

Overview of Middle School Social Studies for Families Grade 8

Wake County Public Schools Middle School Social Studies classes provide students an opportunity to build on the fourth and fifth grade introductions to North Carolina and the United States by embarking on a more rigorous study of the historical foundations and democratic principles that continue to shape our state and nation. The main focus of the course will be the critical events, personalities, issues, and developments in the state and nation from the Revolutionary Era to contemporary times. Inherent in this study is an analysis of the relationship of geography, events, and people to the political, economic, technological, and cultural developments that shaped our existence in North Carolina and the United States over time. Although the major focus is state and national history, efforts should be made to include a study of local history. Your child's teacher provides strong instruction using standards-aligned curricula resources that emphasizes close reading, active learning and student engagement. Resources provide an opportunity for reading, writing, speaking, and listening through a variety of instructional strategies. Classrooms are structured with highly collaborative activities that allow students to engage in academic conversations and study rich academic topics.

What will my middle schooler be doing in class?

The year is divided into 11 units and each module is between three and five weeks in length. During each unit, students build background knowledge about a topic. They engage in research guided by essential questions. They read a variety of literary and informational texts as well as digital resources which are provided to all students. Students engage in critical thinking to gather evidence to support their thinking or claims about the featured topic or issue. In the journey to develop their own perspectives, students collaborate and communicate with their peers. Students are ultimately able to create products (performance tasks) to capture and share their learning and demonstrate perseverance by taking responsibility and initiative for completing high-quality work. Grammar and conventions are incorporated into reading and writing lessons.

What will my middle schooler be doing at home?

Students will extend their learning experiences at home, continuing to read and write each day. As a family, you may have opportunities to engage in conversations around topics of study and current events.

What can I do to support my middle schooler with Social Studies?

- You may want to consider reading the texts and sharing your own experiences related to the topic. Engage in conversations by asking probing questions about your child's learning experience such as:
 - What new information did you learn about?
 - What does this new learning remind you of?
 - What do you wonder about?
 - How can I help you find out more?
 - What questions do you have?
- Read your child's writing, or have your child read his/her writing aloud to you. Not only will you as a parent or guardian begin to understand your child's thinking, but you can also help your child clarify his/her own thinking by talking through the writing process with him/her.
- Ask your child what he/she is doing for research around the topic.
- Support your child with independent reading (i.e. encourage your child to go to your school's media center or public library, encourage time and space for independent reading at home).

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Unit 1: Thinking like a Historian

The **Thinking like a Historian and Geography** unit allows eighth-grade students to reflect on the concepts that they learned in sixth and seventh grade and prepare to learn more about United States history and through the modern era. Students will review primary and secondary sources, geographic knowledge, timelines and the importance of studying history. These skill sets will prepare them for the remainder of the course while also providing an opportunity to remediate and enrich prior skills. Students will also understand the human and physical characteristics of regions in North Carolina and the United States.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- What methods do historians use in researching and writing history?
- How do we, as students, think like historians?
- How do perspective and bias affect the validity of primary and secondary sources?
- How does the geography of the United States impact the culture and characteristics of different regions?

Unit 2: Native Populations, Exploration, and Colonization

The **Native Populations, Exploration, and Colonization** unit allows students to contextualize the historic importance of Native Americans, and how the Age of Exploration and colonization have impacted North America. Students will learn that Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans populated the thirteen colonies that would become the United States. Each group faced its own unique challenges, which informed its histories and traditions. The social, religious, economic and political patterns that emerged in North Carolina, and America reflected the physical geography of the region as well as the ideas and traditions the various colonial groups (Jamestown, Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay, etc) brought to the Americas.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- Was colonization a good thing? For whom?
- Were Carolinians “poor subjects of Britain?”
- How did the Tuscarora War define colonial North Carolina through conflict?
- How did the differences in colonial life, such as geography and culture, impact the relationship settlers had with Britain?
- What political/economic events in early North Carolina demonstrate both tight and loose governance of the colony?
- How might the experiences of groups like Africans in America impact their relationship with Britain?

Unit 3: Revolution and New Government

The **Revolution and New Government** unit allows students to analyze the origin of the American Revolution, the role North Carolinians played, and the impacts of war. Students will explore the ideals on which the United States was built on with the first two governments: the Articles of Confederation and the United States Constitution.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- Should North Carolinians have been revolutionary?
- Further, were North Carolinians “ready revolutionaries” or “cautious revolutionaries”?
- Did governments (USA and NC) work for the people or do we work for the government?
- How did North Carolinians respond to British attempts to take more control of the colonies?
- How did the experiences of African Americans differ during the revolution?
- How did women experience and participate in the American Revolution?
- What were the experiences of soldiers during the war?
- How did North Carolina respond to the Articles of Confederation?
- How did reformers try to stop the economic/political decline of NC?
- What were the experiences of the Cherokee people during these years?
- How did the North Carolina Constitution of 1835 impact the people of the state?

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Unit 4 Growth & Conflict: Compromises, Civil War, and Reconstruction

In the **Growth and Conflict** unit students will contextualize the conflicts that emerge through the growth of the nation. Students should make the connection between **westward expansion** and the issues that arise to start the **Civil War**. Students should also draw on the concepts from *Revolution and New Government* in order to understand how the debates and compromises taking place at the founding of our government (slavery, federalism, states' rights, etc) shape the course of our nation's history during the 1800s. Finally, students will understand the challenges faced during Reconstruction and how the conflict over rights for African Americans persists. Within the context of **Reconstruction**, there are opportunities to make connections to the Civil Rights Era and modern day.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- How did westward expansion create political conflict and compromise?
- Was the Mexican American War and the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny justifiable?
- How did Americans create and overcome challenges along the Western frontier?
- How accurate was Lincoln in his assessment that a nation could not “*continue together permanently--forever--half slave, and half free?*”
- What influence can a president have on a politically divided nation?
- How and why did the Union win the war?
- How would North Carolina be different if it had stayed with the Union?
- What was the promise of Emancipation? To what extent was it fulfilled by Reconstruction?
- How did Reconstruction affect North Carolina?
- Why and how did Reconstruction end?
- In what ways is the United States still dealing with the legacies of Reconstruction?

Unit 5: Progress: Industrialization and the Progressive Era

In the **Progress: Industrialization and Progressive Era** unit, students will explore the immense changes and growth made in America during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Students should be able to identify the ways in which technology and innovators changed American society and economy, and how those changes affected working class Americans. It should be pointed out that a great section of society did prosper during the time, but at what cost to the workers? There are great discussions and comparisons to be made to today's society, including the economy and modern monopolies, and the role immigrants play in the workforce and their treatment in society.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- What was the impact of the industrial revolution in North Carolina?
- How did the “Five Men Who Built America” shape our American economy and culture?
- How did the American technological advances affect the US economy?
- Is greed good?
- How do citizens create and affect change in communities?
- Is the American Dream still relevant today?
- How did the excesses of the Gilded Age contribute to the development of the Progressive Movement?

Unit 6: Personal Financial Literacy

In this **Personal Financial Literacy Unit**, students will explore factors to consider when making personal financial choices such as income, college and career paths, employment benefits, and investment opportunities. EverFi, a web-based curriculum designed in partnership with MassMutual, will guide students through a series of four lessons on financial literacy.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- How do personal financial choices impact one's quality of life?
- How do I choose when to use different available payment methods?
- How might college/career paths affect my financial stability as an adult?
- How can I apply systematic decision making to setting and achieving financial goals?

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Unit 7: The World Stage: the World Wars, Boom, and Bust

In **The World Stage: World Wars, Boom and Bust** unit, students will discuss and analyze how the United States emerged from its isolationist policy and became a player in world affairs. Students will determine why the United States got involved in the World Wars and what effect they had on American citizens. Students should have covered the major causes and effects of WWI and WWII and technological advances in warfare made during the wars in seventh grade, and the content in eighth grade should build upon this, but focus more on the United States' role in the wars and the effect on the homefront. The effects on the homefront should be highlighted, as this leads to the social changes and economic boom of the 1920s (and 1940s and 1950s). Prior to teaching this unit and exploring the economics of the 1920s and 1930s, students should have completed the **Personal Financial Literacy** Unit and have a vocabulary in which to discuss the credit and banking crisis that occurred.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- When was going to war justified?
- What led to the decision to fight?
- What were the experiences of soldiers?
- How did the home front get involved in World War I?
- Did World War I lead to World War II?
- When should government step in to help people who are economically struggling?
- Did the 1920s "roar"?
- How did the people of North Carolina experience the Great Depression?
- How did the American people attempt to address the problems of the Great Depression?
- Should a country be isolated in a time of global conflict?
- Why did the United States enter World War II?
- How did people experience the war abroad and at home?
- What was the scope and significance of the Holocaust?
- How did World War II change America?

Unit 8: The Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement

For this **The Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement** unit, students will explore the political, social, economic and military changes in the United States and North Carolina from 1945 through the early 1970s. The purpose of combining the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement into one unit is to help students understand the intersection of politics, race and war in the mid-twentieth century. For example, the Red Scare and McCarthyism influenced the way many civil rights activists were portrayed in the news media and perceived by government officials. Additionally, the anti-war protests of the era often overlapped-- ideologically and practically-- with protests for civil rights. The aim of this unit is for students to make those crucial connections and be able to contextualize the politics of war and race as being deeply entwined.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- How did the fear of communism influence American foreign policy?
- What were the political, economic and military impacts of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan?
- How did the fear of communism impact American society?
- To what extent were various methods of citizen action successful in anti-war and civil rights protests?

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Unit 9: Globalization: Modern Wars and the Global Economy

In this **Globalization: Modern Wars and the Global Economy** unit, students will explore social, political and economic changes from the early 1970s to the present. Considering our students are Digital Natives (they were born into a society in which the internet and digital communication was already prevalent), this unit will help students realize societal impacts of the advent of the internet. For instance, students will explore ways in which the internet has impacted citizens' relationships with their government over time. Primarily, this unit will require students to explore late-twentieth century and early-twenty first century economics in the United States and North Carolina. Activities related to the Great Recession (2007-2009 in the US) will ask students to compare modern economic issues to those they have studied from the early- and mid-twentieth century.

Standards-aligned Questions:

- What is the most important issue for the United States and/or North Carolina today?
- How did the Watergate scandal alter Americans' perception of their government?
- How did the implementation of Reaganomics affect the national economy?
- What were the causes and what have been the social, economic and military effects of the War on Terror?
- How has the internet impacted the relationship between Americans and their government?
- To what extent do politics and environmental issues intersect in modern America?
- What economic factors and decisions caused the Great Recession?
- What actions have helped recover the US economy?

Resources from the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI)

- [NCDPI Social Studies K-12 Standards: Disciplinary Strands Documents](#)
- [NCDPI 8th Grade Social Studies Essential Standards](#)