

# INDIANA • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

**A-**

SCORES

Content and Rigor **6/7**  
Clarity and Specificity **3/3**

TOTAL SCORE

**9/10**

## Overview

On balance, Indiana's U.S. history standards present solid and substantive content, albeit with scattered errors and thematic departures from chronology. Unfortunately, the decision to cover U.S. history as a single once-through sequence (split across grades five, eight, and high school) shortchanges early American history, which is covered only in earlier grades when student comprehension is inevitably limited.

## Goals and Organization

Indiana's K–8 social studies standards are divided into four thematic strands: history, civics and government, geography, and economics. For each strand, the state provides a straightforward outline, with thematic or chronological headings and grade-specific content expectations.

The organization of the high school standards differs in two important ways. First, the standards are presented by course—such as U.S. History, U.S. Government, and World History—rather than by grade level. Second, within each course, the standards are not divided by thematic strand; strands relevant to each content item are instead noted parenthetically.

Indiana's engagement with history in general, and America in particular, begins in Kindergarten and first grade with the study of national symbols and holidays, concepts of chronology, and differences between the past and the present. The basics of U.S. government are covered in second grade. Native Americans and basic local history are introduced in third grade, along with distinctions between historical fact and fiction. Fourth grade offers a more sophisticated course on Indiana history.

American history per se is treated in a single sequence over grades five, eight, and high school, with limited recapitulation of earlier periods in later courses. Fifth grade covers the pre-Columbian era to 1800; eighth grade runs from the post-Revolutionary period to Reconstruction; the high school course covers Reconstruction to the present.

## Evaluation

Despite the unfortunate division of K–8 grade outlines into thematic strands, Indiana puts a clear emphasis on historical knowledge. The history strand consistently receives the most space, with the others treated as subject-specific adjuncts. Even in early grades, important issues and concepts are raised, including basic coverage of American constitutional government. Exploring the distinction between historical reality and historical fiction is a welcome touch.

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Indiana Academic Standards: Social Studies, U.S. history segments (2008)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://dc.doe.in.gov/Standards/AcademicStandards/PrintLibrary/socialstudies.shtml>

The main U.S. history sequence begins in fifth grade, running through 1800. The course is on the whole quite good, and the content is age-appropriate and well developed. The overview of pre-Columbian cultures in North America, early European exploration, first European settlements, basic motives for colonization, cooperation/conflict with the Native Americans, and colonial settlement is solid and thorough for the grade level, despite some gaps (the origins and legal establishment of slavery in the colonies is, for instance, barely mentioned). In the Revolutionary era, the outline touches on grievances revealed in the Declaration of Independence, leading figures of the Revolutionary War, the French and other foreign allies, the role of women and minorities, and the achievement of independence. There is solid material on the Constitutional Convention, the Bill of Rights, and the party schism of the 1790s. A final heading in the history strand introduces the study of primary and secondary sources. The civics section expands upon the key founding political documents and includes discussion of town meetings and colonial legislatures.

There are occasional errors in the fifth-grade outline: John Adams's election is incorrectly dated to 1798; John Singer Sargent is listed as a colonial artist, when John Singleton Copley is surely meant. But the major problem with the grade's outline is that, except for brief review in eighth grade, students will not study the colonial period after fifth grade—when students' intellectual sophistication and retention of detail are inevitably limited. The eighth-grade U.S. history does begin with a "review of key ideas related to the colonization of America and the revolution and Founding Era," but the guidelines only look back at Native American cultures and the broad issues of the imperial rivalry over North America through the American Revolution.

The depth and scope of historical content do, however, improve substantially with the eighth grade's study of the state constitutions, the Constitutional Convention, the ratifying conventions, the Federalist/anti-Federalist debates, the implementation of the Constitution by the first and second federal Congresses (a critical subject rarely mentioned in school curricula), the early-party schism, and the election of 1800. Moving into the nineteenth century, the standards discuss the growing differences between the North and South over slavery, the Louisiana Purchase, key early Supreme Court decisions, the War of 1812, and the Monroe Doctrine. Manifest Destiny and westward expansion are noted, together with Northern abolition and the conflict over slavery in the territories. Thematic groupings do lead to some chronological jumbling: The Compromise of 1850, grouped with conflicts over slavery, appears before Jacksonian Democracy. There are also some gaps: The nullification crisis and nativism are, for instance, missing. The political crises of the 1850s are generally

well-covered; yet, while *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Dred Scott, and the Lincoln-Douglas debates all appear, John Brown's raid is oddly missing—only his name appears, without explanation, in a list of people connected to reform movements. The Civil War and Reconstruction are also scant on detail.

Indiana's high school U.S. history course begins with a review—again, too brief and general—of the period from 1775 through Reconstruction and the post-slavery South; important details of Reconstruction, absent in eighth grade, are supplied, though Andrew Johnson's impeachment, the Black Codes, and the Compromise of 1877 are still missing. As the course moves into the late nineteenth century, content is often impressively clear and detailed, achieving a still higher level of rigor and detail than in earlier grades. The standards cover industrialization, machine politics, Populism and reform movements, new technologies, immigration, the growth of unions and the labor movement, government attempts to regulate business and industry, land and Native American policy in the West, segregation and *Plessy v. Ferguson*, state and national Progressivism, cultural changes, and expansionism and imperialism. The section on the 1920s, unfortunately, includes the Red Scare, the Palmer Raids, and the rise of Prohibition, implicitly linking them to the administrations of Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover—though all these events occurred in the previous decade during Wilson's presidency.

The New Deal, the isolationist movement, and the approach of World War II are well-covered (though the war itself is handled rather briefly); the specifics of the early Cold War and the civil rights movement of the 1940s through the 1960s are skillfully summarized. Many state standards rush through the last few decades of U.S. history, but Indiana encompasses Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and social programs, U.S.-Soviet relations (to the 1980s), the Vietnam War, Watergate, the Iran hostage crisis, the Iran-Contra scandal, the Clinton impeachment, the disputed 2000 election, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and both Gulf Wars. Even such details as the air traffic controllers' strike and the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act are included.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Indiana's American history standards are, in general, notably clear and specific; sometimes they are exceptional. Despite the separation of K–8 courses into the usual social studies thematic strands, historical material is generally kept together; thematic departures from chronology occur, but do not seriously undermine coherence or comprehension. The standards for grades five and eight are well-structured for those age groups, and the high school course is substantially more sophisticated and detailed.

Unfortunately, Indiana repeats the serious mistake (made also in some other states with otherwise strong standards) of breaking up a single U.S. history sequence among grades five, eight, and high school, relegating early American history to earlier grades when student sophistication is limited. The standards' strong grade-appropriateness actually highlights the fact that earlier material is covered in less depth; and since later grades look back to earlier periods with only spotty recapitulation, it is unlikely that students will retain much of this early material by the time they graduate. Despite this serious flaw in sequence—and despite some gaps and occasional inaccuracies in content, especially in earlier grades—Indiana's general substance, depth, and care earn the state a six out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Indiana presents a single standards document that is consistently clear and straightforward. Each grade's content is outlined coherently and with little jargon. The division of K–8 grades into the usual social studies strands is, as noted above, minimally disruptive, and the high school course abandons the strands altogether. Teachers and students are told plainly what they are expected to teach and to learn. Grade-by-grade progression is clearly laid out—even if, as noted above, it is not always well-conceived. Detail is not always consistent, but increases with grade level and is frequently solid, offering a clear outline of essential content. The standards earn a three out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)