

Strategies for U.S. History Test Preparation



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INTRODUCTION

Across the country, eighth graders are preparing for their state social studies test and for the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in Social Studies (ITBS) and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Social Studies. This booklet is designed to help you prepare students for the ITBS and the NAEP. It allows you to provide a broad perspective or a national view for students examining the growth and development of our country. Ideally, it can be used as a practice and review before spring testing.

The ITBS measures students' social studies knowledge with an emphasis on the use and understanding of concepts, principles, and selected types of visual materials. The content of the eighth-grade social studies test questions is drawn from geography, history, political science, economics, sociology, and anthropology. The NAEP surveys student achievement in the social studies areas of U.S. history, civics, geography, and economics. Both national tests are designed to use social studies content as the context for questions designed to measure broad understandings and concepts rather than specific skills.



How to Use Strategies for U.S. History Test Preparation

This book provides material with capsuled information on about one hundred major events in U.S. history, divided into seven units. The events are presented fairly chronologically. Sample multiple choice questions measure student understanding of the information in each unit. The answers to the questions are at the end of each unit.

You may choose to pull some of those questions together to use as a pretest to determine students' understanding of U.S. history. You can also use the questions to develop a posttest for use after working through these materials or as a preview of the ITBS or NAEP tests.

You may also choose additional events in U.S. history for coverage.

Posting a U.S. History Events Chart

You can post a U.S. history events chart to match events taking place in your state. After examining the events through teacher-led class discussions, students should be able to link what was happening in the nation to what was happening in the state by explaining how national events impacted your state. Often the national events will not match your state's progress; at other times, the two will be parallel.

Student Activities

Students might enjoy developing a class U.S. history trivia game as they review the materials. Have students use color index cards and develop one question (with the answer on the back side) on each card. If each student in the class develops just one question for every U.S. history event covered during the year, you will have an excellent set of trivia questions for future years and a sound review game for the spring before testing. Developing their own game, and getting to play and compete during those "down times," such as picture-taking day or yearbook-signing day, keeps student interest in major U.S. history events high.

Another suggestion for student activities to accompany the U.S. history test prep materials is to have students complete summary charts (*how, who, where, when, why, and what*) for each event or to write newspaper headlines that might have appeared on stories covering each event. Students can post the headlines on a class U.S. history bulletin board. The visual display can be a constant reinforcement for the knowledge tidbit.

Stretch students' critical thinking skills by playing "What if . . ." with each event. For example, "What if John Deere had never invented the steel plow?" Let students speculate on how the lack of that invention might have changed the westward settlers' farming plans.



Preparing Students for the NAEP U.S. History Test

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) surveys student achievement nationally in core areas of the curriculum. One of those areas is United States history because a knowledge of U.S. history is considered a vital component of effective citizenship. NAEP is based on the belief that a "thorough grasp of our country's struggles and achievements will better equip young people to make informed and intelligent decisions about contemporary issues." NAEP's U.S. history framework is organized around three concepts: (1) major themes of U.S. history, (2) chronological periods, and (3) ways of knowing and thinking about U.S. history with four themes serving as the structure of the framework. Those four themes include:

- 1. Change and Continuity in American Democracy: Ideas, Institutions, Practices, and Controversies** This theme concerns the development of American political democracy from the colonial era to the present. It covers political events that shaped America's democracy such as the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the fight for civil rights. It addresses the core ideas and principles that underlie American institutions. The theme addresses students' knowledge of the founding of the nation, the writing of the Constitution, the development of the U.S. government, and the nation's political history. It evaluates students' understanding of the role that major political ideas and conflicts have played at different points in the nation's history.
- 2. The Gathering and Interactions of Peoples, Cultures, and Ideas** This theme covers a major component of U.S. history – the interactions among the peoples and cultures of many countries, racial and ethnic groups, and religious traditions that have contributed to the development of American society. The theme addresses immigration, cultural developments, patterns of social organization, and changing roles of men and women.
- 3. Economic and Technological Changes and Their Relation to Society, Ideas, and the Environment** This theme addresses the economic history of our nation and its development from a rural, agricultural society to an urban, industrialized superpower. It covers the roles of geography and of developments in science and technology in bringing about socioeconomic change.
- 4. The Changing Role of America in the World** This theme addresses the many factors – political ideas, economic interests, public opinion – that have shaped American foreign policy. It also covers specific interactions between our nation and other nations and domestic consequences of developments in foreign policy.