

MISSOURI • U.S. HISTORY



GRADE

F

SCORES

Content and Rigor 1/7
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

1/10

Overview

Missouri’s social studies standards focus on themes and concepts to the near exclusion of substance. Content items are generally so broad as to be useless; the few historical specifics that appear are wedged together under thematic headings with scant regard to chronological coherence. Teachers and students are left with little sense of what they are expected to teach or learn.

Goals and Organization

Missouri’s K–8 social studies standards are divided into a series of seven thematic strands: principles of constitutional democracy; principles and processes of governance systems; Missouri, United States, and world history; economic concepts and principles; elements of geographical study and analysis; relationships of individuals and groups to institutions and traditions; and tools of social science inquiry. Each strand is subdivided into broad “concepts,” for which “knowledge” items—individual content expectations commonly thought of as standards—are provided for each grade from K–8.

The high school standards are arranged identically, save that grade-level outlines are replaced with subject-specific course outlines.

Kindergarten through third grade focus on basic notions of citizenship, constitutional government, and national symbols. Fourth grade is devoted to Missouri history.

In fifth grade, U.S. history appears, covering the period through Reconstruction. Eighth grade retraces the same ground, before the high school U.S. history course covers the period from Reconstruction to the present.

Evaluation

Missouri’s history strand provides occasional glimmers of historical content. But in essence, students are simply told, “Know history,” and no meaningful outline is provided with which they and their teachers might achieve this aim.

Historical content in early grades is exceedingly brief and vague. There are short discussions of basic political ideas and national symbols in the Constitution and governance strands. For first through third grade, just *one* content expectation (knowledge item) is outlined in the history strand for each grade and each is placed under a content heading dubbed “Knowledge of contributions of non-Missourians.” First graders are to discuss “non-Missourians typically studied in K–4 programs, e.g., George Washington [and] Abraham Lincoln”; second graders are to study “the habitats, resources, art and daily lives of Native American peoples”; and third graders are to “describe the contributions of Martin Luther King, Jr.” Fourth grade turns to Missouri history, in greater but still patchy detail.

✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Social Studies Grade Level Expectations, K–8, U.S. history segments (2007)

Accessed from:

http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/curriculum/GLE/documents/ss_gle_2.o_k8_0907.pdf

Social Studies Grade- and Course-Level Expectations 2.0, 9–12, U.S. history segments (2007)

Accessed from:

http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/curriculum/GLE/documents/ss_cle_0907.pdf

American history, such as it is, begins in fifth grade, but historical content remains both brief and shallow. The history strand provides only a handful of U.S. history concepts. These direct students to understand migrations to North America, the discovery and exploration of the United States, perspectives on the American Revolution, political developments in the United States, westward expansion, and causes and consequences of the Civil War. Most concepts offer just a single, general knowledge expectation; none offers more than two.

For instance, under the migrations concept, fifth graders are to “summarize the viability and diversity of Native American cultures before Europeans came.” For the discovery and exploration concept, they are to “outline the discovery, exploration and early settlement of America.” For perspectives on the American Revolution, they are to “explain the American Revolution, including the perspectives of patriots and loyalists and factors that explain why the American colonists were successful”—a neat trick when there is no hint of required content on this subject. Westward expansion is reduced to Texas and the Mexican War, the Oregon territory, and the California gold rush, along with interactions of Native Americans, European immigrants, and “Africans brought to America.” For the Civil War, they are to “identify political, economic and social causes and consequences of the Civil War and Reconstruction.” That is the complete content for the grade.

Indeed, under Missouri’s rigidly thematic approach, the outlines for fifth and eighth grades are *virtually identical*. The fifth-grade content headings are recycled for eighth grade. Even those headings’ specific knowledge expectations are repeated nearly verbatim—save that, where fifth graders are directed to “summarize,” “outline,” and “identify,” eighth graders are instead told to “analyze,” “evaluate,” and “interpret.” The eighth-grade knowledge item on westward expansion adds the Louisiana Purchase, the Lewis and Clark expedition, and the Missouri Compromise to its brief list of specifics.

Two new content headings are added for eighth grade: political developments in the U.S. and reform movements. But each receives only a single knowledge expectation: The former tells students to “justify” the drafting of the Constitution, while the latter mentions abolitionism, the women’s movement, and—curiously—Jacksonian democracy.

The constitutional-democracy and governance strands for both grades add basic discussion of the founding documents. But that is the entire coverage of U.S. history prior to 1877 in the Missouri standards. Save for Lewis and Clark, not a single historical person is even named.

The high school U.S. history course is only marginally more specific. The concept headings are again absurdly brief and general. Indeed, they are even less specific than for grades five and eight, and they all but ignore chronology. A string of

concepts covers such cosmic topics as “political development in the United States,” economic theories, purpose of government, economic development, concepts of “place” and “location,” and so forth. A single historical reference point appears with a concept on “major twentieth-century wars”—but that is the only concept heading in high school U.S. history that refers to a specific historical period or event.

In the knowledge expectations provided for these wholly abstract headings, occasional content is tossed out almost at random, with little regard for chronology or coherence. One extraordinary item directs students to “describe and evaluate the evolution of United States domestic and foreign policies from Reconstruction to the present.” The examples include isolationism, immigration policy, Manifest Destiny, imperialism, the New Deal, the two world wars, the Cold War, and global interdependence—a breathtaking compression of post-Reconstruction policy and politics into a single inadequate list. Further items touch on “the wars of the twentieth century pertinent to U.S. history,” “the changing character of American society and culture,” the changing role of government, and the historical development of the economy, along with general principles of economics, government, and demography. Again, historical figures are totally absent. And that is the entire high school U.S. history course.

Content and Rigor Conclusion

Missouri’s jargon-laden standards provide only the faintest bit of historical substance. The small amount of content they provide is broken into confusing charts, strands, concepts, and knowledge objectives. The “knowledge” items, where all specific content outlining is presumably supposed to appear, offer little guidance and provide only scattered and inadequate details. There is hardly any increase in rigor in later grades, as the content outlines remain fragmentary at all levels. Missouri’s meager references to actual history earn it a one out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Missouri’s bewildering mélange of theme-based charts provides almost no specific guidance for teachers or students on what they should teach or learn. Detail is spotty at best and often absent. The standards are divided by individual grades or courses, but provide no clarity or specifics. What exists has little logical or coherent historical organization. Beyond a general sense that certain periods should be taught in certain grades, teachers and students must wait for the Show Me State to show them much of anything. Missouri’s confusing and nearly empty standards earn a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)