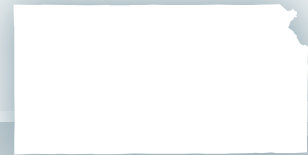


KANSAS • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

C

SCORES

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

TOTAL SCORE

5/10

Overview

Kansas's U.S. history standards offer much solid content and some exceptional items. Unfortunately, thematic organization too often trumps chronology, leading to confused clusters of material that obscure causality and historical logic. The state's decision to split U.S. history into a single course over grades five, eight, and high school—relegating earlier periods to earlier grades with minimal later recapitulation—further undermines what could have been far better standards.

Goals and Organization

Kansas provides grade-specific social studies standards for grades K–8. These are first divided into four thematic strands: civics-government; economics; geography; and Kansas, United States, and world history. Each strand is further divided into thematic or chronological content “benchmarks,” and finally into “knowledge and/or application indicators.” (These indicators are what is commonly thought of as content standards.) In addition, the state offers related “instructional suggestions” for teachers, and “teacher notes” containing definitions of selected terms.

The high school standards are structured identically, but only a single set is provided for grades 9–12.

The study of U.S. history begins in first through third grades with an introduction to basic themes, such as the Declaration of Independence, the Plains Indians, immigration, and historical landmarks and monuments. Fourth grade is devoted to Kansas history (continued, in greater detail, in seventh grade).

The U.S. history sequence begins in fifth grade, running from pre-settlement to 1800. It continues in eighth grade, which runs from 1787 to Reconstruction, and concludes in high school, where the course extends from Reconstruction to the present.

Evaluation

Kansas's social studies standards were prepared by a committee “of teachers, curriculum coordinators, professors and learning consultants ... in order to define what Kansas students should be able to do in history, civics-government, geography and economics.”

Problems are clear from the outset. Of the four content strands used in each grade, history is last. Worse, historical substance is presented in jargon-filled grids and charts, with content often broken up among strands, and sometimes among overly theoretical and thematic benchmarks within strands.

✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Kansas Curricular Standards for History and Government; Economics and Geography, U.S. history segments (2005)

Accessed from:

<http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1715>

Furthermore, like several other states, Kansas has made the unfortunate decision to break the U.S. history curriculum into a single three-part sequence spanning grades five, eight, and high school—relegating much of American history to early grades in which students have limited sophistication and retention.

History coverage in Kindergarten through third grade is basic and conventional. Fourth grade’s introduction of Kansas history offers reasonable detail, but unfortunately little chronological organization.

American history begins in fifth grade with Native American cultures, running through the motives, technology, and consequences of European exploration. The motives listed are “trade, expansion, wealth, [and] discovery”—yet, strangely, the vital factor of religion is omitted. The crucial rise of town meetings and representative assemblies is discussed, as is the counterbalancing rise of slavery, which is usefully contextualized with indentured servitude. A noteworthy post-Revolution item, rarely found in school standards, is a discussion of the importance of George Washington in defining the Presidency, including leadership qualities, balance of power, the setting of precedents, cabinet selection, and term limits.

Despite the inclusion of much valuable content, however, chronology is at times jumbled. Discussion of the Revolutionary movement, for example, lists the “Proclamation of 1763, Intolerable Acts, Stamp Act, [and] taxation without representation.” Why is the 1765 Stamp Act listed *after* the 1774 Intolerable Acts—a sequence that obscures historical development and causality? And the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and other founding documents and important founders are shunted into the separate civics strand—again with little sense of their interrelation or chronological sequence.

Kansas history returns in seventh grade, with much solid detail (including, for instance, the significance of Bleeding Kansas and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Kansas’s role in the Civil War, pressure on the Native American population, railroads and western expansion, Populism and Progressivism, and the Dust Bowl). But, one might ask, why is Kansas history revisited in depth after its introduction in fourth grade, while early American history is *not* revisited after its introduction in fifth grade?

The eighth grade U.S. history course begins with the Constitutional Convention—and oddly does *not* repeat the excellent fifth grade item on the importance of Washington’s presidency. It does cover the Jefferson/Hamilton schism and other key events of the 1790s, yet incorrectly groups the John Adams administration’s Alien and Sedition Acts with events during the Washington administration, leaving out the Adams

presidency and the election of 1800 altogether. The early nineteenth century (including the War of 1812, constitutional change, and western expansion) is both chronologically jumbled and lacking in adequate detail. Coverage of the Jacksonian era and its aftermath is better: To the credit of the standards, they include the rise of nativism, an oft-neglected topic.

The section on the coming of the Civil War is solid (including the central role of Kansas in the violent clashes over popular sovereignty and the territorial extension of slavery in the 1850s). But chronological problems persist: In one case, an item on constitutional interpretation during the Civil War era lists *Dred Scott vs. Sandford*, *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, and Lincoln’s suspension of habeas corpus. The Supreme Court, of course, handed down *Plessy vs. Ferguson* in 1896. Reconstruction is handled in more impressive detail; an unusual and praiseworthy item discusses the cultural romanticizing of the West and its impact on westward expansion.

High school U.S. history picks up in the late nineteenth century with the Gilded Age, big business, and the labor movement. William Jennings Bryan and the Populists are often left out of state curricula, but not in Kansas. The curriculum also covers Progressivism, American expansionism, U.S. entry into World War I, the home-front effects of the war (the First Red Scare and the Wilson administration’s related domestic crackdowns are included here and not, as in many other states, shunted into the 1920s), the women’s suffrage movement, business and consumer culture in the 1920s, social conflict (over immigration and prohibition, for example), race relations, and Jazz Age culture. It is all a bit rushed, but features a solid listing of supporting details.

The New Deal, interestingly, is not so much summarized as challenged: Students are to consider “the costs and benefits of New Deal programs” (e.g., budget deficits versus creating employment, the costs of expanding government, and dependence on subsidies). The instructional suggestions ask students to discuss whether these social programs have met the “needs of society as intended.” These questions are historically and intellectually valid, but the language is somewhat tendentious and seems to suggest an effort to nudge students toward a particular ideological conclusion—an inappropriate tactic in school standards, whether from left or right.

The period from World War II to the present includes most key historical events but, again, is often careless with chronology. For example, McCarthyism is thrown together with disparate social phenomena of the 1950s and 1960s, including federal aid to education, the interstate highway system, the space race, the New Frontier, and Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society. An item

on the “struggle for racial and gender equality” lumps together “*Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*, the Little Rock Nine, Martin Luther King, Jr., Montgomery Bus Boycott, Voting Rights Act of 1965, Betty Friedan, NOW, ERA, [and] Title IX”—a non-chronological amalgam of issues and events spanning four decades.

Content and Rigor Conclusion

The Kansas standards contain much solid content, but there are repeated and often puzzling gaps. Some material is covered in admirable and even unusual depth, while other important content is rushed or omitted entirely. There are repeated chronological muddles, exacerbated by the division of material among thematic benchmarks and trans-historical strands. Students will inevitably have difficulty developing a coherent understanding of how events and ideas unfolded over time. These problems, coupled with the crucial error of relegating earlier historical material to fifth and eighth grades without adequate recapitulation, seriously undermine these often competent and occasionally superior standards, lowering their score to a four out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The scope and grade-level sequence of the curriculum are fairly straightforward, presenting a full course outline for each grade level (even if the division of historical eras among grades is, as noted, deeply flawed). But the *presentation* of this scope and sequence is obscured by formulaic and jargon-laden charts. The actual content, when extracted from this social studies matrix, defines what students are expected to know and to achieve with a fair amount of clarity; however, the substantive gaps, inconsistent detail, thematic groupings, and splicing of historical material into strands will likely keep students from achieving a coherent understanding of the assigned material. Overall, Kansas scores a one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)