

# UTAH • U.S. HISTORY

## GRADE

C

## SCORES

Content and Rigor 4/7  
Clarity and Specificity 2/3

## TOTAL SCORE

6/10

## Overview

Utah offers straightforward outlines of U.S. history content, largely unencumbered by abstract or theoretical social studies categories. Unfortunately, the outlines are often rudimentary, specifics are often neglected, chronology is not always respected, and some outright errors appear.

## Goals and Organization

Utah provides grade-specific standards for grades K–6, and standards for subject-specific courses assigned to grades 7–12. Each grade or course is divided into a series of thematic/chronological “standards,” each of which is sub-divided into more specific content headings, called “objectives.” The objectives are in turn supplied with grade- or course-specific content expectations, called “indicators.”

Basic concepts of community, chronology, connection to the past, diversity, national symbols, and holidays are introduced from Kindergarten through third grade. Fourth grade introduces “Utah Studies.”

Fifth grade offers an introductory U.S. history course, running from pre-settlement through the late twentieth century. A second, two-year course begins in eighth grade, which runs from pre-settlement to 1877; the second half, to be placed anywhere in grades ten through twelve, reviews earlier periods and then continues from post-Reconstruction to the present.

## Evaluation

The Utah standards emphasize “coordinated and systematic study” of history and other social studies areas, stressing both analytical skills and a “knowledge base.” The aim is “an authentic, active, integrated, meaningful, and in depth social studies curriculum,” resulting in “geographic, historical, economic, civic, social and cultural literacy.”

The question is whether the Utah curriculum in U.S. history measures up to these claims.

In the early grades, the thematic standards correspond to familiar social studies strands: civics, economics, geography, and so forth. Equally familiar basic concepts are introduced, though Utah places somewhat greater emphasis than usual on inculcating “patriotic” attitudes. The fourth grade “Utah Studies” course is a largely non-historical overview of culture and landscape.

Starting with the fifth grade U.S. history course, the strands are dropped and the standards divide the course into eras, starting with pre-settlement. The grade’s introductory text notes that, while “there is much more content in studying [sic] the United States than

## ✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

**Utah K–12 Core Curriculum: Social Studies, grades K–2, U.S. history segments (2009)**

### Accessed from:

[http://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/socialstudies/documents/BoardapprovedK-2TomSutton2\\_000.pdf](http://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/socialstudies/documents/BoardapprovedK-2TomSutton2_000.pdf)

**Utah K–12 Core Curriculum: Social Studies, grades 3–6, U.S. history segments (2008)**

### Accessed from:

<http://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/core/corepdf/SoSt3-6.pdf>

**Utah K–12 Core Curriculum: Social Studies, grades 7–12, U.S. history segments (2002)**

### Accessed from:

<http://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/core/corepdf/SoSt7-12.pdf>

can be covered in a year, there are essential aspects students should learn.” The outline that follows does indeed aim for breadth over detail, offering little historical explanation. But, at the same time, it lays out many essential themes and issues, beginning with the technology and motives of European exploration, regions of colonial settlement, and contact with Native Americans. Basic content items continue through colonial trade, the roots of representative government, the American Revolution, the establishment of new governments, and the Constitution. Some important points appear: “the beginning and expansion of the slave trade” is, for instance, included under the heading on colonial economics. But details frequently remain skimpy. The French and Indian War, the Stamp Act, and the Boston Tea Party are the only examples given to explain the Revolutionary crisis, alongside general references to loyalist vs. patriot attitudes, the Declaration of Independence, and unnamed Revolutionary leaders. There are also some politicized distortions: As in too many other states, the Iroquois League is prominently listed as a key influence on colonial representative government and on the federal Constitution—a popular and politically correct yet historically groundless idea.

Specifics fade after the Constitution. A brief section mentions westward expansion in the early nineteenth century, tossing together the “Louisiana Purchase, Lewis and Clark expedition, treaties with American Indians, Homestead Act, Trail of Tears, [and] California Gold Rush”—out of chronological sequence—and the “Oregon, Mormon, Spanish, [and] California” trails. It then jumps to a quick discussion of sectionalism, a few points on the Civil War itself, industrialization, immigration, World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, and post-war social change. This curriculum is simply too vague and general to be useful at any grade level.

American history returns in eighth grade, the first half of a two-year course. There is a notable improvement in depth, but historical coverage remains uneven. The causes of exploration and colonization are now explored in greater detail, as are the origins of slavery and the “destruction of American Indian cultures.” More examples are given for early settlement regions and leaders; imperial rivalries over North America are mentioned. Although specifics are still patchy, key issues of the Revolutionary period are outlined with greater sophistication. Some leaders and political groups are listed, and the terms of the Treaty of Paris and the flaws of the Articles of Confederation are touched upon. Yet again, when the “foundation” of the Constitution is discussed, the examples are: “Magna Carta, Iroquois Confederation, [and] European philosophers.” The state constitutions—which were the most important Constitutional influences—are absent. Another error follows immediately: “Constitution ratification compromises” lists “3/5

Compromise, Great Compromise, [and the] Bill of Rights”—yet only the last of these emerged from the ratification debates; the first two compromises were reached at the Constitutional Convention in 1787.

Discussion of the Constitutional system segues directly to Manifest Destiny and westward expansion, skipping the Washington administration, party schism, and election of 1800. The War of 1812, Texas independence, Mexican War, technology, and industrialization are mentioned, but political history is largely absent. A single item on “new political parties throughout the 18th and 19th centuries; e.g., Whigs, Jacksonian Democrats, [and] Republicans” does no justice to the subject, tossing together parties from very different eras facing very different issues, all without explanation. The rise of Supreme Court power is mentioned, but judicial review and specific cases are not. Reform movements are discussed in some detail, but sectionalism is given no specifics prior to the Compromise of 1850. The course closes on a better note: The coverage of the 1850s, Civil War, and Reconstruction, though general, touches on more key issues before moving into post-war western expansion.

The second part of the U.S. history course (to be offered anywhere in grades ten through twelve) first briefly recaps colonial settlement, antebellum expansion, Civil War and Reconstruction, and Native American policy. As the course moves on into the late nineteenth century, detail remains selective and thematic headings often compromise chronology. The era is discussed largely in terms of industrialization, big business, labor, and urbanization. Political history is all but ignored, save for a catch-all mention of “the growth and influence of political machines; i.e., muckrakers [and] Progressives”—neither of which *were* “political machines”—and a passing reference to socialism. Imperialism and World War I are touched on, but the latter mainly focuses on Wilson’s post-war efforts to ratify the Versailles Treaty. Social changes in the 1920s are discussed; again, the politics of the period are not. The centralization of government power in the New Deal is discussed—but a directive to “analyze the major causes of the Great Depression” explains nothing. Fascism is mentioned as a cause of World War II (many states skip over it), and the war itself receives some detail. But thematic units on the post-war world, while offering reasonable specifics, muddle its chronology. All post-war American involvements in Asia are mentioned together, regardless of when they occurred. McCarthyism and Watergate appear together under a general heading on domestic developments—*after* the Great Society, and *before* the space race. The civil rights movement is discussed only thematically, followed by the “counter culture” movement and a closing item that lumps together “the ‘Reagan Revolution,’” environmentalism, and global terrorism.

## Content and Rigor Conclusion

Utah's history standards do not live up to their self-confident introductory billing. They offer a basic outline of American history which will give teachers some guidance in structuring their courses. But they display serious gaps in coverage and much of what is covered is treated too broadly. Even within the largely chronological outlines, thematic groupings of content sometimes undermine historical logic. There are also outright errors. Rigor at the fifth-grade level could certainly be improved: Though it aims to cover the entirety of American history in one year and must necessarily treat matters briefly, educators need specifics in order to teach effectively. The level of rigor in eighth grade and high school is notably higher but still uneven, and gaps, lack of specifics, and errors continue. Utah's outlines receive a four out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

The Utah standards are largely free of jargon, and avoid splitting history content among arbitrary strands. The sequence is straightforward, with each grade or course clearly assigned content that develops in complexity over time. The system of nested standards, objectives, and indicators creates a routine outline format that is easy to follow. The major failing is in detail. Students and teachers are not given a sufficiently comprehensive overview of course content—what they are expected to learn and to teach is set out in overly general terms. Utah offers a usable overview of American history, but it needs greater consistency, depth, detail, and explanation. It earns a two out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)