

# Investigating History



**GRADE 7**

## World Geography and Ancient Civilizations II

**COURSE OVERVIEW | JUNE 2024**

**desè** MASSACHUSETTS  
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## Introduction to the Grade 7 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 seventh-grade **World Geography and Ancient Civilizations II** curriculum includes lessons that are intended to be 50 minutes in length. These are spread across five 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.

<b>Unit 1:</b> South and Central Asia	34 lessons
<b>Unit 2:</b> East Asia	35 lessons
<b>Unit 3:</b> The Silk Routes	13 lessons
<b>Unit 4:</b> Southeast Asia and Oceania	23 lessons
<b>Unit 5:</b> Europe	31 lessons
<b>Total</b>	136 lessons

### *Launching the School Year*

Taking into account that the 6th grade Investigating History curriculum provides a solid grounding for students in concepts such as culture, identity, and diversity — as well as tools for understanding geography and timelines — the Grade 7 curriculum is designed to begin soon after the school year starts. (It has 11 more lessons than the Grade 6 curriculum.) After you get to know your students, build classroom community, and introduce important concepts and routines, jump right in to Unit 1! There are numerous built-in connections to the Grade 6 content and skills in the Grade 7 units, so students will be reviewing and sometimes drawing comparisons as they go.

**Geography:** The Investigating History curriculum assumes students have been introduced to important geographic concepts that appear in the Grades K through 6 content standards. In Grade 7, students apply geographic concepts learned in Grade 6 (and earlier), and deepen their practice with making inferences from maps and critically analyzing different kinds of maps and images. On content-oriented assessments, they are also held accountable for identifying certain geographical places and features for the first time.

- Programs online such as [Seterra](#) or [WorldMap.io](#) offer useful online map quizzes.
- Having students create hard-copy maps provides beneficial hands-on learning.
- 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.

**Understanding Culture, Diversity and Difference:** The Grade 7 curriculum builds in clear ways from the foundation in cultural concepts established in Grade 6 units of study, and will work optimally if used for both years. However, if that is not the case in your school, consider familiarizing yourself with the Grade 6 curriculum so that you are comfortable drawing connections to what students have already learned about the cultures of West Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Americas. Because the content focus of Grade 7 is on Asia/Eurasia, the 6th grade West Asia unit in particular will offer helpful background that “rounds out” the continent, and helps to ground the Silk Routes mini-unit on transcontinental trade that comes halfway through the Grade 7 year. In general, the curriculum offers continuity to students in probing the diversity of global cultures, along with the notion of how human societies are both alike and different across time and place.

**Getting Organized and Preparing for Knowledge Assessments:** 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 require a synthesis of topics throughout the unit. 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.

A new dimension of the Grade 7 curriculum (previewed in a limited way in Unit 2 of Grade 6 the prior year) is that students are assessed on both their knowledge and their authentic application of skills and knowledge together. After Unit 1, the summative assessments for Grade 7 have two parts and come with Review Sheets noting important terms and concepts for which students will be asked to demonstrate understanding. This offers students a guided opportunity to build their study skills and try different approaches to studying for a test. You may introduce the Review Sheet for Units 2, 4, or 5 whenever you choose during the course of the unit. Giving it to students at the start of the unit, however, will make your expectations clear and allow them to fill it in gradually and begin to review concepts as the unit progresses. Please note that these content-oriented assessments do not replace the more authentic projects and tasks students complete in “Part II” of each summative assessment.

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

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. Unit 7.3 unites the theme of trade for all of Eurasia in a study of the ancient Silk Routes.
- 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. Civics, governing institutions, and political philosophies are a stronger theme in Grade 7, partially in preparation for Grade 8 Civics.
- 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 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 7th-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 7th grade, these are addressed at various points when different governing institutions and systems 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 of Grade 6, each remaining unit features one goal in depth and applies 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 seventh 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 7

	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5
<b>PS 1</b>	With structured prompts, demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions by working collaboratively to identify and explain aspects of the ancient history of Central and South Asia that are relevant to participating in and governing a diverse society.				Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
<b>PS 2</b>			Develop focused questions or problem statements and conduct inquiries.	Develop focused questions or problem statements and conduct inquiries.	
<b>PS 3</b>	Organize information from multiple primary and secondary sources by using details such as origin, context, and author's intent to make connections and construct meaning.	Organize information and data from multiple primary and secondary sources by sequencing, prioritizing based on a given criterion, categorizing, and synthesizing to construct meaning.	Organize information from multiple primary and secondary sources.		Organize information and data from multiple primary and secondary sources by sequencing, prioritizing based on a given criterion, categorizing, and synthesizing to construct meaning.
<b>PS 4</b>					Analyze the purpose and point of view of each source; distinguish opinion from fact.
<b>PS 5</b>		Evaluate the credibility and relevance of each source.	Evaluate the credibility and relevance of each source.		
<b>PS 6</b>	Argue or explain conclusions about political, economic, social, and cultural developments in Central and South Asia using valid reasoning and evidence.			Argue or explain conclusions, using valid reasoning and evidence.	
<b>PS 7</b>				Determine next steps and take informed action, as appropriate.	

## *Content Standards*

The curriculum covers the entirety of the content standards for Grade 7. 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 at the start of the unit or 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.

Since the time the content standards were written, Massachusetts passed legislation requiring the teaching of genocide in secondary schools. The Grade 7 curriculum helps fulfill this need with case studies of genocide in Units 2, 4, and 5, in addition to offering suggestions of other places where it would be an appropriate focus.

## *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 Multilingual 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. In Grade 7, the Supporting Question Launches for each cluster deepen students' practice in inquiry by having them craft questions about particular content, and work toward answering them as the unit progresses.

### *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. In Grade 7, Unit 4 has a particular focus on the experiences, cultures and worldviews of Indigenous communities in Oceania, highlighting their continuity and survival.

All of the civilizations studied in 7th 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 learned about their ancestral cultures in Grade 6 or even Grades 3 to 5; you may find it helpful to preview when each region is featured in the curriculum so students understand the sequence.

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 as the global citizens that they are. 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:

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