

Investigating History



GRADE 6

World Geography and Ancient Civilizations I

COURSE OVERVIEW | JUNE 2024

desè MASSACHUSETTS
Department of Elementary
and Secondary Education

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements..... 2

Copyright Notice..... 3

Introduction to the Grade 6 Course..... 4

Year at a Glance..... 5

 Launching the School Year..... 5

Building Conceptual Understanding:

Cross-Regional Themes in Grades 6 and 7..... 8

Investigating History and the Massachusetts History/Social Science Framework..... 9

 Standards for History/Social Science Practice..... 9

 Key Practice Standard Progression: Grade 6..... 10

 Content Standards..... 10

 Literacy Standards for History/Social Science..... 11

Instructional Principles..... 13

 Inquiry and Investigation..... 13

 Culturally Affirming Instruction..... 13

 Historical Empathy..... 14

 Contemporary and Civic Relevance..... 14

Deepening the Learning..... 15

 Museums and Institutions with Global Art Collections and Outreach..... 15

 Sister School Relationships..... 15

Acknowledgements

Grade 6 Authors: Primary Source

Lead Authors

Deborah Cunningham
Daniel Osborn
Susan Zeiger

Editor

Deborah Cunningham

EL Specialist

Tanya Bogaty

Contributing Authors and Advisors

Rachel Barker
Carissa Ford
Christine Gonzalez
Stephen Guerriero
Gabriel McCormick
Deanne Moore
Jennifer Boyle Nigro
Sara Niño
Molly Ross
Jill Stevens
Elyse Terry
Sara Wahid
Elsa Wiehe

Permissions

Olivia Maduro

Design Specifications

Christopher Martell
Jennifer Bryson

Teacher Advisory Group

Tanya Bogaty
Georgeann Bossers
Michaela Chung
Kerry Dunne
Daniel Fernandez-Dávila
Alex Kuschel
Rashaun Martin
Gabriel McCormick
Sara Niño
Jose Reyes
Dia Riegler
Natacha Scott
Adrienne Stang

Additional Development Partners

Educurious

Jane Chadsey
Adrienne Dickinson
Alex Goodell
Dia Riegler

Boston University Wheelock College of Education and Human Development

Rob Martinelle
Kaylene Stevens

Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University

Kelly Siegel-Stechler
Kei Kawashima-Ginsburg
Sarah Burnham
Noorya Hayat
Jane Lo

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Kathryn Gabriele
Erin Hashimoto-Martell
Reuben Henriques
Russell Johnston
Rebekah Judson
Heather Peske
Jeff Riley
Katherine Tarca
Coleen Thomas-DeBari
Kendra Winner
Jenny Woodford

Massachusetts Executive Office of Education

Danielle Giovanni
Peggy Kraft
Anu Nattamai
Rangadoure Ramachandirane

Graphic Design and Publication

Brittany Arita, *TSM Design*
Dylan Geesey
Elise Kohn, *Learning Tapestry*
Edgar Fukson, *Learning Tapestry*
Whitney Whealdon, *Learning Tapestry*

Teacher Fellows

Angela LoGuidice, *Billerica Public Schools*
Ian Leonard, *Springfield Public Schools*
Catherine Lyons, *Bourne Public Schools*
Qiana Johnson, *Springfield Public Schools*
Sara Stricker, *Mount Greylock Regional School District*

Pilot teachers, administrators, and students in the following districts and charter schools:

Athol-Royalston Regional School District, Attleboro, Benjamin Franklin Classical Charter Public School, Billerica, Boston, Bourne, Brookline, Fairhaven, Fall River, Hudson, Lawrence, Leicester, Lowell Community Charter Public School, Maynard, Medway, Monomoy Regional School District, Mount Greylock Regional School District, Neighborhood House Charter Public School, Peabody, Randolph, Revere, Salem, Springfield, Stoneham, Taunton, UP Academy Charter School of Boston, UP Academy Charter School of Dorchester, Uxbridge, Wales

Copyright Notice



All original content in this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License and © 2023 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.

Introduction to the Grade 6 Course

In Massachusetts, students encounter the cultures, geography and history of the ancient world beyond North America in 6th and 7th grade. These years offer an introduction to early human history and to each settled world region and the multi-faceted societies that developed there. Underpinning this approach is the view that every region on the planet is interesting and worthy of study; every place and people has contributions that merit our scrutiny and wonder. The sheer diversity of human societies — and the inventive ways they have grappled with core human dilemmas — is perhaps the central message of the sixth and seventh grade curriculum as a whole. The lessons that follow provide a path to sharing this rich tapestry with middle school students. It is our hope that students will both see their own cultures reflected in the curriculum and experience the excitement of encountering cultures new to them.

Learning about unfamiliar places and distant times brings significant challenges for students. New concepts and vocabulary appear in these lessons with regularity, requiring support and practice. Similarly, the curriculum's demands on your contextual knowledge as their teacher are significant. Gaining confidence and fluency in introducing so many world regions 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 routines around media literacy and current events, 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 sixth-grade **World Geography and Ancient Civilizations I** curriculum includes 117 lessons that are intended to be 50 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: Human Origins, the Paleolithic and Neolithic Eras	25 lessons
Unit 2: Western Asia, the Middle East and North Africa	35 lessons
Unit 3: Sub-Saharan Africa	32 lessons
Unit 4: Central America, the Caribbean Islands, and South America	29 lessons
Total	121 lessons

Launching the School Year

By design, time has been left for you to launch the school year with your own lessons, getting to know your students and introducing important concepts and routines. These early weeks of the school year might include time spent on:

Identity, Community & Classroom Norms: As you customarily do, open the year by building a sense of classroom community, getting to know your students as they get to know each other.

- [Identity charts](#) or webs, autobiographical timelines, family heritage maps (keeping in mind that some students may not live with their family of origin and/or may know very little about their family heritage), or “about me” posters are all tried and true methods; for this curriculum they have the additional benefit of prompting self-reflection and critical awareness, helping students to consider questions of positionality, point of view, and life experience that have direct or indirect bearing on many lessons that follow.
- Many educators also 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 your class to develop their own norms or models that can be adapted, including [these](#) from the ADL.

Geography: The Investigating History curriculum assumes students have been introduced to important geographic concepts that appear in the Grades K through 5 content standards. While lessons have myriad opportunities for “just in time” remediation, if

students are less familiar with these concepts, it may be helpful to spend several days in the first weeks of school orienting students to the 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 Investigating History lessons, but students will find it helpful to work with them as part of a more concentrated map study early in the year.
- You might also choose to demonstrate and allow students to practice the use of specific 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 they are excellent resources and some of them are modeled (while others could be modeled) at various points in both geography and history lessons.

Timeline Resources: Investigating History provides a variety of timeline tools for particular topics and world regions; these are embedded in the curriculum in the relevant lessons. However, it leaves decisions to you as to whether and how to populate timelines across the whole school year (or even across both 6th and 7th grade!). Such holistic class timelines, whether visual wall representations or digital tools produced with a timeline-creation program, may be helpful for seeing different civilizations' relationships to one another in time. This is particularly helpful since the curriculum jumps around in time as it visits different world regions. While students will have encountered timelines in earlier grades, the first unit of 6th grade introduces basic timelines showing relationships between events to remind students of how timelines work and prepare them for the long timeline of human evolution. You may want to add practice with timelines, and the introduction of a class timeline, to the launch weeks of the 6th grade year.

Understanding Culture, Diversity and Difference: For many districts, this 6th grade curriculum is a first opportunity for students to probe in depth the diversity of global cultures, along with the notion of culture itself and how human societies are both alike and different across time and place.

- While concepts and vocabulary related to these topics (e.g., culture, ethnicity, identity, status, point of view, etc.) are introduced in context across the year, it could be valuable to preview these ideas in the opening weeks of 6th grade. Curricular resources include this [lesson created](#) by Learning for Justice and its [Valuing Differences handout](#), and the lesson [“Culture; What You See and What You Don’t”](#) from PBS Learning Media.
- Horace Miner’s now famous article, [“Body Ritual among the Nacirema,”](#) (American Anthropologist 1956) has intrigued and delighted generations of young people while helping them to think critically and with humility about our own unexamined cultural biases and blindspots; while the entire article is not appropriate for sixth-grade

students, modified, student-friendly excerpts could help prompt students' thinking and cultural humility.

Getting Organized: Throughout Investigating History, students will need to refer back to their work from prior lessons - whether because they are moving through a multi-day inquiry or because most summative assessments are open-note. You can set the stage for their success by determining how you will help them keep track of their materials, whether through binders or folders, a pre-printed student workbook, or using a digital platform like Google Classroom.

Building Conceptual Understanding: Cross-Regional Themes in Grades 6 and 7

After Unit 1 (Human Origins), Investigating History takes a shifting spotlight approach to the various world regions in alignment with the content standards of the [History/Social Science Framework](#), with 6th grade focused on ancient Western Asia/the Middle East/ North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Americas, and 7th grade focused on the rest of Eurasia, and Oceania.

Weaving through the lessons on these disparate regions are six cross-regional themes which appear in many of the curriculum's Essential and Supporting Questions. They are:

- 1. How we know what we know about the ancient past:** Students learn about people from different academic fields who ask and try to answer questions about the past (archaeologists, historians, etc), and about the sources they use.
- 2. How geography and natural resources affect the way societies develop and interact:** Students are introduced to conventions of mapmaking and analyze different kinds of maps and tools for studying regional resources and climates.
- 3. How trade and the exchange of ideas serve as engines of social change, creating the potential for societal benefit and detriment:** Students investigate trade and exchange (both tangible and intangible) as a practice of all societies.
- 4. What roles religions and belief systems play in ancient societies and in our own:** Students consider the roles of religion in a society and consider how various belief systems emerged in the ancient world.
- 5. How societies past and present govern and organize themselves through laws and social structures:** Students learn about early governance models and law codes and the development of social classes.
- 6. How human communities have used creativity and innovation (in the sciences, technology, philosophy and the arts) to improve their quality of life:** Students consider how and why different examples of human ingenuity arose to meet needs and express values in each world region.

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 sixth-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 6th grade, these are addressed at various points when societal institutions such as governments and laws are introduced. In the 6th and 7th grade curriculum, civic-mindedness is also deliberately cultivated through the [United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals](#), which outline 17 civic challenges and aims for the world. Many of the goals connect to issues that people grappled with in the ancient world as well, so after introducing the SDGs in Unit 1, the remaining units each feature one goal in depth and apply it to the region under study for both past and present.

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 6

	Unit 1	Unit 2*	Unit 3	Unit 4
PS 1		Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.		
PS 2		Develop focused questions or problem statements & conduct inquiries.	Develop and revise questions and predictions to guide an inquiry process, with some questions provided for students and some developed by students with peer support.	
PS 3	Organize information and data from multiple primary and secondary sources using timelines, categorization, and notes.			Organize information from multiple sources while using authority and context to guide the selection of sources.
PS 4			Analyze the purpose and point of view of sources, identifying factors that influence people's perspectives; distinguish opinion from fact.	
PS 5		Evaluate the credibility, accuracy, and relevance of each source.		Analyze the relevance of a source by determining its credibility and intended use.
PS 6	Argue or explain conclusions in the form of claims, cause-effect statements, and persuasive arguments, using valid reasoning and evidence.		Argue or explain conclusions, using diverse evidence and disciplinary reasoning such as geographic, comparative, or cause/effect analysis.	
PS 7				Investigate a problem of civic relevance by conducting research and communicating findings to an audience.

* Grade-specific practice standard descriptors for Unit 2 are in development.

Content Standards

The curriculum covers the entirety of the content standards for Grade 6. 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 themes introduced in grades 6 and 7 will be revisited with added nuance and complexity in World History I and II in high school. While it is easy to become overwhelmed by the amount of content in the course, using the Enduring Understandings as overarching concepts to focus students' learning can help maintain a focus on big ideas and historical analysis. The goal in middle school is to engage students' curiosity and build a strong foundation for further study of world history in later years.

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 women, poor and working-class people, cultural outsiders, and other marginalized groups.

All of the civilizations studied in 6th grade are presented as accomplished but not monolithic (in other words, internally diverse). While some students will find affirmation of their own cultural backgrounds in a given unit, others will be delving into the unfamiliar, encountering both differences and connections and enlarging their sense of what is possible in human societies. (Note that many other students will learn about their ancestral cultures in Grade 7; you may find it helpful to preview when each region is featured in the curriculum so students understand the sequence. Also note that in sixth grade, the unit on the Americas focuses primarily on the regions known today as Latin America and the Caribbean; there is additional content related to indigenous cultures of North America in the third, fourth, and fifth grade standards.)

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.”](#)

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

Connections between the present and past — even the ancient past — abound, particularly in the realms of geography, culture, language and in concepts and ideas that have endured over many centuries. Investigating History offers guidance to show these longitudinal connections, and the introductory material for each unit offers additional ideas. As teachers, you will notice other potential connections, perhaps to current events, and can and should add these to keep the curriculum timely and relevant.

Because certain problems also affect both past and present worlds, the civic aspects of learning are important too; students study issues highlighted in the UN Sustainable Development Goals and consider how to take action to reach these goals. Throughout the curriculum, there is an emphasis on “useful knowledge” — knowledge that informs our sense of how human societies have grappled with challenges, and how we might learn from and utilize their experience to solve problems today.

Deepening the Learning

Museums and Institutions with Global Art Collections and Outreach

Massachusetts is fortunate to have world-class museums with collections that relate to the content of the 6th and 7th grade curriculum. 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. These museums and institutions include:

[Museum of Fine Arts Boston](#)

[Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University](#)

[Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East](#)

[Harvard Art Museum](#)

[African Studies Education Outreach Program at Boston University](#)

[Peabody Essex Museum](#) (Salem)

[Worcester Art Museum](#)

[Fitchburg Art Museum](#)

[George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum](#) (Springfield)

[Williams College Museum of Art](#)

[Davis Museum at Wellesley College](#)

[Mount Holyoke College Art Museum](#) (South Hadley)

[Mead Art Museum at Amherst College](#)

[Smith College Museum of Art](#) (Northampton)

Sister School Relationships

Although not a formal part of the curriculum, Sister School relationships during grades 6 and 7 are ideal ways to connect the study of other cultures and geographies to students' lives today. Joint projects involving classrooms abroad could involve geographic or environmental observations and comparisons, with data collection, photo sharing, and the real-world impact of geography on people's lives made manifest. To learn more about initiating such relationships and deepening international consciousness at your school, see [Increasing Communication through Sister School Programs](#), [A School with a Worldview](#), [Sister Cities International](#), or [Elements of a Global School](#).

Notes:

[illegible]