

# ARIZONA • U.S. HISTORY



## GRADE

C

## SCORES

Content and Rigor 4/7  
Clarity and Specificity 1/3

## TOTAL SCORE

5/10

## Overview

Arizona's standards stress abstract concepts over clear chronological development. Furthermore, what is at times a competent historical overview is seriously undermined by illogical division of time periods among grades. Moreover, both jargon and political ideology intrude far too often.

## Goals and Organization

Arizona's *Social Studies Standard* is divided into five strands: American history, world history, civics/government, geography, and economics. The American history strand is then divided into subsections called "concepts"; after a general section on "research skills," these concepts comprise chronological subdivisions. Finally, grade-specific learning expectations are provided for grades K–8.

The high school standards are organized similarly, except that only a single set of standards is provided for grades 9–12.

Basic concepts (such as chronology, cause and effect, and primary versus secondary sources) are stressed in the early grades, but material is often illogically broken up and confusing. Historical content continues to be divided arbitrarily across grades as the curriculum develops. The Revolutionary period is covered in Kindergarten and then in second, fifth, and eighth grades. The 1800–1860 period is discussed in second, fourth, and fifth grades, but not again until high school. The Civil War is covered in third, fourth, fifth, and seventh grades (and as part of Arizona history in fourth grade), and then in high school. The era from 1875–1929 is covered in third and fourth grades (again as part of the Arizona history) and then in seventh grade and in high school. The Revolutionary period is discussed in eighth grade, *after* covering the era from the Civil War to the Great Depression in seventh grade. World War II and the Cold War and its aftermath pop up in eighth grade and again in high school.

## Evaluation

Arizona's standards make a promising start by introducing elementary school students to the distinction between primary and secondary sources and, most importantly, to the need to understand the chronological order and interrelatedness of historical events. First-grade students use primary sources such as maps, photos, and artifacts. By second grade, students are learning to place historical events "in chronological order on a timeline." By sixth grade, students are expected to "determine the credibility and bias of primary and secondary sources" and analyze "the cause and effect relationships between and among individuals and/or historical events."

## ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Arizona Academic Standards: The Social Studies Standard Articulated by Grade Level, U.S. history segments (2006)

### Accessed from:

<http://www.ade.state.az.us/standards/sstudies/articulated/>

But the success of such abstract pedagogical goals must ultimately be judged by the accuracy and coherence of the substantive historical material on which they are based. The standards do attempt to build historical comprehension gradually in the early grades, introducing a few key concepts that small children can understand, then adding complexity when they are somewhat older. Yet in the general skills sections, for example, the division of content among grades often seems arbitrary and repetitive.

More importantly, related history and ideas, which clearly must be understood together, are sometimes introduced several grades apart. For example, the early exploration of the Americas is dealt with at some length in Kindergarten and first grade, but the notion that explorers were motivated by “economic and political reasons” is not mentioned until third grade.

For the most part, the actual historical outlines are presented chronologically within each grade, providing a reasonable amount of information. But material continues to be illogically broken up across grades as the curriculum develops. The awkward and counterintuitive grade-by-grade sequence jumps about from era to era, preventing students from comprehending clear sequential development.

Regrettably, there are unmistakable and repeated intrusions of ideology. In discussing pre-contact cultures of the Americas, for instance, the Arizona standards present an idealized portrait of “the achievements and features (e.g., mathematics, astronomy, architecture)” of the Mayan, Aztec, and Inca civilizations. Surely, students should also learn about the existence of aggression, war, slavery, and human sacrifice in these cultures. Even as late as sixth grade, the standards merely add “government, social structure, [and] arts and crafts” to the earlier list of Mesoamerican achievements. Some of the more graphic details are probably inappropriate at the earliest grades, but leaving them out entirely is dishonest and misleading.

The high school section on the American Revolution likewise promotes the entirely mythic historical importance of the Iroquois League in American constitutionalism, yet fails to mention the crucial experimentation that took place in the state constitutions between 1776 and 1781. When students are asked to analyze the experiences and perspectives of various groups in the Revolutionary era, the list of choices is extremely skewed—of the five groups, four are clearly intended as marginalized victims: African Americans, women, Native Americans, and indentured servants. The only other group mentioned is “property owners”—whom students are plainly meant to judge negatively in comparison.

Oddly, the content of the high school sections often lacks the specificity found in the earlier grades. The 1929–1945 section,

while including some key points, is egregiously sketchy—it manages to include Japanese internment and the atomic bombings, while ignoring the rise of fascism and the roots of World War II. The Navaho code talkers (an Arizona connection, to be sure) and minority participation in military units are offered as two of only three items about war mobilization. The post-war section is short on detail or guidance for teachers. The section on the recent past (since 1970) is an even more inadequate list of decontextualized points.

By the time students reach the high school curriculum, the Arizona standards expect them to have acquired sufficient skill to formulate questions based upon historical study and research. In order to achieve that advanced level of historical analysis, students are expected to be able to: evaluate primary and secondary sources for their main points, purpose, and perspective; distinguish between facts, opinions, and different points of view on the same historical event; and assess credibility and validity. Mastering such skills is a worthy goal. But Arizona’s presentation of U.S. history must be made considerably more logical and sequential before students can realistically be expected to understand it—let alone to analyze it to the degree that the high school standards purport to require.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Arizona’s U.S. history outline is overly broad and incomplete; it leaves out too much specific content, and some included content is undermined by an ideological tilt. The substantive rigor and progressive degree of sophistication, which should be apparent as students move from the early grades into high school, is often unclear. These problems weaken much of the content that is present. As such, Arizona earns a four out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The scope and sequence of the historical material is often muddled and difficult to follow. The chronological periods covered in each grade jump about bizarrely—eras appear, are skipped, and are repeated from grade to grade with little historical logic or progressive sequence. Students will have difficulty developing a clear picture of America’s historical development. The actual content—especially in early grades—is reasonably specific despite the poor organization. But the standards’ prose tends too often toward social studies jargon. The flawed historical outline, weighed down by inadequate clarity or sequence, earns the state a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)