history.org

Frequently Asked Questions

Question	Answer
What is history.org?	history.org is a free, K-12 resource dedicated to helping teachers spark student interest in, understanding of, and connection to history and civics.
Who created history.org?	history.org is a project of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and includes contributions from a large and growing number of history and civics education organizations nationwide. The project is steered by a committee of leading history, civics, and education organizations including: Colonial Williamsburg, iCivics, George Washington's Mount Vernon, National Constitution Center, and William & Mary. Current K-12 social studies teachers were involved in the creation of all instructional resources.
Who is history.org for?	history.org is a tool created for K-12 teachers of history, civics, and social studies and those who help them.
Why are Colonial Williamsburg and other museums creating this website?	history.org aims to bridge history and civics classrooms and the vast holdings of history museums by offering teachers easy-to-find-and-use resources designed to reflect powerful and effective museum education pedagogies like visual thinking strategies and object-based inquiry. Every asset on history.org was contributed by a history museum or civics education organization.

How is history.org different from other sites that offer free instructional resources for social studies/history?	history.org offers teachers carefully curated collections based on the topics most commonly taught in K-12 U.S. history and civics. Collections consist of short videos, primary sources with analysis questions and learning supports, and primary-source based mini lessons. Our principles for designing collections include: • **Thoughtful curation:** Primary sources have been contributed and organized into classroom-ready collections by leading history museums and civic organizations. • **Teacher expertise:** K-12 social studies teachers were involved in the creation of all instructional resources. • **Historian review:** All content in the collections has been vetted and reviewed by historians from the Organization of American Historians. • **Research-informed:** The design team surveyed and interviewed over 1,000 current K-12 social studies teachers representing communities nationwide to guide the design of content and the site features. • **Multiple perspectives:** Collections include videos and primary sources that showcase diverse experiences and illuminate differing perspectives of the past. • **"Object-based" inquiries:** history.org resources emphasize object-based inquiry and center student observations and connection making–cornerstones of museum education made ready-to-deploy in classrooms. • **Age- and grade-appropriateness:** Each collection is aligned to the learning demands of specific grade bands with attention to what is appropriate, feasible, and needed for those students. • **Meet varied students needs:** Resources help build background knowledge and include support for literacy, including student-friendly definitions of vocabulary words, transcripts of videos and documents, and closed captioning. • **Teacher choice:** Teachers know what will work for their curriculum, standards, and learners. Collections offer vetted options and allow teachers to make the final selection for their classrooms. Everything is editable to allow maximum flexibility.
Where does the funding for history.org come from?	history.org is funded by The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and private donors.

What makes history.org's design "research-informed"?	The history.org design team utilized research at every stage of the development process and continued cycles of research in classrooms will drive ongoing updates of the website and resources. Research highlights include: ● **A quantitative study with 900+ social studies teachers:** Our first step was to survey current social studies educators to better understand their needs, pain points, and classroom constraints. ● **Review of state learning standards:** Led by faculty at William & Mary's School of Education, the history.org design team analyzed state standards from across the nation to determine the most commonly taught topics at each grade band. These topics then informed the initial set of U.S. history- and civics-focused collections. ● **Qualitative interviews with teachers:** The history.org design team connected with dozens of K-12 social studies teachers in one-on-one interviews designed to illuminate their instructional goals and challenges, resource needs, and preferences for digital materials. ● **Rigorous and continued user-testing:** Current social studies teachers from around the country evaluated early prototypes of content and website mockups. Cycles of user feedback as we launch new features and content types will continue to inform future development. ● **Classroom pilots:** A select number of teachers and classrooms will be invited to formally pilot history.org in their classrooms in spring 2025. Insights from this pilot will be used to determine future features, evaluate current usability and functionality, and assess desirability of additional resources.
What kinds of teaching materials does history.org have for K-12 classrooms?	history.org offers: ● Primary sources including documents, maps, artifacts, artwork and images, and audio and video footage curated from leading U.S. history museums and libraries. ● Primary source analysis questions that progress along a ladder of complexity to drive understanding, empathy, and connection making for each primary source. ● Short 2-3 minute animated videos that can be used to build background knowledge and introduce or review key ideas, events, people, and concepts from K-12 social studies, U.S. history, and civics. ● Scaffolded comprehension questions that can check for student understanding or spark discussion of each video. ● Additional accessibility supports including vocabulary words with definitions and examples, closed captioning on all videos, and transcripts of videos and documents. ● Mini lessons composed of videos and primary sources that provide ready-to-go learning experiences that take approximately 20-40 minutes.

	● All discussion questions and mini lessons are available in editable formats to allow for customization and adaptation.
What primary sources does history.org offer and where do they come from?	history.org's primary sources were contributed by leading history museums and civics education organizations. Each contributing partner was invited to review our collection topics and videos and submit objects, artwork, and documents from their collection and archives that illuminate the stories and experiences related to that topic. Working with the William & Mary School of Education, teacher designers reviewed and selected the primary sources that provided the most opportunity to engage students and advance key understandings.
What kinds of learning experiences will students have with history.org?	history.org's resources are informed by museum education pedagogies, like object-based inquiry and visual thinking. These approaches have been shown to improve student engagement, so history.org seeks to make them accessible in the classroom. Pedagogical approaches that you will see in our resources include: ● **Telling stories:** The short videos engage students in the past by foregrounding stories of people, places, and events. Primary sources have also been carefully selected to tell our nation's complex and heterogeneous history. ● **Analyzing primary sources:** history.org uses a consistent approach to questioning, observing, and interpreting primary sources. Based on the National Archives' Document Analysis progression, history.org aims not just to engage students in analysis of each individual primary source, but to support students in developing an approach to primary source analysis that they can replicate independently. ● **Using Visual Thinking Strategies:** history.org's primary source analysis questions and mini lessons deploy visual thinking questions to encourage student observation and use of evidence. ● **Fostering student inquiry:** history.org's primary source analysis questions and mini lessons make students active participants in their learning, inviting them to ask and seek answers to questions that interest them and to make connections to what they already know. ● **Historical thinking skills:** history.org primary source analysis questions and mini lessons provide opportunities for students to engage in the National Council for History Education's Historical Habits of Mind in order to develop historical thinking skills that build understanding of the contemporary world and create a foundation for active citizenship. ● **Embracing tensions and complexities:** Teaching a complete history of the United States involves acknowledging our nation's triumphs and tragedies. history.org provides teachers with multifaceted resources that support them in surfacing and navigating the tensions inherent in the stories of our past.

What topics will history.org cover?	history.org is currently in a Beta development process and site content is being developed, tested, and released iteratively. Ultimately, history.org will offer U.S. history and civics materials aligned to the topics most commonly taught in K-12 schools. These topics were determined based on analysis of state standards with review by current social studies teachers. • **Grades K-2:** Collections focus on foundational social studies concepts including civic virtues and qualities of leadership, understanding communities, symbols of American democracy, and developing geospatial awareness. • **Grades 3-5:** Collections continue to build on foundational social studies skills and concepts including understanding the role of citizens, organization and structure of the U.S. government, and using geographic tools. History collections span pre-1620 Indigenous cultures through the Civil War (1865). • **Grades 6-12:** Collections in secondary grades span pre-1620 Indigenous cultures through the contemporary United States. Additional collections focus on civics and government with an emphasis on foundational documents, civil rights, and Constitutional amendments. In most cases, history.org offers two versions of each secondary collection, with one aimed at Grades 6-8 and another designed for high school classrooms.
How did you determine which topics to include for each grade band?	Faculty from the William & Mary School of Education (a history.org Steering Committee member) conducted an analysis of social studies learning standards from a diversity of states to surface the most commonly taught themes, topics, individuals, events, and terms. Current social studies teachers then vetted and reviewed these findings to determine the list of initial collections to include at each grade band on history.org. Colonial Williamsburg historians and educators completed a final review to ensure the topics provide an appropriate balance of breadth and depth, including the experiences and contributions of historically marginalized groups.
Is history.org aligned to my state standards?	The topics covered on history.org emerged as the result of analysis of multiple states' social studies learning standards and review by experienced social studies teachers from diverse communities. If you cannot find a topic you are required to teach in the history.org content for your grade band, we recommend looking in the grade-band above or below. Because our instructional resources are designed to be edited, teachers should feel free to adapt content to suit their state standards.
Who created the instructional resources on the site?	The educational videos were created by Makematic in close collaboration with Colonial Williamsburg, the history.org steering committee, and the Organization of American Historians. Instructional resources such as comprehension and analysis questions and mini lessons were developed by current K-12 social studies teachers working closely with the William & Mary School of Education, museum educators from contributing partners, advisors from Wondrus Consulting, LLC, historian reviewers from the Organization of American Historians, and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

How do you ensure the content on history.org is accurate?	history.org videos, comprehension and analysis questions, and mini lessons undergo multiple layers of fact checking and review to ensure accuracy. Prior to publication, all history.org materials are reviewed by the Organization of American Historians who provide feedback and notes. Please report any concerns about the materials using the Contact Us page.
How does history.org support students who struggle to read or who have other learning differences/disabilities?	The history.org team knows that meeting varied student needs is one of teachers' biggest day-to-day challenges. We have designed history.org's resources to support their efforts. Our accessibility supports include: ● **Diverse primary sources:** Primary sources are so much more than documents. history.org's collections include artwork, images, objects, and photographs, all with analysis questions, which help level the playing field for students who struggle to read. ● **Vocabulary and student-friendly definitions and examples**: Current classroom teachers reviewed each video and primary source and selected key vocabulary words, crafted student-friendly definitions, and developed example sentences to support student acquisition of new words. ● **Captions**: All educational videos have English Closed Captions. ● **Transcripts of videos and documents:** All educational videos and primary documents include typed transcripts to support accessibility and comprehension. ● **Editable instructional resources:** All comprehension and analysis questions, vocabulary words and definitions, and mini lessons are available to teachers as exports in Google Docs and Google Slides, which can be used as-is or downloaded to Powerpoint or Microsoft Word. Teachers are encouraged to adjust the exported resources to meet the specific needs of the learners in their classroom. If there is a specific accessibility support that you would like to see, please let us know using the Contact Us page.
How can I share feedback or a concern with history.org?	Please report any concerns about the content, materials, or functionality of the website using the Contact Us page.
When can I anticipate more U.S. history and civics content?	We launched a closed Beta version of history.org in Fall 2024 with a small number of collections at each grade band to test the site's content and functionality. We anticipate publishing additional collections on a rolling basis between September 2025 and July 2027 with the goal of providing resources for U.S. history from pre-1620 Indigenous cultures through contemporary United States by July 2027.

If my child's teacher is using history.org, what can I do to extend their learning/engagement at home?	Here are some ways to support and extend your student's learning at home: ● **Ask them to tell you about a favorite story or object from the past:** Invite your student to share with you a favorite story, object, or fact about the past that they've recently learned. ● **Build connections to the past:** The past, both distant and recent, is all around us. Look for ways to highlight both the physical, visible past ("That building is more than 100 years old. What has happened in its lifetime?") and the ways in which the past shapes our life today ("How do you think our lives are different today because the colonists won their fight for freedom against Great Britain?") ● **Learn about the history of shared topics of interest:** Cars, clothing, families, skateboarding, food–everything has history. Deepen your students' understanding of their favorite activity by learning more about its past. ● **Connect current events to history:** When your student hears and asks questions about current events, encourage them to wonder what happened first and share what you know about related events. ● **Engage in debate and discussion:** Ask your student for their opinion on topics, events, or ideas happening at school, home, or in the world, and encourage them to support their ideas with evidence. Challenge your student by presenting an opposing viewpoint, and ask them to assess the strengths and weaknesses of both sides. ● **Consider alternate perspectives:** Ask your student to imagine how someone different from them might experience or interpret events, news, and change. Ask questions such as: "How would someone who is very different from you feel about that?" "What factors might influence someone's opinions on this topic?" "What would someone who disagreed with you say?" "Can you think of another way to interpret those facts?" ● **Share a memory or experience from your own past:** Highlight how the world is different today than when you were younger, encourage your child to ask questions and compare their life today with your personal experience. ● **Foster empathy:** Seek opportunities to encourage your student to empathize with fictional characters and people from the past. When reading a book or watching a movie ask questions like, "What would that character have seen/heard/felt/thought in that moment?" ● **Encourage close observation:** When looking at art, pictures, even everyday objects like forks and coffee mugs, ask your student, "What do you notice? What do you wonder?" Share your own observations and challenge each other to come up with as many observations and questions as you can.

If my child or I want to explore history.org, can we create an account?	In late 2024 through summer 2025, history.org will be available to a limited number of K-12 educators while we conduct additional usability testing. We anticipate opening access to site accounts to all when this testing is complete. While anyone will be welcome to use history.org, our design is focused on the needs of classroom teachers.
Can I create accounts for my students on history.org?	At the moment, history.org offers teacher accounts for K-12 educators. If you are interested in a student accounts feature, please let us know by using the Contact Us button.
What are some ways I can encourage teachers in my school or district to use history.org?	Here are some ways teachers might want to try using history.org in their classrooms: **If your teachers have limited instructional time:** ● **Introducing ideas:** Use the educational videos to introduce new ideas, fill in missing background knowledge, or review previous instruction. At less than three minutes long, the videos offer teachers an efficient method of either filling in missing background knowledge; introducing a new idea, person, or event; or reinforcing instruction from earlier in the year or from a previous grade. ● **Bellringers:** Select an intriguing primary source and use the "Say hello to the source" and "Make observations" questions to spark students' curiosity and get them warmed up for history class. **If your teachers are engaging in long range planning:** ● **Unit planning:** Use a relevant history.org era or collection to drive unit and lesson planning, selecting the videos and primary sources best aligned to your curriculum and learning standards. **If your teachers want to use more primary sources but aren't sure how to get started:** ● **Open-and-go mini lessons:** Our ready-to-use mini lessons take between 20 and 40 minutes, but can be adapted based on time available. Each mini lesson typically includes two primary sources and a video that ensures students have context to interpret them.