



## GRADE

**D**

## SCORES

 Content and Rigor **2/7**  
 Clarity and Specificity **1/3**

## TOTAL SCORE

**3/10**

## Overview

Ohio's standards offer, at best, an exceedingly broad and basic outline of U.S. history. Huge swaths of history are covered in a few brief strokes, and specific events and people are all but absent.

## Goals and Organization

Ohio's social studies standards provide grade-specific outlines for pre-K–8. Each grade is assigned a topical “theme” (e.g., “Communities: Past and Present, Near and Far,” “Ohio in the United States”) with a short explanatory paragraph. Each grade outline is then divided among four strands—history, geography, economics, and government—and each strand is divided into thematic or chronological “topics,” many of which are repeated across grades. Finally, each topic is provided with grade-specific “content statements” which constitute “the essential knowledge to be learned at each grade level or within each course.”

High school organization is largely identical, save that subject-specific courses replace the strands, and each topic receives a brief introductory paragraph. The courses are not assigned to any specific grade.

Kindergarten through third grade focus on broad concepts of community and change over time. Fourth grade introduces Ohio history. Fifth grade turns to a general overview of the entire Western hemisphere's early history.

American history enters in eighth grade and covers the period from pre-settlement to Reconstruction. The high school course continues from Reconstruction to the present.

## Evaluation

Ohio's standards claim to outline the “essential knowledge” that students should acquire through the social studies curriculum. Unfortunately, the state does not seem to consider substantive historical content to be “essential,” since very little is included.

In the elementary grades, Ohio's standards place little emphasis on U.S. history. Early grades' guiding themes include such general concepts—typical of the “expanding environments” approach to social studies—as “The Classroom Community” (pre-Kindergarten), “A Child's Place in Time and Space” (Kindergarten), “Families Now and Long Ago, Near and Far” (first grade), “People Working Together” (second grade), and “Communities: Past and Present, Near and Far” (third grade). The history strand in these grades is divided between “historical thinking and skills” and “heritage” topics. A small number of very general content statements touch on basic concepts such as change,

### ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Ohio Academic Content Standards: Social Studies, PreK–8, U.S. history segments (2010)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=1706&ContentID=76598&Content=93224>

**Ohio Academic Content Standards: High School Social Studies Course Syllabi, U.S. history segments (2010)**

**Accessed from:**

<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=1706&ContentID=76598&Content=93224>

culture, and the impact of individual actions. The only specific reference is to a few American national symbols.

In the fourth-grade Ohio history course, the history strand offers a few modestly specific references to U.S. history (the Native American presence, African American immigration, the Northwest Ordinance, and technological innovation) but fails to offer a coherent historical outline. The other strands add generic references to diversity and constitutional government, but no additional U.S. history specifics.

In the fifth grade's general glance at the early Western hemisphere, the content statements are again exceedingly few, brief, and general. The history strand, for example, includes a topic subheading on early civilizations, which contains just a single content statement referring to the "unique governments," "social structures," "religions," "technologies," and "agricultural practices" of the Maya, Inca, Aztec, and Mississippian cultures. A statement under the heritage topic adds that "European exploration and colonization had lasting effects which can be used to understand the Western Hemisphere today." The other strands add no further specifics.

Eighth grade turns at last to American history but, even here, the outline provided is entirely inadequate as a substantive guide to teachers or students. After a historical thinking and skills topic, the history strand is divided into four chronological headings: "Colonization to Independence," "A New Nation," "Expansion," and "Civil War and Reconstruction." But these topics *combined* receive a mere *twelve* content statements. There are passing references to pre-contact Native American cultures, European exploration and colonization "for economic and religious reasons," competition between European empires, the rise of slavery, Enlightenment ideas, and "dissatisfaction with colonial rule" that led to the American Revolution. But these brief and general statements are devoid of specific events or dates, and they do not include the name of a single individual.

There are equally shallow references to the Articles of Confederation, early presidential administrations (again with no names), and westward expansion. The sectional crisis is reduced to "disputes over the nature of federalism, complicated by economic developments in the United States," resulting "in sectional issues, including slavery, which led to the American Civil War." Reconstruction is likewise reduced to "changes to the U.S. Constitution, an affirmation of federal authority and lingering social and political differences." The other strands add equally superficial references to the Constitution and the Industrial Revolution. This is the *only* coverage of American history through 1877 offered anywhere in Ohio's standards.

In the high school U.S. history course (no longer divided into strands), each topic receives a brief introductory statement. But these offer only broad generalities on each era's issues. The statement on "Industrialization and Progressivism (1877–1920)" for example, mentions the start of "large-scale industrialization...in the United States during the late 1800s... ignited by post-Civil War demand and fueled by technological advancements." "Growing industries," it continues, led to "foreign immigration" and "urbanization," giving "rise to the American labor movement," expanded western settlement, and a "period of progressive reform" in response to "political corruption and practices of big business."

Such topic summaries are marginally useful, but within the topics themselves, there are only *twenty-eight* very general content statements for the entire course. The aforementioned "Industrialism and Progressivism" receives five such content statements, referring to industrialization, urbanization, *laissez-faire*, post-Reconstruction racial systems, and Progressive response. But that is all there is—general references, entirely without specifics or historical individuals. Foreign policy from 1898–1930 receives just two content statements, mentioning the Spanish American War, World War I, and the failure to join the League of Nations. The topic's introductory paragraph says only that the "industrial and territorial growth of the United States fostered expansion overseas," and that "greater involvement in the world set the stage for American participation in World War I and attempts to preserve post-war peace."

Four content statements cover domestic developments from 1919 to 1941. Three more cover foreign affairs from 1930 to 1945: America's entry into World War II is mentioned only in the topic's brief textual introduction, which refers to "tyrannical governments" in "certain nations" and to Pearl Harbor without context or explanation. The remaining ten statements seek to address the Cold War (McCarthyism, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the fall of Communism all appear), post-war social change (civil rights, the economic boom, population movement, and debates on federal power are mentioned only in passing), the modern global economy, and the post-9/11 world.

The government and economics courses include a few broad conceptual generalities but add no substantive historical coverage.

Ohio is now preparing optional "model curricula" to guide teachers through the official standards. These are meant to add some explanatory text about each of the content statements, but the statements are themselves so broad that even this voluntary supplement is unlikely to provide anything substantive.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

There is little American history content or educational rigor in Ohio's standards. Before eighth grade, there is effectively none. The eighth-grade course offers a bit, attempting to cover the entire period in a handful of broad content statements. The high school course, while marginally more sophisticated, is still exceedingly brief and general; at best, it offers a *very* basic outline. There are no dates beyond the topic titles; hardly any specific events are mentioned and not a single person is named. Historical explanation and context are all but absent, leaving teachers and students largely on their own in constructing courses or comprehending the content. And even the limited improvement in rigor at the high school level applies only to U.S. history after 1877. Ohio's content earns a two out seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Ohio's American history sequence is clear. Unfortunately, it is also inadequate. Little attempt is made to introduce anything of substance before middle school. Ohio history is ostensibly covered in fourth grade and the early history of the Western hemisphere in fifth grade, but neither is given more than a few generalizations with occasional references to facts or events. Eighth grade is meant to cover U.S. history to 1877, but offers only the most meager specifics; high school's coverage of 1877 to the present, though somewhat better, is still short on detail. Ohio's lack of detail and near-absence of meaningful sequence in the elementary grades leaves it with only one out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)