

# Additional Notes for Teachers/Mentors

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## Overview

[Investigating American History](#) contains learner materials using primary sources from America's past that focus on an aspect of effective learning—principles essential to the sense-making process.

We've added several new units, each with investigations that include more primary sources. All fit the conceptual sequence of *IAH*, and add sufficient material for a full year's course for those teachers or mentors who enjoy enough autonomy to make use of them. Others may wish to use some of the investigations in *IAH* or in the additional units to supplement traditional courses.

Listed below are the *IAH* course materials (numbered), along with the additional units (double indented and blue), in the sequence we recommend:

- Columbus and the Natives, 1492-1493 (Inferring)
- 1. Planning a Spanish Town (Active learning project)
- 2. Life in a Puritan Village (Using primary sources)
- 3. New England Native Americans (Organizing knowledge)
- 4. Colonial Virginia's Setting (Model category: Setting)
- 5. Colonial Population Changes (Model category: Demographics)
- 6. Native American Patterns of Action (Model category: Action patterns)
- 7. Puritan Shared Ideas, (Model category: Shared Ideas)
  - Colonial Exchange Patterns, 1725-1765 (Economic systems)
  - Stamp Act; Colonials React, 1765-1766 (Values and emotions)
  - Biased Reporting/Boston Massacre, 1770 (Values, emotions, selective perception)
  - Constitution/Bill of Rights, 1787-1791 (Political power)
- 8. Relationships on the Ohio Frontier (Systemic relationships)
  - Northeastern Region 1800-1850 (Systemic relationships)
  - Southern Region, 1800-1850 (Systemic relationships)
  - Western Region 1800-1850 (Systemic relationships)
  - Comparing Regions, 1800-1850 (Cultural differences)
  - Native Americans, 1840-1900 (Systemic relationships: cultural interaction)
- 9. Polarization before the Civil War (System change: Polarization)
  - Polarization and Slavery, 1819-1860 (System change: Polarization)
- 10. Problems in Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century America (System change: autonomy, and stress)
  - Industrial Change, 1865-1890 (Autonomy and stress)
  - African-Americans, 1865-1910 (Autonomy and stress)
  - Immigrants, 1870-1930 (Autonomy and stress)
- 11. Changes in a Native American Group & Changes related to World War I (System change: Complex causation)
  - Boom and Depression, 1920-1941 (Economic system change)
  - System Change/Cities, 1945-1990 (System change: Cumulative causation)

## Beginning the Course:

Thoughtful historians face a problem: The amount of information about the past is limitless. There is, then, no such thing as an objective account of it. The story that gets told reflects the assumptions and values of the teller. That so many history textbooks tell very similar stories is mostly attributable to the market. Textbook selection committees expect to see some version of what they've seen before.

Most writers of histories don't make explicit their criteria for selecting content. The late Carroll Quigley, an extremely popular history teacher at the Georgetown School of Foreign Service, said this in the introduction to his book *The Evolution of Civilizations*:

" . . . it should require only a moment's thought to recognize that the facts of the past are infinite, and the possible arrangements of any selection from these facts are equally numerous. Since all the facts cannot be mobilized in any written history because of their great number, there must be some principle on which selection from these facts is based. . .

"If historians are not explicit, at least to themselves, about their principles of selection among the facts of the past and among the many possible arrangements of these facts, all histories will be simply accidental compilations that cannot be justified in any rational way. Historians will continue to write about some of the events of history while neglecting others equally significant or even more significant, and they will form patterns for these facts along lines determined by traditional (and basically accidental) lines or in reflection of old controversies about the pattern of these facts."

Our view, of course, is that events or periods are important enough to include if they had significant systemic effects on later American society or illustrate some important idea. This doesn't, of course, make the "importance" decision an easy one, because tracing the consequences of any event or circumstance is extremely complicated. Different investigators will have different opinions and values.

However, it's obvious that some wars are of less importance than others, that some elections haven't mattered all that much, and some Supreme Court decisions are of little consequence. These days, especially, if we need information about the "XYZ Affair" or what happened during the administration of Millard Fillmore, finding answers is as close as the nearest Internet-connected computer or smartphone.

**Learners can be introduced to active learning, and to the nature and difficulties of the content selection process, by the Investigations on the next page.**

In the second investigation, we suggest that the first part—writing a brief "History of My Morning"—be introduced verbally and completed before proceeding with the rest of the investigation.

Discussion of the final questions ("How big could an American history book be? How big should it be?") leads rather naturally into creating a timeline. See "Historical Context" that follows the material for learners on the next page.

## Investigation: Drawing Inferences

(For this exercise, you'll need three coins of the same value, such as pennies.)

1. *Imagine you're on a beach, hundreds or thousands of years in the future. The tide has just gone out, you see something unusual in the sand, and you discover three metal objects.*

*Suppose also that you know nothing at all about the country or people who made the objects, and there are no available records. Assume you don't know the meaning of any of the symbols (letters or numbers) on them.*

*You're curious about the society that created the objects and have lots of questions, but have no source of answers except whatever you can figure out (infer).*

2. *Examine the objects. Consider these questions:*

*What kind of technology was necessary to make them? What can you infer about the society that made the objects—its size, organization, ways of acting, etc.? List your inferences, and your reasons for each inference.*

## Investigation: What's Important?

One problem with making sense of the past is that there's so much of it. Let's begin by looking at a tiny piece of history that you know more about than anyone else.

*Write a brief (half-page or less) history of your morning from the time you woke up until school started. Finish before going on.*



*Next: Make a list of everything you can think of that you left out of your "history of this morning." Everything—sights and smells, specific actions, things you did, things other people around you did, estimates of temperature, information about exactly what you did where, and so on.*

*Stop writing when it gets easy to add to the list.*

*How big might your "history of this morning" be if you included everything you left out—not just what's on your list, but everything you could have included?*

*How big could a history book be? How big should it be?*

### *For Teachers/Mentors—Historical Context:*

As we've said elsewhere, telling the story of America's past isn't the aim of these course materials. There's little mention of George Washington, no account of Lexington and Concord, no description of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, no French and Indian War or War of 1812, no Gettysburg battle or sinking of the battleship Maine in Havana harbor. Those with conventional views of what should be in an American history course will likely reject *Investigating American History* soon after looking at it.

Our main focus isn't to tell one of the near-infinite number of stories about America's past that could be told, but to improve learner ability to make sense of experience, engage in a full range of cognitive processes, introduce and elaborate the elements of a descriptive-analytical model, and understand the dynamics of historical change. We believe these are more important aims than simply remembering certain random details of America's past.

That said, there's value in acquiring (or re-acquiring) the "bones of the story." It provides context for the program's investigations. It also serves as a kind of "social cement," providing Americans with a shared picture of the past and a shared "language of allusion." Surveys make it clear that many (maybe most) of those exposed to the usual number of required history courses recall very little of what they once read or heard.

This isn't surprising. We forget largely because we're exposed to so much poorly organized information it overloads our ability to sort it out, make sense of it, and mentally store it. To add to the difficulty, what we read or hear is rarely reinforced and applied in a memorable or effective way.

This isn't to say that we can't learn from passive instruction, but for new information to stick, it (1) needs to be relatively simple, and (2) needs to be put to useful work. For example, if students are given information to create a simple timeline of United States history, with a limited number of events or periods, and they then use it over and over to establish chronological context for what's being learned, the timeline is likely to become part of their permanent mental equipment.

In the student materials on the next page are suggested contents for one such timeline, chosen because of their systemic impact on American society and culture. We suggest the list be used for discussion using questions such as: **What makes an historical event or period important? Are these the most important? Why or why not? Are there some you'd leave out or others you'd include?**

When the discussion winds down, learners can use the list (or their revised version of it) to create the timeline.

**See note following student materials.**

(Next page: Student materials)

## Investigation: Generating an American History Timeline

Wars, elections, inventions, natural disasters, heroes, villains, immigration, crime, celebrations—the list of past events is endless. If you go to the Internet, you’ll find summaries and timelines that include far too much information to remember. What you need is something less complicated. To make sense of America’s past, a relatively simple “timeline” will help.

Deciding what events and eras to include can be difficult. Here’s a list of what many historians think is pretty basic:

- Spanish discovery and colonization—1492 to 1600 (and beyond)
- English colonization—1607 to 1690 (and beyond)
- Revolutionary War: 1775-1783
- Declaration of Independence: 1776
- Constitution and Bill of Rights: 1787-1791
- Louisiana purchase: 1803
- Texas, Southwest and California from Mexico: 1836-1848
- Civil War: 1861-1865
- Great Depression: 1930-1941
- World War II: 1941-1945
- Cold War: 1945-1990

1. ***On a sheet of paper, draw a vertical line near the left side. Mark it off in even increments of 50 or 100 years. Choose spacing for the increments that allows the line to cover the period from the beginning year (at the top) to the present (bottom).***

2. ***Mark the above events or periods at the proper place on your timeline.***

***As you move forward, you might choose to add a few other events or periods, or change it in some other way, but keep it simple enough that you can recall most of it without looking.***

**General note to teachers/mentors:**

As we've said, the American history student materials we've supplied do not "cover" significant (and dramatic) elements of the traditional story, including **battles and wars, the Louisiana Purchase (with Lewis and Clark's expedition), the 1849 gold rush, "heroes and holidays,"** and similar content. These are sources of great stories, but they don't give much insight into the important processes and principles that we emphasize. However they could provide opportunities for additional investigation by learners, or for use of supplementary materials.

Throughout the course, interweaving elements of the conventional story in some form with the investigations will give a change of pace, and perhaps a chance to be a storyteller (a role some teachers play with skill and enthusiasm.). Videos and other dramatic forms of stories and biographies from America's past may also be used occasionally with good effect, especially if it's clear to learners that "context" doesn't mean that they're likely to find a question about it on a test.

Another possibility is to ask working groups of students to prepare presentations on these additional subjects to be given to the whole class or some other audience.

Link to webpage for *Investigating American History*:

<http://www.marionbrady.com/AHH.asp>