

OKLAHOMA • U.S. HISTORY

GRADE
B+

SCORES

Content and Rigor 5/7
Clarity and Specificity 3/3

TOTAL SCORE

8/10

Overview

Oklahoma provides, on the whole, a solid and frequently impressive outline of U.S. history content, enhanced by the inclusion of expository statements that often supply explanation and context and go well beyond mere outlining. Unfortunately, the combination of erratic detail, some serious gaps and omissions, and relegation of all content before 1760 to fifth grade undermines these otherwise impressive standards.

Goals and Organization

Oklahoma's *Priority Academic Student Skills Guide* for social studies lays out three "core content areas": history; geography; and civics, economics, and government. These themes are, however, integrated into unified courses. Content is *not* divided into strands.

The state provides grade-specific content outlines for grades K–8, and subject-specific course outlines for grades 9–12. Each grade or course is divided into a series of numbered "standards" which constitute thematic/chronological subdivisions. Each standard is further divided into numbered points, explaining ideas, skills or topics that students should master. These constitute the grade- or course-specific expectations.

Kindergarten through fourth grade introduce basic concepts of community, chronology, and change over time; fourth grade also includes brief content items on historical and geographical features of Oklahoma.

Fifth grade turns to U.S. history, covering the period from pre-settlement to 1850. Eighth grade covers the years from 1760 to 1877. The high school U.S. history course runs from 1850 the present.

Evaluation

Oklahoma's U.S. history standards display some notable strengths. At times, detail and substantive explanation are impressive; unfortunately, this level of quality is not consistently maintained. Some content items are little more than lists of people or events, largely without historical context. And some important historical content, which one would expect to find when so much *is* covered thoroughly, is missing altogether.

The state has also made two questionable sequencing decisions. First, rather than placing a two-year U.S. history course in high school, Oklahoma places the first year of its two-year course in eighth grade. Second, and more serious, the eighth-grade course begins in 1760, thus relegating the pre-settlement and colonial eras solely to fifth grade, when student understanding and retention are inevitably less developed.

✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Oklahoma Priority Academic Student Skills: Social Studies, U.S. history segments (2010)

Accessed from:

<http://www.sde.state.ok.us/Curriculum/PASS/Subject/socstud.pdf>

Historical content in Kindergarten through third grade is general and largely thematic. A very brief and general discussion of Oklahoma's historical and geographical background is included in fourth grade.

Fifth grade then turns to the history of early America. Considering the grade level, the content outline can be quite impressive, offering short expository statements rather than mere lists. Students are asked, for example, to “describe early European settlements in colonial America (e.g., Jamestown, Plymouth Plantations, Massachusetts Bay, and New Amsterdam), and identify reasons people came to the Americas (e.g., economic opportunity, slavery, escape from religious persecution, military adventure, and release from prison)” —a reasonably informative summary. Other items are far too general, for instance, “relate the contributions of important individuals and groups (e.g., John Smith, John Rolfe, Puritans, Pilgrims, Peter Stuyvesant, Roger Williams, Anne Hutchinson, Lord Baltimore, Quakers, William Penn, and James Oglethorpe)” —a list both incomplete (why Anne Hutchinson and not John Winthrop?) and lacking explanatory context.

Coverage at the fifth-grade level remains broad yet competent, touching on the French and Indian War and its connection to the American Revolution—neglected in many states; the ideas of the Declaration of Independence; the drafting of the Constitution; and on into the Jacksonian era, expansion, and reform movements. This overview, though somewhat elementary, is not inappropriate for the grade level. The somewhat basic coverage would not therefore be a problem, *if* all the material were covered again at a subsequent higher level.

Eighth-grade U.S. history begins with the Revolutionary crisis. What follows is uneven, ranging from overly general to admirably thorough. The section on the American Revolution is impressive, discussing the consequences of the French and Indian War, the Treaty of Paris, the Proclamation of 1763, the Sugar, Stamp, and Declaratory Acts, and the concept of taxation without representation. Coverage of independence and the war itself, though selective, is intelligent and well-explained. Most unusually, state constitutions, the dispute over western lands under the Articles of Confederation, and the Northwest Ordinance are discussed. The party schism and election of 1800 (missing in fifth grade) are mentioned, as are *Marbury v. Madison* and *McCulloch v. Maryland*.

Yet the Constitutional Convention and ratification are only mentioned rather than explained; the John Adams presidency and its important controversies are missing; and events up to the War of 1812 are presented only in brief. “The rise of sharecropping”—a post-Civil War development—is confusingly placed in a section otherwise devoted to the early nineteenth

century, which deals with the slave system and antebellum economic changes.

Stronger units address the nature of Jacksonian democracy, the National Bank, the nullification crisis, Native American removal, the schism over slavery, reform movements, and utopian experiments. To some extent, theme is allowed to trump chronology in this period. As one example, a section on westward expansion abruptly jumps back to the Louisiana Purchase, moving through Texas independence and the Mexican War, immigration, Mormonism, and Native American displacement—into the 1870s, no less—before moving back to the roots of the Civil War. This chronological jumbling leads to some key omissions; for example, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Dred Scott, and John Brown are discussed—but the Missouri Compromise, which undergirds them all, is missing. Motives for fighting the Civil War and relative Northern/Southern strengths are discussed too briefly; the same is true of Reconstruction, where key issues are identified but too little detail provided.

High school U.S. history recapitulates the period from 1850 before continuing to the present. The structure remains generally chronological, but curious gaps persist. Events underlying the secession crisis are listed, but there is no direct reference to the key issue behind them all: the expansion of slavery into the territories. (The Missouri Compromise, which Jefferson compared to “a fire bell in the night,” still goes unmentioned.) Key points of the Civil War and Reconstruction are listed briefly though intelligently. But Andrew Johnson’s impeachment, mentioned in eighth grade, is now missing.

Solid items, offering considerable contextual explanation, are included for the key social and reform issues of the later nineteenth century: immigration, westward movement and Native American policy, industrialization, and the labor movement. Discussion of Progressivism includes frequently omitted details, such as the muckrakers, the child labor and conservation movements, the direct primary, initiative, and referendum and recall. Individual reformers such as Susan B. Anthony, Upton Sinclair, William Jennings Bryan, and Theodore Roosevelt are included. Yet political history is barely addressed; the crucial election of 1912 is skipped, and the Wilson administration is discussed almost solely in terms of World War I (though domestic propaganda and the Red Scare are mentioned).

The period through the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War and its aftermath is covered in frequently impressive detail. The nuclear arms race, McCarthyism, civil rights, and the women’s movement, as examples, all receive even-handed coverage, often with well-integrated and well-chosen detail. (For example, the standards include the rise of racial tensions

in the 1920s, important content that is rarely mentioned in other states). Yet political history is again given short shrift (Lyndon Johnson, for instance, is never mentioned, nor is the Great Society). Some events that one would expect to find (the 1925 Scopes trial, for example) are missing. And there are occasional oddities (Woody Guthrie is listed alongside Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Will Rogers, and Huey Long as a key figure “between the wars”—presumably because he was born in Oklahoma—even though he was little known in those years).

Content and Rigor Conclusion

Oklahoma’s coverage of historical content is generally solid and often impressive. The use of expository statements, rather than strict outlining, allows important issues to be explained, not just listed. Unfortunately, depth and quality are erratic. Some material is handled too broadly and briefly, or is omitted entirely; some sections abandon a chronological format for awkward thematic groupings, moving events out of proper context and allowing important material to fall through the cracks. There is a clear and appropriate increase in rigor between grade levels—but this highlights the problematic decision to relegate the colonial period to the very basic fifth-grade course. Oklahoma flirts with excellence. Closing gaps and covering colonial history again after fifth grade could make it first rate. The state receives a five out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Oklahoma’s straightforward grade-by-grade outlines make the sequence clear and specific. The content to be covered in each grade is clearly noted, and the standards for each grade/course delineate that content without confusing jargon. Despite the gaps in detail noted above, the document is solidly constructed and provides an intelligent historical guide—one students and teachers should easily be able to understand and to employ. The Sooner State receives a three out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)