 Descriptor	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5
Generate questions relevant to multiple aspects of a topic.	✔		✔		

PS 3: Organize information and data from multiple primary and secondary sources.

Grade 3 Descriptor	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5
Use provided categories to gather and/or sort information based on a topic or inquiry question.		✔			✔
Distinguish between primary and secondary sources.			✔		

PS 4: Analyze the purpose and point of view of each source; distinguish opinion from fact.

Grade 3 Descriptor	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5
Identify the purpose of a source using information about source type, maker, intended audience, date, and place of origin.	✔				
Identify facts, opinions, and the point of view presented in a source.		✔			
With prompting and support, use knowledge of relevant topics or events to identify individuals and/or groups whose voices are represented and not represented in a given source or sources.				✔	

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.

PS 5: Evaluate the credibility, accuracy, and relevance of each source.

Grade 3 Descriptor	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5
Identify information about a given source, including the maker, date, intended audience, source type, and/or place of origin. Determine a source's relevance to a topic.		✔			
Distinguish between facts and opinions when examining sources. Discuss how the opinions and/or point of view of a source's maker might affect its credibility.			✔		

PS 6: Argue or explain conclusions using valid reasoning and evidence.

Grade 3 Descriptor	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5
In response to an inquiry question, respond with a claim based on evidence.		✔			
Identify evidence from a source that is relevant to an inquiry question.			✔		
Provide reasons to support a claim.					

PS 7: Determine next steps and take informed action, as appropriate.

Grade 3 Descriptor	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5
Describe a range of local, regional, and/or global issues, and explain how different actions taken by students and others would help address these issues.					✔

Content Standards

The curriculum covers the entirety of the content standards for Grade 3. Due to the abundance of content standards, some are prioritized and developed in greater depth, while others receive a lighter treatment. Enduring Understandings provide teachers with a synopsis of the content in each unit so that they can identify the key understandings students should take away from the unit. Students are supported in deepening their knowledge of significant historical concepts through both the topical focus of lessons and the Unit Synthesis provided before each Summative Assessment. An understanding of these ideas, more than detailed mastery and recall of specific historical facts, is crucial for applying knowledge accurately in the Assessment Tasks.

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.

Literacy Standards for History/Social Science

Investigating History heavily emphasizes literacy, especially with regard to nonfiction texts and student-led discourse, with certain literacy standards selected for emphasis in each unit. By design, there is a great deal of reading, writing, and speaking and listening. The literacy focus of each lesson is highlighted in the lesson's language objective.

Many readings have been adapted to be appropriate for grade level. Due to the prevalence of proper nouns in historical sources, an automated Lexile analysis of some sources may erroneously suggest that these sources are written above grade level; know that these proper nouns are explicitly addressed in the lessons.

Some modifications for multilingual learners and others in need of additional language support are provided through the "Plan for English Learner Success" callout at the beginning of each lesson, the "Support All Students" sidebar boxes throughout the lesson, and the inclusion of scaffolded student handouts for key lesson tasks. Additional modifications may be necessary for some student populations. Wherever possible, multilingual learners and students with disabilities will be working toward the same unit and lesson objectives, even if they take different paths to accessing the content and demonstrating their learning.

Each lesson's language objective includes suggested modifications for English learners with WIDA proficiency levels of 1–2, 3–4, or 5–6. The **Curriculum Guidebook** provides specific suggestions on how best to leverage the curriculum's supports for multilingual learners.

Assessing Standards Mastery

Over the course of the Investigating History curriculum, students are assessed on both their knowledge and their authentic application of skills and knowledge. In addition to informal assessments such as discussion prompts, students engage with Formative Assessments at the end of each cluster. These tasks provide teachers with an opportunity to monitor students' mastery of key content learning goals.

Each unit closes with a performance-based Summative Assessment that assesses practice standards and priority content standards. Each unit also has an optional Content Assessment that teachers can use to gain additional insight into students' mastery of the content standards addressed in the unit.

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.

Instructional Principles

Investigating History's instructional approach is grounded in scholarly research and pedagogical best practices and is fully described with accompanying citations in the **Design Specifications** that accompany the curriculum. Teachers' skillful pedagogy is critical to help bring these principles to life in the classroom; see the **Curriculum Guidebook** for more. What follows is a brief overview of the four key principles that anchor the curriculum as a whole and a description of how these principles show up in students' day-to-day learning.

Historical Inquiry and Investigation

Historical inquiry and investigation are achieved through an inquiry arc—the backbone for each unit and cluster—administered through the use of inquiry routines. With these experiences, students gain practice with generating questions, gathering information from sources, and communicating responses to Essential and Supporting Questions. Many lessons utilize primary and secondary sources of various types as texts and materials to be investigated. Throughout, the emphasis is on students constructing meaning in order to do the fundamental work of historians and social scientists.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Instructional approaches in Investigating History show a commitment to centering the experiences and agency of non-dominant groups. Sources by and about Indigenous peoples, enslaved peoples, women, and other marginalized groups have been selected to provide access to the views and expressions of these groups.

The course further develops students' sociopolitical awareness by examining issues of power, equity, and justice, past and present. Essential Questions, sources, and activities dive into these topics, with guidance provided to teachers on how to teach the harder aspects of history. Among other goals, Investigating History aims to develop students' conceptual vocabulary to engage in discussions of and careful analysis of such issues.

Finally, Investigating History treats the cultural knowledge students bring with them as a valuable asset. Lessons encourage students to make connections between class and outside learning and allow them some choice regarding the process, content, and products of their learning in order to accommodate different interests and modes of sensemaking.

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.

Districts and teachers should know that this curriculum has been extensively reviewed by DESE, scholars, and grade-level teachers in Massachusetts. Guidance on difficult and culturally sensitive topics is offered throughout lessons and in "Cultural Competence" boxes. The Commonwealth remains committed to an accurate, authentic, and inclusive approach to history and appreciates the work that teachers do in helping students to investigate history for themselves. For additional information, please see DESE's "**Race, Racism, and Culturally Responsive Teaching in History and Social Science in Massachusetts: Frequently Asked Questions**."

Historical Empathy and Human Connections

Students are motivated to learn history when they care about people and events. Investigating History engages students through sources that capture their sense of wonder, create an emotional connection, and spur their imagination. At the same time, the curriculum cultivates social and emotional learning by asking students to do the hard work of engaging in dialogue and collaboration with diverse peers across lines of difference.

Civic Engagement and Current World Relevance

Investigating History offers guidance to show the connections between the past and present. This includes the "Connections to Current Events and Issues" section in each Unit Overview as well as "Make Connections" boxes throughout the lessons. Teachers will notice other potential connections to current events or to the school community and can and should add these to keep the curriculum timely and relevant.

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.

Notes

Unless otherwise noted, Investigating History is © 2026 by DESE and licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. Published June 2026.