

Student Achievement Committee Meeting

Wednesday, September 17, 2025 6:30 PM

BOE Auditorium and via Zoom Meeting Platform, 129 Church Street, Bristol, CT 06010

1. **Call to Order/ Pledge of Allegiance**

2. **Decision: Approval of Minutes**

3. **Public Comment**

4. **Information**

4.1. 25-26 Anticipated Curriculum Revisions

4.2. 25-26 Scheduled Data presentations

4.3. 24-25 Attendance and Discipline Reports

4.4. 2025 SAT Report

4.5. 2025 AP Report

5. **Decision**

5.1. Minor curriculum revisions in Humanities

6. **Information: 4QM Partnership**

7. **Adjournment**



Student Achievement & Outcomes Committee
August 20, 2025
MINUTES

The minutes presented within this document are a summary of the discussion that took place at the Student Achievement Committee meeting. To view the meeting in its entirety and hear full reports please go to: [August 20, 2025 SAC Meeting Recording](#)

PRESENT Committee members: Jill Fitzsimons-Bula, Kristen Giantonio, Maria Simmons (Zoom)

ALSO PRESENT: Carly Fortin, Joe Grabowski, Laura Lanza, Holly Pugliese (Zoom), Leszek Ward, Iris White

Call to Order

Commissioner Fitzsimons-Bula called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Decision: Approval of Minutes from April 30, 2025 meeting

A motion was made by Commissioner Giantonio and seconded by Commissioner Fitzsimons-Bula to approve the minutes.

Commissioner Fitzsimons-Bula: yes

Commissioner Giantonio: yes

Commissioner Simmons: abstain

Motion passes.

Decision: Approval of Minutes from May 21, 2025 meeting

A motion was made by Commissioner Fitzsimons-Bula and seconded by Commissioner Simmons to approve the minutes.

Commissioner Fitzsimons-Bula: yes

Commissioner Giantonio: abstain

Commissioner Simmons: yes

Motion passes.

Public Comment: No public comment.

Decision: Marketing I Revision

Mrs. Laura Lanza, Supervisor of Secondary STEM, presented the Marketing I curriculum revision. The revised curriculum includes 5 units: 1. The Marketing Environment, 2. Market Segmentation & Understanding the Customer, 3. Pricing & Product/Service Management, 4. Promotion & Public Relations, 5. Selling, Customer Relations & Channel Management.

Comments followed.

On a motion made by Commissioner Fitzsimons-Bula and seconded by Commissioner

Giantonio, it was unanimously;

VOTED: to move the Marketing I curriculum revision to the full Board of Education for approval.

Decision: Accounting I Revision

Mrs. Lanza presented the Accounting I curriculum revision. The revised curriculum includes 8 units: 1. Debits & Credits, 2. General Journal and General Ledger, 3. Cash Control Systems, 4. The Worksheet, 5. Financial Statements, 6. End-of-Fiscal Period for a Proprietorship, 7. Special Journals and Subsidiary Ledger, and 8. End-of-Fiscal Period for a Corporation.

On a motion made by Commissioner Giantonio and seconded by Commissioner Fitzsimons-Bula, it was *unanimously*;

VOTED: to move the Accounting I curriculum revision to the full Board of Education for approval.

Decision: Grade 6 Math Revision

Mrs. Lanza presented the Grade 6 Math curriculum revision. The revised curriculum includes 8 units: 1. Area & Surface, 2. Introducing Ratios, 3. Unit Rates & Percentages, 4. Dividing Fractions, 5. Arithmetic in Base Ten, 6. Expressions & Equations, 7. Rational Numbers, and 8. Data Sets & Distributions.

Questions and discussion followed.

On a motion made by Commissioner Giantonio and seconded by Commissioner Fitzsimons-Bula, it was *unanimously*;

VOTED: to move the Grade 6 Math curriculum revision to the full Board of Education for approval.

Decision: Civics Revision

Mr. Leszek Ward, Secondary Humanities Supervisor, presented the Civics curriculum revision. The revised curriculum includes 4 units: 1. Foundations of Democracy, 2. Structure of the Federal Government, 3. Public Participation, and 4. Policy Case Studies.

Comments followed.

On a motion made by Commissioner Giantonio and seconded by Commissioner Fitzsimons-Bula, it was *unanimously*;

VOTED: to move the Civics curriculum revision to the full Board of Education for approval.

Decision: Model United Nations- New Course

Mr. Ward presented the new course: Model United Nations. This course was created to expand opportunities to the Model United Nations experience and generate interest in club participation. There is also a possibility to make this part of a future International Relations Pathway. This course is made up of 3 units: 1. Introduction to the United Nations, 2. Preparing Position Papers, and 3. Simulated Committee.

Comments followed.

On a motion made by Commissioner Fitzsimons-Bula and seconded by Commissioner Giantonio, it was *unanimously*;

VOTED: to move the Model United Nations curriculum to the full Board of Education for approval.

Decision: Introduction to Criminology SCSU- New Course

Mr. Ward presented the potential new course: Introduction to Criminology. This course was created to complete the Criminal Justice Pathway and include another option for students to receive college credit. The course consists of 4 units: 1. Research Methods, 2. Theories of Criminology, 3. Types of Crime, and 4. Current Issues and Reforms.

On a motion made by Commissioner Giantonio and seconded by Commissioner Fitzsimons-Bula, it was *unanimously*;

VOTED: to move the Introduction to Criminology curriculum to the full Board of Education for approval.

Information: Criminology Textbook- First Reading

Mr. Ward presented the new textbook that aligns with the Introduction to Criminology course. The textbook is called: Criminology Today: An Integrative Introduction, 10th Edition. This textbook is used by the Southern Connecticut State University Sociology Department. This textbook will be presented for a second reading at the next Board of Education meeting.

Decision: Latin I Revision

Mr. Ward presented the Latin I curriculum revision. The revised course consists of 4 units: 1. At Home in Rome, 2. Community Interactions, 3. Enslavement and Freedom, and 4. Entertainment and Leisure Time.

Comments followed.

On a motion made by Commissioner Giantonio and seconded by Commissioner Fitzsimons-Bula, it was *unanimously*;

VOTED: to move the Latin I curriculum revision to the full Board of Education for approval.

Information: Office of Teaching and Learning/Curriculum and Instructional Services Department Update

Mrs. Carly Fortin, Chief Academic Officer, presented a department update for the Office of Teaching and Learning. The department will now be called the Curriculum and Instructional Services Department (CIS). Mrs. Fortin shared the mission and vision of the department and shared changes in staff members. She also shared the roles and responsibilities for each member of the department.

Questions and discussion followed.

There being no further discussion, Commissioner Fitzsimons-Bula adjourned the meeting at 8:22pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Katlyne Laprise

Katlyne Laprise



PROCEDURES FOR REMOTE PUBLIC COMMENT

Members of the public are invited to comment to the Board on any topic related to school business.

Items requiring consideration by the Board must be approved as an agenda item by a 2/3ds vote of the Board members present. Such items may be referred for further study and not necessarily acted upon at this meeting.

Anyone wishing to address the Board should adhere to the following procedures:

PUBLIC COMMENT

Before a Remote Meeting

1. Send your comments to: KatlyneLaprise@bristolk12.org
2. Be sure to put **PUBLIC COMMENT-SAC** in the subject line.
3. Include your name and address.
4. Direct your comments to the Board Chair.
5. Your comments will be read at the meeting by the Board Chair.
6. All comments should be written in an appropriate manner, particularly if concerning a personnel matter.
7. Any comments not adhering to the guidelines will not be read at the meeting.

During a Remote Meeting

1. Everyone is requested to address the Chair for recognition.
2. Each speaker must state his/her name and address.
3. All speakers must observe rules of common etiquette. Personalities are not to be injected. Anyone violating this rule will be denied the floor. Unless waived by the Chairperson or a majority of the Board,
4. Each speaker shall limit his/her remarks to three (3) minutes.
5. A speaker will not be recognized for a second time on the same topic.
6. Each speaker must concern himself/herself with the topic under discussion. Anyone digressing from the topic will be ruled out of order.
7. Written statements and materials may be made available, in advance of comments, for distribution to Board members.
8. Speakers shall state their positions on the subject being discussed.
9. Board members will not respond directly to comments during the Board meeting. The Superintendent will direct the question to the appropriate staff member for follow-up.

Bristol, Connecticut

Unit 8: National Identity in a Digital Age

Overview

Relevant Standards: **Bold indicates priority**

- US.His.2.b. Assess the US response to human rights violations around the world (e.g., genocide, **support for free elections**, sanctions, humanitarian aid, funds for human rights organizations).
- US.His.2.c. Analyze the effectiveness of individual and group responses to public policies that they deem to be discriminatory.
- US.His.14.f. Analyze the multiple and complex causes and effects of the September 11th attacks on domestic and foreign policy.
- US.His.5.c. Analyze how the September 11th attacks shaped perspectives in the United States (e.g., **views of Muslims and Sikhs, Department of Homeland Security, Transportation Security Administration, Patriot Act**).
- US.Civ.10.a. Analyze the impact of personal perspectives in public debates about national security and individual liberties (e.g., 2nd Amendment, Obergefell v. Hodges, Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, Sanctuary Cities, Dakota Access Pipeline).
- US.Eco.8.b. Describe domestic economic policies in terms of market outcomes (e.g., **North American Free Trade Agreement**, Electronic Benefit Transfer, Great Recession, Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act).
- US.Geo.12.a. Evaluate the effects of human-made and natural catastrophes on global trade, politics, and human migration in the United States (e.g., Hurricane Katrina, Flint water crisis, Deepwater Horizon oil spill, climate change, investments in green technology).
- US.Civ.14.b. Analyze the impact of multimedia on American politics and public discourse (e.g., 24-hour news cycle, echo chambers, social media algorithms, live streaming, trolls, deep fakes, artificial intelligence).

Overview

The final unit of the course examines questions of national identity since the 2000 election. The unit allows students to enter a national conversation regarding division and polarization in American society by examining the elections of three presidents and a major crisis each of them faced during their presidency. Students begin by learning about the elections of George Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump, including each candidate's performance across multiple demographics in the popular vote, as well as the electoral college. Students then explore how each administration, and the public at large, reacted to a significant crisis. Students conclude by considering the impact of technology and social media in further uniting or dividing the country, equipping them to participate in the democratic process as critical consumers of information.

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|---|---|
| Essential Question(s): | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Has America grown more united since 2000? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How have presidential elections united and divided American society? b. How have national crises united and divided American society? c. How has technology united and divided American society? | |
| Enduring Understanding(s): | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EQ1 - Elections since 2000 have been incredibly close and fiercely contested, often illustrating significant divisions in American society. Despite these divisions, American institutions have consistently upheld the democratic process. ● EQ2 - American society has faced a number of significant challenges since the year 2000. Oftentimes Americans have banded together in response to threats or challenges, but in doing so have also sometimes highlighted divisions in American society, reinforcing “we/they” dynamics and excluding those deemed to be less American. The government has typically intervened in response to these challenges, but those interventions have been contentious in their own right. ● EQ3 - The rise of social media promised to/and allows for unprecedented connection across society. In many ways, Americans are more technologically connected than ever, but the 24 hour news cycle and social media have also created echo chambers that have further divided Americans with differing political allegiances/identities. | |
| Demonstration of Learning: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Write an argument that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical sources while acknowledging competing views. ● Unit Exam | |
| Connections to Prior Units: | Connections to Future Units: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students will have considered the theme of national unity twice in 8th grade. In that course, summative inquiries ask students to evaluate the extent to which the Constitution and the Civil War united the country. ● Students will have previously studied the impact of threats and challenges on national unity in Unit 4. In that unit, students study ways in which the attack on Pearl Harbor, and WWII as a whole, impacted a shared sense of national identity. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● |

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| Family Overview (link below) | Pacing for Unit |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 classes, 4 weeks |
| Integration of Technology: | Aligned Unit Materials, Resources, and Technology: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of google docs is recommended throughout the writing process to facilitate drafting, feedback, collaboration, and revision. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook • Primary/secondary sources listed below |
| Opportunities for Interdisciplinary Connections: | Anticipated misconceptions: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • |
| Differentiation through Universal Design for Learning | |
| UDL Indicator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CHECKPOINT 3.4 Maximize transfer and generalization | Teacher Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide scaffolds that connect new information/texts to prior knowledge and anchor texts studied over the course of the year • Embed new ideas/texts in familiar ideas and contexts studied throughout the year • Provide explicit, supported opportunities to generalize learning to new situations by reflecting on essential questions over the duration of the course • Offer opportunities over time to revisit key ideas and linkages between texts |
| Supporting Multilingual/English Learners | |
| Related CELP standards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9-12.9 An EL can ... create clear and coherent grade-appropriate speech and text. | Learning Targets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 1: With prompting and supports, communicate basic information about elections since 2000. • Level 2: With prompting and supports, introduce and explain a sequence of elections since 2000, providing facts about the popular vote • Level 3: With guidance and supports, introduce and explain a sequence of elections since 2000, providing facts about the popular vote and using common transitional phrases • Level 4: Introduce and develop a detailed account of elections since |

2000, using a variety of complex transitions to link major sections of the text.

- Level 5: Introduce and effectively develop a detailed account of elections since 2000, using a variety of complex transitions to link major sections of the text and clarify relationships between ideas..

Unit 8: National Identity in a Digital Age

Lesson Map

| Lesson | Learning Targets | Sources | Knowledge | Vocabulary |
|--------|---|--|---|------------|
| 1-EQ1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine what presidential election results since 2000 indicate about national identity. | Popular vote counts Electoral college results Demographic breakdowns Op Ed Articles | Bush v Gore (2000) Obama v McCain (2008) Trump v Clinton (2016) | |
| 2-EQ2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can describe the causes of the September 11th attacks, the government's response, and evaluate the impact on American society. | Bush approval ratings Polling Op Ed Articles | War in Afghanistan Invasion of Iraq Views of Muslims and Sikhs Dept. of Homeland Security Patriot Act | |
| 3-EQ2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can describe the Great Recession, the government's response, and evaluate the impact on American society. | Obama approval ratings Polling Op Ed Articles | Great Recession Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform Consumer Protection Act Affordable Care Act | |
| 4-EQ2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can describe the Coronavirus Pandemic, the government's response, and evaluate the impact on American society. | Trump approval ratings Polling Op Ed Article | Vaccination Quarantine Restrictions Executive Order 13769 | |
| 5-EQ3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can analyze the impact of multimedia on American politics and public discourse | | 24-hour news cycle Echo chambers Social media algorithms | |
| 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can participate in a seminar discussion with my peers to evaluate whether American Society has grown more divided since the 2000 election. I can draft a thesis and outline an argument in response to a summative prompt. | | | |
| 7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can draft a document based essay | | | |

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| | supporting a historical argument. | | | |
| 8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can revise a prior essay to strengthen my historical argument. | | | |
| 9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess/flex | | | |
| 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flex | | | |

Unit 8: Change in the Digital Age

Overview

Relevant Standards: **Bold indicates priority**

- US.His.2.b. Assess the US response to human rights violations around the world (e.g., genocide, **support for free elections**, sanctions, humanitarian aid, funds for human rights organizations).
- US.His.2.c. Analyze the effectiveness of individual and group responses to public policies that they deem to be discriminatory.
- US.His.14.f. Analyze the multiple and complex causes and effects of the September 11th attacks on domestic and foreign policy.
- US.His.5.c. Analyze how the September 11th attacks shaped perspectives in the United States (e.g., **views of Muslims and Sikhs, Department of Homeland Security, Transportation Security Administration, Patriot Act**).
- US.Civ.10.a. Analyze the impact of personal perspectives in public debates about national security and individual liberties (e.g., 2nd Amendment, Obergefell v. Hodges, Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, Sanctuary Cities, Dakota Access Pipeline).
- US.Eco.8.b. Describe domestic economic policies in terms of market outcomes (e.g., **North American Free Trade Agreement**, Electronic Benefit Transfer, Great Recession, Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act).
- US.Geo.12.a. Evaluate the effects of human-made and natural catastrophes on global trade, politics, and human migration in the United States (e.g., **Hurricane Katrina**, Flint water crisis, Deepwater Horizon oil spill, climate change, investments in green technology).
- US.Civ.14.b. Analyze the impact of multimedia on American politics and public discourse (e.g., 24-hour news cycle, echo chambers, social media algorithms, live streaming, trolls, deep fakes, artificial intelligence).

Overview

This capstone unit examines the period from the 1990's through the early 21st century. Students will study key events, like the passage of NAFTA, the September 11th attacks, Hurricane Katrina, the Great Recession, and the rise of social media with the goal of comparing them to earlier developments in American history. In making these connections, students will conclude their study of modern American history by grappling with enduring tensions, recognizing that questions surrounding the size of the government, the balance between liberty and security, and responses to crises, and the impact of new technologies manifest in new ways while retaining echoes of the past.

| Essential Question(s): | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do events in the contemporary United States represent change and continuity over time? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Was the War on Terror a fundamental shift in America's foreign policy and approach to civil liberties? b. How different are recent economic crises and natural disasters from those that came before? c. How different is the impact of today's digital media on politics compared to the impact of radio and TV? | |
| Enduring Understanding(s): | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EQ1: The War on Terror represents a modern manifestation of enduring historical tensions between national security and civil liberties. American presidents have often framed foreign interventions in terms of national ideals, and periods of perceived threat have often led to debates over and restrictions on individual freedoms. However, terrorism replaced communism as a focal point of US foreign policy, and unprecedented technological capabilities for surveillance altered the scale and scope of these debates. ● EQ2: The government's response to contemporary crises like Hurricane Katrina and the Great Recession reflects historical tensions regarding the government's role in addressing economic inequality and providing social welfare. Events like the Great Depression have prompted significant federal intervention, as well as debates over the extent of government responsibility and the impact of policies on different social and racial groups. These debates continue today, but the scale of late 20th-century deregulation, the interconnectedness of the 21st-century global economy, and the specific vulnerabilities exposed by climate-related disasters, present unique challenges. ● EQ3: The rise of social media platforms and the 24/7 news cycle are modern examples of how technological innovation impacts American political discourse and societal cohesion. New media technologies such as radio and television have consistently reshaped how citizens receive information and engage with politics, often promising greater connection while also creating new avenues for influence. However, the digital age introduces novel developments such as algorithmic echo chambers, the unprecedented speed and reach of information, and the decline of universally trusted news sources, which have fundamentally altered the landscape of public discourse and civic engagement. | |
| Demonstration of Learning: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Write an argument that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical sources while acknowledging competing views (on the final exam). | |
| Connections to Prior Units: | Connections to Future Units: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This unit is designed to repeatedly prompt comparisons to significant events students have already studied over the course of the year. Each lesson directly compares a significant historical event after the year 1990 to comparable events at other moments in modern American history. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● |

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| Family Overview (link below) | Pacing for Unit |
| • | • |
| Integration of Technology: | Aligned Unit Materials, Resources, and Technology: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of google docs is recommended throughout the writing process to facilitate drafting, feedback, collaboration, and revision. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook • Primary/secondary sources listed below |
| Opportunities for Interdisciplinary Connections: | Anticipated misconceptions: |
| • | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may fail to recognize similar moments in history, reflecting a natural human bias towards the present and/or their own experiences. • Students may likewise fail to recognize unique circumstances of the present, falling into overly simplistic conclusions that “nothing changes.” |
| Differentiation through <i>Universal Design for Learning</i> | |
| UDL Indicator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CHECKPOINT 3.4 Maximize transfer and generalization | Teacher Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide scaffolds that connect new information/texts to prior knowledge and anchor texts studied over the course of the year • Embed new ideas/texts in familiar ideas and contexts studied throughout the year • Provide explicit, supported opportunities to generalize learning to new situations by reflecting on essential questions over the duration of the course • Offer opportunities over time to revisit key ideas and linkages between texts |
| Supporting Multilingual/English Learners | |
| Related <i>CELP standards:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9-12.9 An EL can ... create clear and coherent grade-appropriate speech and text. | Learning Targets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 1: With prompting and supports, communicate basic information about elections since 2000. • Level 2: With prompting and supports, introduce and explain a sequence of elections since 2000, providing facts about the popular vote |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Level 3: With guidance and supports, introduce and explain a sequence of elections since 2000, providing facts about the popular vote and using common transitional phrases• Level 4: Introduce and develop a detailed account of elections since 2000, using a variety of complex transitions to link major sections of the text.• Level 5: Introduce and effectively develop a detailed account of elections since 2000, using a variety of complex transitions to link major sections of the text and clarify relationships between ideas. |
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Unit 8: Change in a Digital Age

Lesson Map

| Lesson | Learning Targets | Sources | Knowledge | Vocabulary |
|--------|--|--|---|------------|
| 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can compare and contrast Clinton's domestic policies with Reagan's approach to government. | Clinton's State of the Union Clinton on Welfare Reform Reagan's Inaugural * Income Inequality * Election Results | Bill Clinton NAFTA Welfare Reform Deregulation Supply Side Economics | |
| 2-EQ1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can compare and contrast the domestic response to 9/11 with earlier responses to national security threats | DOJ on Patriot Act ACLU on Patriot Act The Sedition Act * | George W. Bush Dept. of Homeland Security Transportation Security Admin. Patriot Act Views of Muslims and Sikhs | |
| 3-EQ1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can compare and contrast post-9/11 foreign policy with earlier American interventions abroad. | Bush's Axis of Evil Wilson's Request * Truman Doctrine * | War in Afghanistan Al-Qaeda Osama bin Laden Operation Iraqi Freedom War on Terror | Preemptive |
| 4-EQ2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can compare and contrast the response to Hurricane Katrina with responses to previous national disasters and crises. | Help us now PEW Research Negro CCC or Rampy Burdick? * Social Security Exemptions * FDR Critique * | Hurricane Katrina (2005) FEMA New Orleans Levee System Federal vs. State Response Racial/Economic Disparities | |
| 5-EQ2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can compare and contrast the response to Great Recession with FDRs response to the Great Depression | | Barack Obama Great Recession (2008) Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform Consumer Protection Act Affordable Care Act | |
| 6-EQ3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can compare and contrast the political | Pew Research News and Trust | 24-hour news cycle | |

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| | impact of modern digital media with that of earlier mass media | Social Media Ruining Politics | Echo chambers Social media algorithms Adoption rates Mass Media | |
| 7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flex | | | |
| 8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flex | | | |
| 9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flex | | | |
| 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flex | | | |

Unit 4: A Raisin in the Sun

Overview

Relevant Standards: **Bold indicates priority**

- 7.RL.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
- 7.RL.6 Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.
- 7.RL.5 Analyze how a drama's or poem's form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning.
- 7.W.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
 - b. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning/relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic..
 - c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence.
- 7.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
 - b. Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
 - c. Use appropriate transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
- 7.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- 7.L.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- 7.L.6 Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Overview

After reading *House on Mango Street*, students read *A Raisin in the Sun*, by Lorraine Hansberry, tells the story of the Youngers, an African American family living on the South Side of Chicago in the 1950's. The play opens with the Youngers awaiting the arrival of a \$10,000 life-insurance payment, due to them after the death of the family patriarch Walter Younger. Tensions in the home rise as Walter Jr. and his mother conflict over how to best spend the money. In reading this classic play, students will continue to explore the importance of housing and homeownership to American identity, while also being introduced to the study of drama for the first time and also considering the role of generational conflict in the pursuit of the American Dream. Teachers may, with consultation of their supervisors, elect to substitute another similar text of their choosing to anchor this unit. Writing instruction in this unit continues to focus on expressing a depth of analysis through the repetition of key words/phrases.

Essential Question(s):

- What happens to a dream deferred?
- What does the American Dream mean to different people?
- What role does race, class, and gender play in a person's ability to achieve their dreams?

| Enduring Understanding(s): | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite emancipation from slavery, black Americans faced decades of legal discrimination and oppression both in the Jim Crow South and the North • Lorraine Hansberry’s play was semi-autobiographical, influenced by Langston Hughes, and shaped perceptions of the Black experience in postwar America; it was both highly successful and controversial at the time of its debut. • Generational ideals, experiences, and values often shape one’s dreams and aspirations. • A person’s environment can have a powerful impact on their identity and also their opportunities in life. | |
| Demonstration of Learning: | |
| <p>Summative Writing Prompts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Props Analysis: Consider the different props (symbols) that are used in Hansberry’s play: eggs, Mama’s plant, the insurance check, Beneatha’s robe and head wrap, Mr. Linder’s business card, Mama’s new gardening tools, or others. Choose 2-3 of these props and explain why their choices are significant or symbolic and how she develops their significance throughout the play. • Analysis of Generational Conflict: What differentiates the beliefs and attitudes of the younger characters from the older characters in the play? Explain how these ideals create conflict between the characters. • Influence of Langston Hughes: Hansberry was undoubtedly influenced by the poetry of Langston Hughes. Describe how the messages of Langston Hughes might have influenced the themes explored in her play. | |
| Connections to Prior Units: | Connections to Future Units: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like The House on Mango Street (7th), A Raisin in the Sun is also set in the South Side of Chicago. • Students will have studied the concept of white flight and neighborhood segregation during The House on Mango Street, leading into the discussion of red lining in this unit • The title of A Raisin in the Sun is an allusion to the poem “A Dream Deferred,” by Langston Hughes, which students read at the start of this unit. Students will have previously read poetry by Langston Hughes in the opening unit of this course, specifically “Let America Be America Again,” which gives voice to a number of people for whom the American Dream has been deferred. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will read the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass in the next unit, which allows for students to draw the through lines between enslavement and red lining • This is the first play students study in their English classes in Bristol. Students will go on to read Romeo and Juliet (9th), The Crucible (10th), Fences (11th), and Macbeth (12th) in high school. • Students will further explore generational conflicts when studying Romeo and Juliet in 9th grade and Kindred in 10th. • Students will consider how a person’s environment shapes them when studying Kindred, Of Mice and Men, and Fahrenheit 451 in 10th grade. |
| Family Overview (link below) | Pacing for Unit |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31 lessons, 6 weeks |

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| Integration of Technology: | Aligned Unit Materials, Resources, and Technology: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of google docs is recommended throughout the writing process to facilitate drafting, feedback, collaboration, and revision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Reconsidered Lessons |
| Opportunities for Interdisciplinary Connections: | Anticipated misconceptions: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> |
| Differentiation through <i>Universal Design for Learning</i> | |
| UDL Indicator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CHECKPOINT 8.4 Increase mastery-oriented feedback | Teacher Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide feedback on writing lessons/CFAs that encourages perseverance, focuses on development of efficacy and self-awareness, and encourages the use of specific supports and strategies in the face of challenge Provide feedback on writing lessons/CFAs that emphasizes improvement and achieving a standard rather than on relative performance Use Show Call to provide feedback that is frequent, timely, and specific Use Show Call and/or Whole Class feedback to identify patterns of errors and wrong answers, and generate positive strategies for future success |
| Supporting Multilingual/English Learners | |
| Related <i>CELP standards:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6-8.4 An EL can construct grade appropriate oral and written claims and support them with reasoning and evidence. | Learning Targets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level 1: I can verbally or nonverbally express an opinion about a familiar topic (my home or my family) using a limited number of acquired words and phrases. Level 2: I can construct a claim about a familiar topic (my home or family) and give a reason to support it. Level 3: I can construct a claim about the Youngers or their decision to move and provide several supporting reasons. Level 4: I can construct claims about the Youngers and their decision to move, provide several supporting reasons, and acknowledge opposing ideas Level 5: I can construct claims about the Youngers and their decision to move, provide several supporting reasons, and address the counterargument. |

Unit 4: A Raisin in the Sun

Lesson Map

| Lesson | Text | Learning Target | Vocabulary | Knowledge |
|--------|--|--|------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 23-30 & “A Dream Deferred,” by Langston Hughes | Describe how the Younger’s apartment reflects the state of their lives and aspirations. | Weary Uniformity Pretense | Setting Symbolism |
| 2 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 30-39 | Consider how Walter’s view of his wife and sister are influenced by postwar gender roles. | Domestic Conformity | Stage Directions Props Female Gender Roles in the 1950s |
| 3 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 41-46 | Explain how Mama is a figure of the strength and suffering of black Americans in post-war America. | | |
| 4 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 46-53 | Explain how the Mama, Ruth, and Beneatha’s relationship depicts generational conflict. | | Generation Gaps |
| 5 | Writing Mini Lesson: Relevant Analysis | I can add relevant analysis to my paragraph by repeating key words and/or synonyms from my claim | | Synonym |
| 6 | Film Version of A Raisin in the Sun | Evaluate the impact of changes made in the film adaptation of A Raisin in the Sun. | | |
| 7 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 54-60 | Examine how cockroaches might be symbolic in Hansberry’s play. | Heathen Ignorant Exotic | |
| 8 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 60-66 | Analyze how Asagai influences Beneatha’s sense of identity. | Assimilation Ghetto Mutilate | |
| 9 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 66-75 | Explain why Mama is conflicted over the arrival of the insurance check. | | Blocking Symbolism |

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| 10 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 76-81 | Compare Beneatha and George's conflicting perspective of their African heritage. | | Allusion Uncle Tom's Cabin |
| 11 | Writing Mini Lesson: Relevant analysis | I can add relevant analysis to my paragraph by repeating key words and/or synonyms from my claim | | |
| 12 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 82-89 | Analyze George's effect on Walter. | | Allusion Prometheus |
| 13 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 90-95 | Evaluate the impact of Mama's revelation. | Revelation Jubilant | |
| 14 | <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> , by W.E.B. DuBois | Analyze W.E.B. Dubois' arguments about the divisions between the experiences of black Americans at the time he wrote. | | W.E.B Dubois The Souls of Black Folk |
| 15 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 96-109 | Explain how George and Mrs. Johnson represent common social views of the time. | | Booker T. Washington vs. W.E.B. DuBois |
| 16 | <i>Brief Write CFA</i> | Given a weak body paragraph, students revise for deeper analysis, context, punctuation | | |
| 17 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> Langston Hughes Close Reading | Explain how Hansberry's play might have been influenced by Langston's Hughes' poetry | | Langston Hughes |
| 18 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 110-124 | Explain what Mr. Linder reveals about historical perspective of racial segregation | Strident Deplore Gall | |
| 19 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 125-130 | Describe the meaning of Walter's response to Bobo's news. | | |
| 20 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 131-143 | Examine Hansberry's purpose for Asagai's visit to the apartment. | | Allusion Thirty pieces of silver |
| 21 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 143-151 | Evaluate multiple interpretations of the ending of Hansberry's play. | | |

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| 22 | Seminar | I can engage in a Socratic Seminar with my peers to explore essential questions and make connections between texts. | | |
| 23 | Assessment | | | |
| 24 | Summative Writing | I can plan my essay by organizing my ideas and choosing the most relevant evidence to support them. | | |
| 25 | Summative Writing | I can draft complete body paragraphs for my summative essay. | | |
| 26 | Summative Writing | I can revise body paragraphs of my summative essay by ensuring my analysis is clearly tied to my claims. | | |
| 27 | Summative Writing | I can add a brief introduction and conclusion to the draft of my essay. | | |
| 28 | Flex | | | |
| 29 | Flex | | | |
| 30 | Flex | | | |
| 31 | Flex | | | |

Unit 4: A Raisin in the Sun

Overview

Relevant Standards: **Bold indicates priority**

- 7.RL.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
- 7.RL.6 Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.
- 7.RL.5 Analyze how a drama's or poem's form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning.
- 7.W.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
 - b. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning/relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic..
 - c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence.
- 7.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
 - b. Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
 - c. Use appropriate transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
- 7.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- 7.L.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- 7.L.6 Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Overview

After reading *House on Mango Street*, students read *A Raisin in the Sun*, by Lorraine Hansberry, tells the story of the Youngers, an African American family living on the South Side of Chicago in the 1950's. The play opens with the Youngers awaiting the arrival of a \$10,000 life-insurance payment, due to them after the death of the family patriarch Walter Younger. Tensions in the home rise as Walter Jr. and his mother conflict over how to best spend the money. In reading this classic play, students will continue to explore the importance of housing and homeownership to American identity, while also being introduced to the study of drama for the first time and also considering the role of generational conflict in the pursuit of the American Dream. Teachers may, with consultation of their supervisors, elect to substitute another similar text of their choosing to anchor this unit. Writing instruction in this unit continues to focus on expressing a depth of analysis through the repetition of key words/phrases.

Essential Question(s):

- What happens to a dream deferred?
- What does the American Dream mean to different people?
- What role does race, class, and gender play in a person's ability to achieve their dreams?

Enduring Understanding(s):

- The American Dream refers to the idea that anyone can achieve success in America through hard work, regardless of the circumstances they were born into. In reality, different people have different access to opportunities as a result of their class, gender, race, or other identifying categories. For Black Americans in the 1950s, the pursuit of the American Dream was complicated by a “blanket of oppression” restricting opportunities and access. Housing discrimination was one way in which racism limited Black Americans’ ability to achieve the American Dream.
- Lorraine Hansberry’s play was semi-autobiographical, influenced by Langston Hughes, and shaped perceptions of the Black experience in postwar America; it was both highly successful and controversial at the time of its debut.
- Generational ideals, experiences, and values often shape one’s dreams and aspirations.
- A person’s environment can have a powerful impact on their identity and also their opportunities in life.
- Reading a play is different than reading a novel or other genre of text. The playwright uses only dialogue and stage directions to build a world and tell a story, and we must also consider elements of stagecraft that might not be on the page. Actors, directors, and designers bring a play to life through blocking, set and costume design, lighting, and other choices.

Demonstration of Learning:

Summative Writing Prompts

- Stage Directions Analysis: Choose one scene in which the stage directions are especially important to understanding the characters. Analyze how the stage directions contribute to this scene.
- Analysis of Generational Conflict: What differentiates the beliefs and attitudes of the younger characters from the older characters in the play? Explain how these ideals create conflict between the characters.
- Influence of Langston Hughes: Hansberry was undoubtedly influenced by the poetry of Langston Hughes. Describe how the messages of Langston Hughes might have influenced the themes explored in her play.
- Argumentative essay: Should the Youngers move into their new house? Use both the play and the non-fiction texts about the Great Migration, Redlining, and Jim Crow laws to help support your claim.

Connections to Prior Units:

- Like The House on Mango Street (7th), A Raisin in the Sun is also set in the South Side of Chicago.
- Students will have studied the concept of white flight and neighborhood segregation during The House on Mango Street, leading into the discussion of red lining in this unit.
- The title of A Raisin in the Sun is an allusion to the poem “A Dream Deferred,” by Langston Hughes, which students read at the start of this unit. Students will have previously read poetry by Langston Hughes in the opening unit of this course, specifically “Let America Be America Again,” which gives voice to a number of people for whom the

Connections to Future Units:

- Students will read the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass in the next unit, which allows for students to draw the through lines between enslavement and red lining
- This is the first play students study in their English classes in Bristol. Students will go on to read Romeo and Juliet (9th), The Crucible (10th), Fences (11th), and Macbeth (12th) in high school.
- Students will further explore generational conflicts when studying Romeo and Juliet in 9th grade and Kindred in 10th.
- Students will consider how a person’s environment shapes them when studying Kindred, Of Mice and Men, and Fahrenheit 451 in 10th grade.

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| American Dream has been deferred. | |
| Family Overview (link below) | Pacing for Unit |
| • | • 31 lessons, 6 weeks |
| Integration of Technology: | Aligned Unit Materials, Resources, and Technology: |
| • Use of google docs is recommended throughout the writing process to facilitate drafting, feedback, collaboration, and revision | • Reading Reconsidered Lessons |
| Opportunities for Interdisciplinary Connections: | Anticipated misconceptions: |
| • | • |
| Differentiation through Universal Design for Learning | |
| UDL Indicator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CHECKPOINT 8.4 Increase mastery-oriented feedback | Teacher Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide feedback on writing lessons/CFAs that encourages perseverance, focuses on development of efficacy and self-awareness, and encourages the use of specific supports and strategies in the face of challenge Provide feedback on writing lessons/CFAs that emphasizes improvement and achieving a standard rather than on relative performance Use Show Call to provide feedback that is frequent, timely, and specific Use Show Call and/or Whole Class feedback to identify patterns of errors and wrong answers, and generate positive strategies for future success |
| Supporting Multilingual/English Learners | |
| Related CELP standards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6-8.4 An EL can construct grade appropriate oral and written claims and support them with reasoning and evidence. | Learning Targets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level 1: I can verbally or nonverbally express an opinion about a familiar topic (my home or my family) using a limited number of acquired words and phrases. Level 2: I can construct a claim about a familiar topic (my home or family) and give a reason to support it. Level 3: I can construct a claim about the Youngers or their decision to |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> move and provide several supporting reasons. Level 4: I can construct claims about the Youngers and their decision to move, provide several supporting reasons, and acknowledge opposing ideas Level 5: I can construct claims about the Youngers and their decision to move, provide several supporting reasons, and address the counterargument. |
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| Unit 4: A Raisin in the Sun | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Lesson Map | | | | |
| Lesson | Text | Learning Target | Vocabulary | Knowledge |
| 1 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 23-30 | I can consider what descriptions of the Youngers' apartment suggest about the family. | Weary Uniformity Pretense contradict (p. 23) pretense (p. 24) | Setting Symbolism Personification |
| 2 | <i>Non fictional articles</i> | I can examine the historical context of the play's setting. | accommodate (p. 23) oppression (p. 29) | |
| 3 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 30-39 | I can analyze the impact of staging on the developing tension and conflict of the play. | permeate (p. 35) futile (p. 45) | Conflict Tension |
| 4 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 39-46 | I can consider the meaning of the American Dream and its impact on the Youngers. | | symbolism |
| 5 | "Harlem" by Langston Hughes | I can analyze connections between Langston Hughes's "Harlem" and <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> . | | Simile Mood |
| 6 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 46-53 | I can analyze the dynamics of the relationships among the play's three central women. | raucous (p. 48) profound (p. 52) | |

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| 7 | Writing Lesson: Relevant Analysis | I can add relevant analysis to my paragraph by repeating key words and/or synonyms from my claim | | Synonym |
| 8 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 54-60 | I can examine how Hansberry intensifies conflict and raises the stakes in Scene Two. | bastion (p. 55) suppress (p. 59) | Conflict Stakes Exposition Rising action |
| 9 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 60-66 | I can consider influences on Beneatha's exploration of her identity. | liberate (p. 64) insinuate (p. 66) | |
| 10 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 67-75 | I can analyze the confrontation at the end of Act I. | | |
| 11 | Writing Lesson: Relevant analysis | I can add relevant analysis to my paragraph by repeating key words and/or synonyms from my claim | | |
| 12 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 76-81 | I can analyze how imagining their African heritage impacts Beneatha and Walter. | heritage (p. 81) majesty (p. 79) | |
| 13 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 82-89 | I can explore Walter's understanding of what it means to be a man. | | Allusion Prometheus |
| 14 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 89-95 | I can examine Mama's decision and its impact on the family. | radiant (p. 91) hostility (p. 92) | |
| 15 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 96-109 | I can consider the purpose and impact of visits from George and Mrs. Johnson. | | |
| 16 | Brief Write CFA | Given a weak body paragraph, students revise for deeper analysis, context, punctuation | | |
| 17 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> Pp 104 - 109 "Mother to Son" | I can write a paragraph response analyzing Mama's choice and its impact on Walter. | | |
| 18 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 110-121 | I can analyze Mr. Lindner's visit and its impact on the Youngers. | exuberant (p. 110) amiable (p. 114) | |

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| 19 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 121-130 | I can Analyze the play's climax at the end of Act II. | | |
| 20 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 131-140 | I can consider how the women of the family respond to the loss of the money. | idealist (p. 133) disillusioned (not in text) | |
| 21 | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> pp. 140-151 | I can examine the resolution of the play. | | |
| 22 | Seminar | I can engage in a Socratic Seminar with my peers to explore essential questions and make connections between texts. | | |
| 23 | Assessment | | | |
| 24 | Summative Writing | I can plan my essay by organizing my ideas and choosing the most relevant evidence to support them. | | |
| 25 | Summative Writing | I can draft complete body paragraphs for my summative essay. | | |
| 26 | Summative Writing | I can revise body paragraphs of my summative essay by ensuring my analysis is clearly tied to my claims. | | |
| 27 | Summative Writing | I can add a brief introduction and conclusion to the draft of my essay. | | |
| 28 | Flex | | | |
| 29 | Flex | | | |
| 30 | Flex | | | |
| 31 | Flex | | | |

BPS Ongoing Curriculum Revision: As part of the implementation process, teachers and supervisors will revisit the written curriculum to ensure that it is optimized for student learning. Minor changes to standards, learning targets, priorities, common learning experiences, assessments will be reflected below. Major curricular revisions will be done when 1) standards have been revised by the state of CT, OR 2) the curriculum is up for revision on the district revision timeline, OR 3) when more than 50% of the learning targets will be revised. Courses will be considered new when the course does not currently exist within the program of study.

| Course | Unit Title | Curricular Area | Change From | Revise To | Rationale |
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A New Way to Teach History

A curriculum now being developed enables students to engage with the subject at a deeper level.

[Natalie Wexler](#)

Mar 30, 2025



Efforts to improve education outcomes focus overwhelmingly on reading and math. Science often gets a nod. But social studies or history? Those subjects are generally overlooked, with many elementary schools barely teaching them at all. At higher grade levels, students often find the material boring.

The result: students don't know much about history. On the most recent national tests in US history, only 13 percent of eighth-graders scored "proficient" or above.

History textbooks can be dense and dry, and teachers may be ill-equipped to come up with engaging material to replace or supplement them. One survey found that only about 40 percent of social studies teachers have an undergraduate degree in history, and they're disproportionately likely to take on additional school-related duties. For example, nearly 34 percent coach an athletic team, teach physical education, or both.

“It’s really hard to get a history teaching job if you’re not a coach,” a Texas teacher told me recently.

But there are good reasons to elevate the status of history in the K-12 curriculum. One study found that elementary students from lower-income families who got more social studies than average did better on reading comprehension tests by fifth grade. As I’ve discussed elsewhere, that’s likely because social studies provided them with the knowledge and vocabulary needed to understand the passages on the test.

And teaching more history is probably the best way to address the lack of civics knowledge that many bemoan. History can provide the context that enables students to understand and retain concepts like “checks and balances.”

There are signs that history is starting to get more respect, including the launch of the History Matters Campaign, which promotes high-quality elementary history curricula. (I serve on the board of the campaign’s parent organization.) And a curriculum is now under development that could yield dramatic improvements in history instruction.

The Four Question Method

That curriculum is the brainchild of Jon Bassett and Gary Shiffman, two former high school social studies teachers who created an approach to teaching historical topics called the Four Question Method, which I’ve written about before. (I serve on the advisory board for their organization, 4QM Teaching.) It’s also described in their book, *From Story to Judgment*.

Briefly, the “four questions” are:

1. **What happened?** Students create a narrative of the major developments in a historical event in the form of a storyboard.
2. **What were they thinking?** Students explore what the historical actors believed they were doing, often using primary sources.
3. **Why then and there?** Students investigate why a particular event happened at the time and place it did.
4. **What do we think about that?** As a last step, students debate a question that requires judgment about the event.

Bassett and Shiffman originally thought that if they just disseminated the framework, teachers would adapt it to whatever topics they were teaching. But, as they recently wrote on their blog, they came to realize that most busy teachers don't have the bandwidth to do that. So they decided to write a curriculum grounded in their method, beginning with a course in US history geared to eighth grade.

That curriculum, which covers the period from 1492 to 1877, is now almost finished, and it's being beta-tested by a group of teachers around the country. In their post, Bassett and Shiffman say they've "learned a ton" from those teachers, and that they're tweaking and improving lessons based on the feedback they've gotten.

I was curious about how the beta testing was going, so I asked Bassett and Shiffman to connect me with some of the participating teachers. I spoke to a total of six in a variety of settings. While I heard a few suggestions for improvement (that's what beta testing is all about), all of them said they felt their teaching had become more effective as a result of the curriculum.

Here's what they told me:

Many kids arrive at middle school with little knowledge of history. That's because of the narrow focus on reading and math in elementary school. A couple of the teachers I spoke with said they have little trouble catching kids up on what they've missed, but at least one found the situation challenging, noting that her students arrive in eighth grade with "pretty much zero knowledge" about history.

"At least half of my kids have never been more than 20 to 50 miles outside town," said Stacie Dixon, who teaches in a low-income, rural part of eastern Texas. "So they haven't been going to museums or historic sites." Most don't know what the American Revolution was, she said, and if shown a map of the US would only be able to identify Texas and perhaps nearby Louisiana. "Even the higher-achieving students struggle," she said, "because there's so much they've never learned."

The 4QM approach enables teaching at a deeper level. "The way that our curriculum/classes were set up before did not really allow for this level of discussion," Blake Waller, who teaches in a Texas district similar to Dixon's, told me in an email. He and others said instruction focused on teaching a state social studies standard specifying certain content, trying to get kids to memorize the facts, and moving on to the next standard.

“Now that we are building student ability and capacity to grow in their narration, interpretation, explanation, and judgment skills,” he added, “we are able to go much deeper.”

Even the two teachers I spoke with at an elite private school in Manhattan, the Allen-Stevenson School, shared that perception. Ben Neulander and Winnie Barnes, who co-teach sixth grade history, said the curriculum they previously used tried to cover too many topics, sacrificing depth for breadth.

Students find the approach challenging at first but soon acquire the necessary skills.

The 4QM curriculum uses routines like creating a storyboard or finishing sentence “stems” about the content with the conjunctions *because*, *but*, and *so* (the latter routine is taken from The Writing Revolution method). While a couple of teachers said the routines can get tedious, they and others saw their value.

“At the beginning of the year,” said Dixon, “it would take them forever to do a storyboard or a *because, but, so*. Now it’s easier for them and they’re more efficient.” One boy, she said, started the year “always saying, ‘I don’t understand, I need your help.’ Now he’s usually one of the first with an answer, and his writing has improved.”

Tiffany Brandenburg, who teaches at a lab school affiliated with the University of Texas in Tyler, had a similar experience. At the beginning, taking the required notes on texts and trying to understand primary documents for Question Two was a struggle for her students. “Now,” she said, “they know the routine. They don’t complain.”

Students are more engaged. Colin Pratt, who teaches eighth graders in Bristol, Connecticut, put it bluntly: “The way I taught before was boring.” This year, he said, his students have enjoyed learning about history through the narratives created by Bassett and Shiffman. “It’s not like reading a history text,” he said. “It’s not as dry. It’s a story.

Brandenburg said her students like retelling the story through storyboards. “It’s probably the most engaged eighth-grade class I’ve had” in six years of teaching history, she said.

Students are learning more. Dixon compared her students’ scores on this year’s midyear benchmark state history tests to those of the eighth-grade class at her school last year, when her predecessor wasn’t using 4QM. The Texas tests categorize students by whether they “approach,” “meet,” or “master” grade-level standards. Last year, only 4

percent of students scored in the “meets” category midyear, and none were in “masters.” This year, 30 percent were in “meets” and 18 percent in “masters.”

Brandenburg’s observations were similar, if more anecdotal. “They remember more stuff than my previous classes,” she said. “Like Bacon’s Rebellion. Who remembers Bacon’s Rebellion?”

Waller observed that having students retell the story through note-taking was a powerful way “to build understanding and knowledge, especially for struggling readers.” And both Brandenburg and Pratt noted that the curriculum uses routines grounded in the concept of “retrieval practice.”

Studies have found that the more learners practice retrieving items of information they have in long-term memory but may have slightly forgotten, the more likely they are to be able to recall those items in the future. Creating storyboards, responding to *because/but/so* prompts, taking notes, and answering questions about content covered the previous day are all forms of retrieval practice that are baked into the 4QM curriculum.

Students learn to understand primary sources and see multiple points of view.

Question Two, which focuses on what historical actors were thinking, often requires students to interpret primary sources. Dixon noted that the Texas state history test includes a number of primary sources, and when students took the benchmark test at the beginning of the year they found those documents intimidating. But when they took the test midyear, “they were like, this is easy.”

In addition, several teachers commented that Question Two enables students to understand the perspectives of the authors of those historical documents, even when those perspectives differ from their own. That carries over to the judgment required by Question Four. “You need to know the context before you can judge,” said Barnes. For instance, she said, the sixth graders she teaches were able to see beyond the fact that Thomas Jefferson owned slaves to also “value his contributions.”

When Dixon’s students came to the Question Four for the unit on the American Revolution—“When is violence justified to achieve political change?”—“they were all on the side of the revolutionaries,” she said. “They had to work hard to see the other point of view.” Dixon feels the approach helps students learn “not to make snap judgments.”

Students learn how to engage in civil disagreement. For the unit on Writing the Constitution, Question Four is “Should we keep the Electoral College?” Waller and Brandenburg both told me that discussion came on the heels of a polarizing presidential election but nevertheless went remarkably well.

“I told them, it’s not about what I think, it’s what do *you* think?” said Brandenburg. “It showed them we *can* disagree, and that’s okay. They can voice different opinions, but they need to listen.”

Waller said that an administrator who happened to be observing his class that day gave him the highest rating he’d ever received. His class has also had productive discussions about topics like slavery and what’s fair in campaign speech.

“4QM provides a solid framework to base those discussions [on] so that real civil discourse can take place,” he added, “and we can truly learn from one another to help better explain and understand the past. Students are already beginning to see how these skills can help them navigate the tricky issues of the day.”

Despite their disparate settings, all the teachers I spoke with were eager to use the curriculum again. “I’m ready to start it again on day one of next year,” said Dixon. Barnes said her school doesn’t have time to cover the whole curriculum in sixth grade, but she’s passing on the Civil War unit to the seventh-grade history teacher, who begins with that topic. Brandenburg said she wishes there was a 4QM curriculum for the ninth-grade world history class she also teaches.

It's challenging to improve history instruction on a broad scale. Each state has different social studies standards, making it difficult to develop a coherent high-quality curriculum that can be used across the country. But all state standards include US history, usually in eighth grade, making that a logical place to start. And ideally, once teachers see what can be done in that context, a framework like the Four Question Method will trickle up to higher grade levels—and even, perhaps, down to the elementary level, where more history instruction is clearly needed.

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By Natalie Wexler · Launched 4 years ago

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4QM Teacher Survey Results

Summary

The survey results show strong overall support for adopting the 4 Question Method as a common pedagogical framework in the department. All four teachers who completed the methodology survey recommended using 4QM as a framework, and three out of four teachers who piloted the curriculum materials recommended purchasing and/or adapting them.

Strengths

1. Consistent Framework for Historical Thinking

- “Having a consistent method in which students gather, analyze, and evaluate information makes students more conscious and thoughtful. Using this method has helped students gain a deeper understanding not only of history, but of their own thinking and judgement.”

2. Vertical Alignment Benefits

- “The vertical alignment that this would give us as a department would be so important. Students would have consistency and alignment year over year. Teachers would feel more comfortable and could really dive into the material to provide clarity for students.

3. Knowledge Building

- “I believe it helped with knowledge retention for sure because each lesson starts with a do now that relates back to the previous lesson and each unit starts with a story board that is often referred back to and allows students to see how one event led to another or was caused by something else.”

4. Sourcework

- “The Q2 and Q3 primary documents allow students to take an in depth look and develop meaningful understanding of content specific topics through primary sources.”

5. Ease of Planning

- “The curriculum and materials streamlined the planning and workload. It has made it easier.”

4QM Framework/Curriculum - Challenges

1. Grade-Level Compatibility

- "I am interested to learn how the method could be adapted (or force us to adapt to it?) in grades 6 and 7, or really, any course that isn't based on a chronological timeline of major events."

2. Opportunities for Discourse

- "Nothing doesn't align, but we would need to help with Q1 so teachers don't feel like it is all lecture."

3. Content Alignment

- "Some of the lessons/units seem to focus on topics that are not part of what we currently believe are important to cover in the amount of depth and also omit some of the topics we have covered in the past."
- "This is not a curriculum formulated around our brand new state standards."

4. Potential Adaptations

- "Several units I think are perfect just the way they are however others I would prefer that we as a team develop to better fit what we are currently doing such as the western expansion lesson."

4QM Student Empathy Interviews

The Four Question Method (4QM) is largely perceived positively by students, aligning with several strengths identified by teachers. Student feedback highlights specific successes and provides clear direction for refining implementation, particularly around active engagement during note-taking.

Key Takeaways

- 1. Students Appreciate Structure and Clarity:** Students widely appreciated the structure, predictability, and clarity provided by 4QM. This consistent approach helped them understand daily expectations and prepare for lessons. At least four students (Students 1, 4, 5, 6) explicitly described this "repetitive but helpful" dynamic.
 - Student 1: "With this class, I think there was a lot more structure behind it...everything we had right in front of us. We were able to figure it out pretty quickly...knowing what's coming, I think, helps prepare a lot of students as well".
 - Student 4: "I think it's helpful because it's repetitive and it's kind of like you get down in the mindset of today, we're working on Question one today, working on question two, and just kind of helped to, like, figure out what we're going to be doing that day".
 - Student-Teacher Alignment: Students' appreciation for structure and clarity validates teacher observations that 4QM could provide a consistent framework for historical thinking. Both groups recognize that this systematic approach aids comprehension and predictability.
- 2. Students Appreciate Narrative Notes and Storyboards:** Students consistently identified narrative notes and storyboards as effective and often enjoyable tools for learning. Narrative notes were praised by at least four students (Students 1, 4, 5, 6), and storyboards were popular with at least five students (Students 1, 2, 4, 5, 6).
 - Student 6 on Narrative Notes: "Narrative notes "kind of help, like, understand because you could put into your own words and really think about it".
 - Student 2 on Storyboards: "Drawing it is way more better...That storyboard would make me want to go back into the article, look for any more information, and then draw about it".
 - Student-Teacher Alignment: Students' positive experiences with these tools align with teacher's observations that narrative note taking is a powerful tool to build knowledge, and that these activities (part of Q1 lessons) help "create a base of a story". Both students and teachers see these as effective activities for comprehension and knowledge construction.

3. **Students Distinguish Between Active and Passive Note Taking:** Active cognitive engagement in the note-taking process is crucial for deeper learning. Subtle shifts in implementation can counteract the potential for lessons to become passive or "lecture-heavy," a concern voiced by teachers.
- Student 4 on active note-taking: "Instead of going from, I'm gonna show you what the notes are...to where you're gonna write your own notes...now you have to write your own I feel like it's making maybe me a better...note writer...because I kind of focus more on the reading, and I stay more focused". She noted this active process, with less direct information on the board, improved her quiz scores.
 - Student 1 on the need for engagement: "I would make it a little more engaging...sometimes when it's a narrative notes day, it's like they're talking at us...So I think making it a little more engaging would definitely help".
 - Student-Teacher Alignment: Student desire for more engagement (Student 1) and the demonstrated success of more active processing during note-taking (Student 4) directly address teacher concerns that Q1 could be lecture-heavy and the general need for more student discourse. Student experiences indicate that the *implementation* of activities like narrative notes is key to their success.
4. **Students Appreciate Vertical Alignment:** The majority of students (five out of six: Students 1, 3, 4, 5, 6) support the idea of using the 4QM in younger grades and future high school classes, anticipating benefits from familiarity and increased confidence.
- Student 6: "It would feel like something I've already done so it's like, I already have understanding. And I kind of know I do it because I've been in class...It would give confidence".
 - Student 1: "I do think it's a useful thing. Yeah, I've really enjoyed the narrative notes this year. I've gotten very familiar with the processes we've used this year".
 - Student-Teacher Alignment: Students' enthusiasm for consistent application of 4QM across grades validates teachers' emphasis on the potential benefits of vertical alignment, which they believe would offer students "consistency and alignment year over year". Both groups see significant value in this long-term, structured approach.

Student feedback affirms teachers' intuitions about the structural benefits of 4QM and the power of its core activities, especially when implemented to foster active student engagement. By emphasizing active processing during note-taking, the framework can effectively address concerns about passive learning and enhance its overall impact.