



GRADE 5

United States History to the Civil War and the Modern Civil Rights Movement

COURSE OVERVIEW | JUNE 2024

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Ashland, Athol-Royalston Regional School

District, Attleboro, Benjamin Franklin Classical

Charter Public School, Billerica, Boston,

Brookline, Central Berkshire Regional School

District, Franklin, Gloucester, Lawrence,

Leicester, Lexington, Lowell Community

Charter Public School, Maynard, Medway,

Mount Greylock Regional School District,

Neighborhood House Charter School,

Needham, Newton, North Andover, Pittsfield,

Plymouth, Taunton, UP Academy Charter

School of Dorchester, Wales

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Introduction to the Grade 5 Course

In this course, fifth-grade students study North American history from the precolonial and colonial period through the Civil War and Reconstruction, and then study the 20th-century movements for civil rights for all people. The Investigating History curriculum offers students their first opportunity to study a chronological history of the nation beyond the Revolutionary era. Fifth-grade lessons build upon the third-grade study of the geography, history, government, and economics of Massachusetts and New England, and the fourth-grade examination of the physical and political geography of North America.

Underpinning the approach to the 5th-grade curriculum is the view that the United States has been shaped by the experiences, contributions, and perspectives of diverse peoples. The promise and potential of the nation's founding values and democratic government are perhaps the central message of the year as a whole, and the lessons provide a path to critically examine the nation's founding, expansion, and efforts to become “a more perfect Union” throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. It is our hope that students will be inspired by the individuals that took action to secure and protect their human and constitutional rights, and that students feel invested in the project of democracy as they investigate the people and events that have shaped this nation since its beginning.

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 key 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. The span of topics and the level of depth with which they are treated are new to the 5th grade. Gaining confidence and fluency in the diverse experiences and contributions of the many groups who participated in the nation's development will require professional learning over time. The curriculum offers recommendations for high-quality educational resources for you to begin or continue this process.

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/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 your facilitation skills as you prompt students to take risks with ideas and 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 you facilitate this type of instruction, and we encourage you to start your journey with Investigating History by reviewing the guidebook if you have not yet already.

As a social studies educator, you have likely already adopted many practices that are valuable and will fit beautifully into this curriculum. Some of these might include strategies for using literature to help students learn about the past and the experiences of diverse people, techniques for explaining timelines or map skills, using technologies or resources to which your district subscribes, or using particular 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.

Year at a Glance

The fifth-grade **United States History to the Civil War and the Modern Civil Rights Movement** curriculum includes 97 lessons that are intended to be 30 minutes in length. These are spread across four units, with room to flexibly adapt the pacing of particular lessons as needed. You should expect that in general, lessons will take the longest the first time you teach them.

Unit 1: Early Colonization and the Growth of Colonies	23 lessons
Unit 2: The American Revolution and Principles of United States Government	23 lessons
Unit 3: The Growth of the Republic	26 lessons
Unit 4: Slavery, The Legacy of the Civil War and the Struggle for Civil Rights for All	25 lessons
Total	97 lessons

A Note on Pacing

Since the fifth-grade curriculum offers students their first opportunity to study the nation’s history through the 20th century, it is necessary to keep momentum in Units 1 and 2 in order to allow time for the study of Units 3 and 4. Fifth-grade teachers may be accustomed to spending more time on Colonial and Revolutionary history than the Investigating History curriculum prescribes. The length of time dedicated to the topic is intentional and based on the understanding that students studied these topics in 3rd grade and will revisit them in high school.

However, please note that some flexibility is built into the curriculum; while comprehensive, it does not account for every day of the school year. You can slow things down, or use the “Key Moments” guidelines to make choices about priority activities, as you deem necessary. Another option is to extend lessons into literacy blocks or other aspects of existing curriculum such as Morning Meeting. You know your students best, and can bring more emphasis to some areas (such as current events) than to others.

Building Conceptual Understanding: Course Themes in Grades 5

In fifth grade, Investigating History takes a chronological approach to United States history from the precolonial era through the twentieth-century Civil Rights Movement.

Weaving through the lessons are seven historical themes. These appear in many of the curriculum's Essential and Supporting Questions. They are:

1. How we as historians can use **sources** to construct understandings of the past
2. How **Indigenous peoples** have worked to protect the sovereignty of their land from the encroachment of European powers and the United States
3. How the issue of **slavery** challenged the nation's unity and values, codified racial discrimination and oppression, and had an enduring effect on its history and people
4. How the **Constitution** of the United States is the nation's governing blueprint and presents a model for governing a republic that has been amended by the people over time
5. How the United States is characterized by shared values and regional and ideological differences that have led to both **conflict and cooperation** among its states and people
6. How the United States was created and built by the contributions of **diverse peoples**, some who benefited more than others from the nation's success
7. How diverse people and groups have organized and fought for their **rights** throughout the history of the nation

Investigating History and the Massachusetts History/Social Science Framework

Standards for History/Social Science Practice

In each IH unit, two or three key practice standards in each unit are explicitly taught, with students receiving multiple opportunities to apply them before demonstrating their skill on the Summative Assessment. Other practice standards that are not key to that unit are also developed in particular 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 if necessary for a fifth-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. These practices are introduced in age-appropriate ways in relation to particular fifth-grade content.
- **Civic knowledge, skills and dispositions:** Practice Standards 1 and 7 center civic thinking and action. In fifth grade, these are addressed as students learn about the structures of colonial government and the creation of the United States government in the period following the Revolution. Civic-mindedness is also cultivated through examples of activism and agency throughout the history of the United States and how individuals and groups have often harnessed the power of the nation's founding documents to advocate for their rights.

The chart on the next page illustrates the way that students' mastery of practice standards builds over the course of the sixth grade year; this growth fits into students' broader trajectory of learning across each grade of Investigating History, and aligns with the grade-band descriptors in DESE's [K-12 Vertical Progression of the Standards for History and Social Science Practice](#).

Within each unit, the key anchor practice standards have been modified to more precisely reflect the focus of students' learning and their expectations by the end of the unit. Other practice standards do still appear in units where they are not defined as the priority standard, but may not be the focus of teachers' and students' deliberate practice and feedback.

Key Practice Standard Progression: Grade 5

	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4
PS 1		Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions by identifying methods of civic participation, governing principles and structures in colonial/revolutionary America.		Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions by working collaboratively to identify, describe and explain the history of the struggle for civil rights for all in the United States.
PS 2	With support of the teacher, develop questions about primary sources that demonstrate historical thinking and ultimately contribute to the inquiry process.			
PS 3	Analyze primary and secondary sources to determine ideas and key details; gather information about the past from age-appropriate primary sources, and distinguish primary from secondary sources.		Analyze primary and secondary sources to determine ideas and key details; gather information about the past from age-appropriate primary sources, and distinguish primary from secondary sources.	Organize information and data from multiple primary and secondary sources to describe and analyze historical issues and events.
PS 4		Identify a point of view in a source and explain its origins.	Analyze the purpose and point of view of sources, explaining factors that influence people's perspectives.	
PS 5				
PS 6			Support historical claims using textual evidence and disciplinary reasoning such as cause and effect and comparative analysis.	
PS 7				Research and analyze the work of civil rights activists to communicate the steps and actions they took in pursuit of their goal.

Content Standards

The curriculum covers the entirety of the content standards for Grade 5. Due to the abundance of content standards, some are prioritized and developed in greater depth, while others receive a lighter treatment. Students are supported in learning particular content through the Enduring Understandings, the focal topics of lessons, and the review sheet of each unit's key concepts, 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.

It's important to bear in mind that many of the topics introduced in Grade 5 will be revisited in United States History I and II with added nuance and complexity. The goal of the fifth-grade curriculum is to engage students' curiosity and build a strong foundation for further study of United States history in later years. Lessons are necessarily introductory and designed to be accessible to this age group.

Literacy Standards for History/Social Science

Literacy, especially with regard to nonfiction texts and student-led discourse, is a strong emphasis of Investigating History, with certain literacy standards selected for emphasis in each unit. You will notice a great deal of reading, writing, and speaking and listening in this curriculum, and that is by design. The literacy focus of each lesson is highlighted in the language objective for that lesson.

Note that all readings have been adapted to be appropriate for grade level, with links to the original sources provided. 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 taught in the lessons.

Some modifications for MLs and others in need of language support are provided in the lessons and in the Supporting All Learners sidebar boxes. Please note that additional modifications may be necessary for particular student populations. *Multilingual Learners and students with disabilities should be working towards the same unit and lesson objectives even if they take different pathways to accessing the content and demonstrating their learning.*

For each lesson's language objective, we have provided suggested modifications for two subgroups of English learners: those with a WIDA proficiency level of 1-3 and those with a WIDA proficiency level of 4-5.

- **In the newcomer to intermediate level (levels 1-3),** suggestions include strategies such as pre-teaching key vocabulary, reducing reading demands, and varying response formats and length. Visual support and modeling are essential to helping

students at these levels access instruction, and while the volume and complexity of student language output may be reduced compared to their peers, students should be given opportunities to engage with the material in meaningful ways.

- **At the more advanced level (levels 4-5),** students are expected to be able to comprehend and produce language that approaches that of their native-English-speaking peers, so suggestions are aimed at pushing students to stretch their vocabulary and syntax development in English. Cooperative learning is woven throughout these units in a way that teachers can carefully select groupings that support student learning, whether that means pairing students of higher and lower proficiency together or students of same language backgrounds.

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. 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.

Inquiry and Investigation

Inquiry and investigation involves full inquiry cycles with components that include question generation, research and information-gathering from sources, reaching and communicating responses to a Guiding Question and supporting questions. Additionally, many lessons utilize primary and secondary sources of many kinds as texts and materials to be investigated. In either case, the emphasis is on student construction of meaning in order to do the fundamental work of historians and social scientists.

Culturally Affirming Instruction

Instructional approaches in IH show a commitment to including the experiences and agency of non-dominant groups, through selection of sources that provide access to views and expression of these groups. For instance, you will see sources centered that are by and about Indigenous peoples, African Americans, women, poor and working-class people, and other marginalized groups.

The curriculum also strives to emphasize that the experiences and perspectives of individuals and groups are not monolithic or simplistic. Throughout the curriculum, students will meet a diversity of people who make individual choices based on their values, lived experiences, and circumstances.

The materials further develop students' sociopolitical awareness by examining issues of power, equity, and justice in the past and present: many Essential Questions, sources, and activities dive into these topics, with guidance 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 an asset: lessons encourage students to make connections between class and outside learning, and allow them some choices regarding the process, content and products of their learning in order to accommodate different interests and modes of sensemaking.

Districts and teachers should know that this curriculum has been extensively reviewed by DESE, by scholars, and by grade-level teachers in Massachusetts. Guidance on difficult and culturally sensitive topics is offered throughout lessons and in "Teaching Notes," in context. 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 "[Frequently Asked Questions: Race, Racism, and Culturally Responsive Teaching in History and Social Science](#)."

Teaching difficult subject matter in a way that is honest, age-appropriate, and culturally affirming requires intentional planning, preparation, and reflection on the part of teachers. The following resources can support teachers in this work and continued learning:

- DESE's web page on [Supporting Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices](#), including the [Culturally Responsive Teaching Video Library](#) and the [Classroom Instruction Videos](#) and [Culturally Responsive Teaching Rubric](#)
- Learning for Justice's [Teaching Hard History: American Slavery](#) resource, which provides grade-specific to support informed, honest discussion of slavery, including suggestions for elementary school educators.
- [On-demand webinars](#) from Facing History, many of which discuss strategies for facilitating classroom discussions about identity and oppression as well as strategies for setting a foundation of trust at the beginning of the year
- Additional resources included in the [Supplement to the 2018 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework](#), especially those listed under the "Resources for Facilitating Classroom Conversations" section

Historical Empathy

Students are motivated to learn history when they care about people and events and understand that entertaining perspectives held in the past is a tool for deeper understanding of why things happened (though not a justification for choices). Investigating History engages students affectively through sources that engage their sense of wonder, emotional connection, and 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.

Contemporary and Civic Relevance

The power and potential of democratic government and the enduring nature of the nation's founding documents are a throughline in the fifth grade curriculum. In the fifth grade, connections between the present and past abound, particularly in the realms of social justice and political activism. As teachers, you will notice other potential connections, perhaps to current events, and can add these to keep the curriculum timely and relevant.

Deepening the Learning

Literacy Integration

Investigating History is a literacy-based curriculum. Many of the texts and skills used in the lessons would fit beautifully into a literacy block by providing students with practice in reading, writing, speaking, and listening; throughout the curriculum, we have identified a number of particularly high-leverage “extension” opportunities to build upon students’ content learning and further develop literacy skills. Additionally, many picture books can support and supplement students’ learning in the Grade 5 curriculum. Since social studies can involve difficult topics, teachers should always preview texts for their classrooms to ensure they are appropriate for their students. The picture book lists accompanying each unit provide some suggestions. You will also find that links to some of the titles are directly included in the lessons of the Investigating History curriculum.

Throughout the curriculum, students leverage and build on a number of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills that they will also be developing in their ELA/literacy learning. While we suggest approaches for many of these literacy-based tasks, we also encourage teachers to leverage other routines and structures with which students may be familiar from their ELA/literacy curriculum—for example, approaches to argumentative writing, strategies for annotation, or routines to introduce and practice new vocabulary—which can be easily integrated into the Investigating History curriculum as appropriate.

Place-Based Learning

Massachusetts is fortunate to be the home of many historic sites that have played prominent roles in the nation’s history. Many of these institutions also have both in-person and virtual educational offerings designed for students. We encourage you to consider place-based learning at these sites to expose students to authentic primary source materials and to museum educators with expertise in teaching with them. DESE provides a list of sites in the [Supplement to the 2018 History and Social Science Framework](#). The place-based learning sites are listed on pages 29–38.

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