

# Introduction



# Introduction

Americans' birthright is freedom. We teach our children social studies, above all history and civics, so they can know what freedom is, where America's ideas of freedom come from in the long history of Western civilization, how our ancestors achieved their freedom, how our laws, republican institutions, and limitation of the scope of government preserve our freedom, and what they need to do to preserve their country's liberty. We also teach our children social studies so they can learn why their country deserves to be loved, and to learn what we owe to our ancestors—the heroes of the American past who deserve our gratitude because they created a free and prosperous country and bequeathed it to us, their posterity. We teach our children social studies so they can learn to understand the enduring character of the American nation and to love the customs that should define and unite us as a people.

Our children should learn who we Americans are—and then they should be taught about the nations, the faiths, and the history of the world. They should also learn America's common language of liberty, patriotism, and national memory. We must instruct our children so they may become worthy of their ancestors by becoming full members of the American republic and the American nation, self-reliant citizens who respect the dignity and the rights of their fellow Americans, who love their country, and who cherish our liberties and our laws. *Love, liberty, and the law*—these are the touchstones of American social studies instruction.

Rather, these *should* be the three touchstones of American social studies instruction. Far too many schools have wandered from these touchstones. Some educators are so caught up in pedagogical “theory” that they have forgotten that facts come first. Some activists in our schools, public and private alike, are so antagonistic toward our culture, without recognizing what they owe to it, that they seek to erase our worthy history of liberty from the curriculum. Instead of an informed and intelligent patriotism, they foster a cynical spirit devoid of appreciation for the richness and complexity of the American past.

America at large has suffered from the success of their malign efforts. Too many Americans have emerged from our schools ignorant of America's history, indifferent to liberty, filled with animus against their ancestors and their fellow Americans, and estranged from their country. The warping of American social studies instruction has created a corps of activists dedicated to the overthrow of

America and its freedoms, larger numbers of Americans indifferent to the steady whittling away of American liberty, and many more who are so ignorant of the past they cannot use our heritage of freedom to judge contemporary debates. We must restore American social studies instruction centered on liberty if we are to restore the American republic to good health.

American students do indeed need to learn that redress of grievances is an essential component of civic liberty—but this should not be used as an excuse to convert social studies instruction into the polemical nursing of resentment or into community organizing efforts designed to recruit students into activist organizations. American students should learn how their forefathers designed our system of self-government to facilitate redress of grievances by protecting Americans' rights to seek changes in the law and to protest unjust laws and government actions. Social studies instruction should teach that American citizens can be bold to seek justice precisely because our republic's institutions and procedures work to enhance liberty and to protect it from infringements by officers of the state.

Yet the educational establishment will not of its own accord reverse the decay of American social studies instruction. American policymakers and parents know that something has gone wrong with our country's history and civics classes. The trouble is that they are not professional teachers, so they rarely have a concrete alternative to offer. They can criticize the details of a curriculum gone wrong, but it is more difficult to say what curriculum the schools should offer instead.

Here, we provide that alternative—the Civics Alliance's *American Birthright: The Civic Alliance's Model K-12 Social Studies Standards*. The Civics Alliance, a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to improving America's civics education, created *American Birthright* as a model state social studies standard—that is, a model for the document that state education departments use to provide guidance to each public K-12 school district as it creates its own curriculum. We chose this form because state standards are the single most influential documents in America's education administrations. These state standards not only guide public school districts and charter schools but also influence what textbook authors write, and what knowledge assessment companies (such as the College Board) test for in their Advanced Placement examinations. They affect teacher training and they provide the framework for individual lesson plans created by teachers. Private schools and homeschool parents also keep an eye on state standards. We wish to improve all these aspects of American social studies instruction and hope, therefore, that *American Birthright* will inspire America's state education departments to adopt similar social studies standards of their own that teach American students their birthright of liberty.

But we did not provide *American Birthright* just for state education departments. Far too many of these departments are set on imposing state social studies standards that combine the worst of misguided pedagogical theory with the worst of anti-American animus. We also have written *American Birthright* for governors, state legislators, school boards, grassroots activists—indeed, for every American citizen. Every American needs to know what a proper social studies instruction should be, not least to be prepared for the political battles needed to reclaim our schools. *American Birthright* is a myriad of slings for the army of Davids who face the Goliath of the education establishment.

We have crafted *American Birthright* to teach America's foundational history of liberty and to appeal to a bipartisan majority of Americans. Yet we have not pursued bipartisanship for its own sake.

Too much of America's educational establishment has abandoned America's bedrock principles, and we do not wish to compromise *American Birthright's* commitment to liberty in search of a hollow consensus.

## Organization

*American Birthright* provides the content knowledge in history, geography, civics, and economics that American citizens need to have so they can preserve their liberty. *American Birthright* summarizes for citizens, policymakers, education administrators, and teachers the history and social science content that schools should teach in each grade from pre-kindergarten through high school.

Each course's learning standards describe what students should be expected to learn in each grade—knowledge such as the location of the Battle of Yorktown, the concept of separation of powers, the effects of Thomas Aquinas' and Martin Luther's theologies on European culture, the contributions of Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton to scientific thought, and the causes and effects of World War I. *American Birthright* frames both instruction and assessment to ensure that students learn in-depth content knowledge rather than a hollow mastery of abstract skills.

*American Birthright* integrates the upper-level learning standards with an extensive series of primary source documents, which students should read in whole or in part. (Some primary sources we list are lengthy and will need to be excerpted.) Students should learn the actual materials of history and not just textbook interpretations, which often distort the past. We list these documents as "*Seminal Primary Documents to Read*." *American Birthright* provides these documents for the upper grades, but we encourage teachers to integrate them into instruction for the lower grades wherever appropriate.

*American Birthright* does not provide an entire curriculum. It offers, rather, a minimum number of topics, articulated in very broad terms, which an individual curriculum should include. Teachers should have the liberty to teach each topic as they see fit, to add new topics, to incorporate independent lesson plans and sequences, and to unite items from these learning standards into thematic units that encourage students to think deeply about larger questions. They should also have the liberty to reorganize the sequence in which they teach these topics (although history classes usually are taught best in chronological sequence), as well as to review material from earlier grades in any course of instruction.

*American Birthright's* learning standards consist of simple statements of what factual content to teach, not of how to teach. *American Birthright* includes no *concepts* or *skills*. Teachers should know what their students need to learn, but they should be free to choose how students learn. Nor should they waste precious classroom hours on mandated skills instruction, which all too often takes the place of actual social studies content. State standards should not mandate pedagogy.

We do believe, however, that schools should assign assessable expectations for the different grades. To say, for example, that students should develop "writing skills" provides no assessable expectation for either teacher or student. A writing expectation instead provides a clear benchmark. A series of writing expectations might be:

- Students are expected by the end of Grade 2 to write sentences and simple paragraphs on historical subject matter with good command of spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
- Students are expected by the end of Grade 5 to write an introductory 3-page history paper with full command of spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
- Students are expected by the end of Grade 8 to write an intellectually solid 5-page history paper with sophisticated vocabulary and complex grammar.
- Students are expected by the end of Grade 12 to write an intellectually and stylistically sophisticated 10-page history paper, and thereby demonstrate that they are prepared for an undergraduate history course.

We encourage states and school districts to craft similarly assessable expectations to cover all aspects of social studies instruction.

*American Birthright* also avoids including *skills* and *concepts* because including them makes state standards unreadably complex. Too many state standards combine Themes, Concepts, Skills, and Periods into a labyrinth of cross-checked administrative categories. Ordinary citizens can scarcely understand such standards, much less critique them—and even teachers frequently find it difficult to understand what precisely they are supposed to teach. The standards' very complexity hinders proper accountability to policymakers and citizens.

*American Birthright*, by contrast, has been written so that every American can understand it easily. We have organized each grade's standards in bullet points and have reduced the number of social studies disciplines to a minimum. We have put our broader pedagogical points into this introduction, rather than muddying our content standards by conflating *how* to teach with *what* to teach.

*American Birthright* includes four disciplines—History (H), Geography (G), Civics (C), and Economics (E). These disciplines teach us an enormous amount about humanity and our world, but above all these disciplines work in harness to teach us about liberty. History teaches us where our liberty came from. Geography allows us to trace the story of liberty on the map. Civics teaches us how our government works to maintain our liberty, and how we as citizens must act to preserve the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity. Economics teaches us about the freedom to buy and to sell, to do as we judge best with our property, to choose how to work and what to do with our earnings—the freedom in private life that is the essential buttress to political liberty. We mark each individual item in the standards with (H), (G), (C), and/or (E), to indicate which discipline or disciplines it emphasizes, but each element contributes to a single and coherent course of instruction. We arrange historical instruction as a chronological narrative.

We want students to enjoy learning for its own sake, since instruction in these disciplines stocks their minds with dates, persons, and places. But every fact our children learn should also equip them to understand the world around them, to treat their fellow Americans with wise affection, and to work intelligently to preserve their liberties and their country.

## Scope and Sequence

*American Birthright* provides a sequence of courses through Grade 7 that introduces students to the geography, history, and government of their towns, states, country, and world, as well as an introduction to economics. This sequence centers its instruction on America's symbols, geography, history, and government. *American Birthright* then provides a more advanced sequence of courses in Grades 8 through 12 on Ancient and Classical Mediterranean Civilizations, the Development of Western Civilization, World History, United States History, and Civics.

We believe that this sequence is coherent and that its culmination in United States History and Civics supports the basic framework of social studies instruction to sustain American liberty. Yet we presume that states and school districts will alter the sequence in different ways. We would be delighted, for example, if states, school districts, and individual teachers integrated our United States History instruction with instruction in regional, state, and local history. We encourage state and local experimentation with the scope and sequence, as well as age-appropriate adjustment of each course's learning standards.

Several states mandate or allow high school electives in State History or Bible Literacy. Our standards are meant to work in tandem with such courses. *American Birthright* generally is meant to prepare students for any sort of social studies elective offered by a particular school district.

*American Birthright* also is meant to prepare students for advanced work in European History, United States History, World History, and Government. Unfortunately, the College Board, whose tests govern the structure of most Advanced Placement coursework, has politicized and softened its own standards; Advanced Placement courses for College Board credit no longer educate properly. We suggest that high schools that wish to provide advanced instruction in history and government would do better to provide dual credit courses (high school courses for which students receive college credit) or to facilitate dual enrollment in local community colleges.

*American Birthright's* learning standards have been crafted to support seven *primary themes*.

1. *Liberty*: The slow development and application of the ideals and institutions of liberty, particularly those embodied in constitutional self-government.
2. *Faiths and Nations*: The distinctive histories and characters of the world's enduring faiths and nations, and their importance as wellsprings of human behavior.
3. *Science and Technology*: The unique development of *Western* science and technology and the consequent transformation of most of the world from poverty to affluence.
4. *Economics*: The development of conscious understanding of how markets promote human flourishing, the rule of law, and prosperity, and the development of institutions and policies to deepen the benefits of free markets and broaden the number of beneficiaries.

5. *State and Society*: The development of state power, for good and for ill, as a complement to the autonomous, self-regulatory dynamics of human societies.
6. *Culture*: The character and transformations of different world cultures, their exemplary masterpieces in literature and the fine arts, and the interplay of particular cultures, individual free will, and universal human nature that determines the course of history.
7. *Achievement*: The exceptional but fragile achievement embodied in the creation and preservation of the American republic, which has to a remarkable extent institutionalized the practice of liberty and extended its habits within the American nation.

Students generally should be able to *identify* the ideals, institutions, and individual examples of human liberty, individualism, religious freedom, and republican self-government; *assess* the extent to which civilizations have fulfilled these ideals; and *describe* how the evolution of these ideals at different times and in different places has contributed to the formation of modern American ideals.

*American Birthright* also has been crafted to provide sustained coverage of four main topics: Western Civilization, World History, United States History, and Civics.

1. *Western Civilization*. Trace the continuous development of Western civilization from ancient Sumer, Egypt, Greece, and Israel through Rome, medieval Christendom, the Protestant Reformation, and the European creation of the modern world since the Renaissance. Europe's internal and external wars, which shaped the character of European civilization, preserved that civilization from conquest by its rivals, and culminated, during a brief apogee of technological advantage, in Europe's conquest and colonization of much of the world. Pay particular attention to the development of democratic and republican ideals and institutions via the matrices of classical and Christian thought, and to the history of England, which links the broader history of European liberty with the history of the United States. Emphasize the uniquely European histories of science, technology, and free-market economics.
2. *World History*. Examine the migrations, clashes, massacres, conquests, and technological advances of prehistory and history. The development and character of small-scale tribes, nomadic societies, and villages that preceded civilization, whose warlike nature must be understood in order to comprehend the character and the magnitude of the civilizing process. The development, increasing complexity, and distinctive character of the larger civilizations, with comparative evaluations of their strengths and weaknesses. Examine how Europe created a world system that united largely separate regions and gave birth to new nations in the Americas and Australasia. Analyze the interplay of common human dynamics such as agriculture, commerce, military conflict, and state-building with the particular events, faiths, and cultures of each region—with particular attention to the power and appeal of Europe's unique ideals and institutions of liberty, and their varying reception by different civilizations.



3. *United States History*. Elucidate the development of the American nation from its origins in England and England's colonies on the Atlantic seaboard. The development of American liberty from European ideals and practices, its institutionalization in colonial laws and practices, early state constitutions, and the federal Constitution, and its extension and application in America's subsequent history. Pay particular attention to the interplay of republican ideals and institutions and the creation of an American nation, imbued with the habits and culture of liberty and willing to welcome newcomers into its land and way of life. The reality that many Americans at some point were denied liberty and equality will be given due attention and placed in the appropriate historical context. Emphasize the role of faith in sustaining and extending liberty, and examine the economic and technological sinews of power that have given America the capacity to champion freedom throughout the world during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
4. *Civics*. Explore the Hebrew, Greek, and Roman sources of the American political system, and the Christian synthesis of Hebrew, Greek, and Roman thought, with its emphasis on the equal dignity of all individual humans in the eyes of God. The medieval English inheritance and documents of common law, trial by jury, local self-government, liberty, and representative government. The early modern English inheritance and documents of Christian liberty, republicanism, militia, accountable government, mixed government, parliamentary sovereignty, limited government, freedom of the press, the English Bill of Rights, and the Toleration Act. The colonial American inheritance and documents of Christian liberty, self-government, and local government. Discuss the Enlightenment theories of Locke, Montesquieu, and their contemporaries that universalized the traditions of Christian and English liberty. The opposition of patriots after 1764 to British violations of Americans' constitutional and natural rights. The sources, ideas, and effect of the Declaration of Independence. The nature of the Articles of Confederation and the reasons why Americans created a weak central government. Revolutionary-era state constitutions, the impulse to create a new federal Constitution, the nature of the Constitution, federalist and anti-federalist arguments, and the Bill of Rights. The American constellation of civic ideals: liberty, republican virtue, natural law, natural rights, republican self-government, the preservation of the republic, the expansion of the republic, commercial expansion, national interest, national unity, moral crusades, populist revolts, and moderation. The state constitutions and state and local government.

We encourage states and school districts to keep these primary themes and main topics in mind as they craft their own standards and curricula.

## Selection Criteria

We have drafted *American Birthright* in good measure because existing social studies standards too frequently omit crucial figures, such as Christopher Columbus and George Washington, or excise

entire concepts, such as *liberty* or *republican virtue*. We realize that *American Birthright* inevitably will be criticized in turn for its own omissions. We expect that one common critique will be something like: *We have conducted a keyword search of your document and American Birthright doesn't mention systemic racism, it never refers to intersectionality, and it didn't use the canons of modern identity politics to provide greater representation of select groups.*

We do not agree with the ideological presumptions of that kind of criticism. Yet we love the richness of humanity and we regret every concept, fact, and individual we could not include. Much that we wish we could have included overlaps with the preferences of the advocates of representation. To confine our regrets to individuals, we would love to have mentioned such figures as the Empress Dowager Cixi, Charles Curtis, Félix Éboué, Pim Fortuyn, Indira Gandhi, Irène Joliot-Curie, Clare Boothe Luce, Golda Meir, Hannah More, Murasaki Shikibu, Ben Nighthorse Campbell, and Bayard Rustin. But then, we also regret that we could not mention such topics and individuals as Europe's Barbarian West (c. 400 – 800); Russian America; the English colonizations of Ireland and the Caribbean as contexts to the English colonization of mainland North America; extensive analysis of the histories and cultures of Indonesia and Korea; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Romanticism; and R. A. Fisher and the invention of modern statistics. *American Birthright* can provide no more than an introduction to the study of mankind.

Our criteria for including particular items generally have been whether they help students to learn the themes and topics we listed above in *Scope and Sequence*. Above all, we have selected individual items to equip students to know the story of liberty in human history and to describe how the ideals and institutions of liberty have created and shaped America. We believe that any American social studies standard, whichever facts and individuals it chooses to mention, should use *significance for the story of liberty* as its primary selection criterion.

## Pedagogies

*American Birthright* neither endorses nor rejects specific pedagogies. Teachers should be free to teach as they like. That said, our focus on rigorous standards, classroom instruction, and content knowledge aligns well with pedagogies such as E. D. Hirsch's *Core Knowledge*.

Furthermore, we judge that a great many pedagogies actively inhibit student learning, including action civics, so-called "anti-racism," civic engagement, critical race theory, current events learning, inquiry-based learning, media literacy, project-based learning, social-emotional learning, and virtually any pedagogy that claims to promote "diversity, equity, and inclusion" or "social justice." The best of these substitute education in skills for education in content and instruct students to "question" when they cannot answer the most elementary factual queries. Many such pedagogies select tendentious, ideologically driven questions that suggest predetermined answers. The worst of these substitute vocational training in progressive activism for classroom instruction ("action civics" or "civic engagement," better known as "protest civics") and actively promote disaffection from our country. We strongly recommend avoiding all such pedagogies.

We favor pedagogies that facilitate *accountability*—not just students’ accountability to their teachers and their parents, but also teacher and school accountability to parents, policymakers, and taxpayers. Inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, social-emotional learning, critical race theory, outcome-based education, differential standards—among these pedagogies’ many grave flaws is that they disable teacher and school accountability. You can’t tell how well teachers instruct an individual student when what you’re assessing is a group project, a protest, a “skill,” or an ideological commitment—or when all students pass, no matter how little they’ve learned. Pedagogies that focus on rigorous standards, individual effort, classroom instruction, and content knowledge allow parents and policymakers to assess just how well their schools teach their children. We favor these pedagogies not least because they make possible such democratic accountability.

Social studies classes should teach concepts and skills that are discipline-specific rather than abstract skills that supposedly can be applied to any discipline. The skills they do teach should be age-appropriate, while also challenging. (See *Disciplinary Methodologies* below.)

We also favor pedagogies that truly prepare students for college and career. Both advanced study and the workforce require competitive and ambitious Americans with broad and deep background knowledge; the talent to absorb, synthesize and make use of large numbers of facts; the habit of making comparisons and learning broader contexts so as to judge with a sense of proportion; the ability to subject any topic to logical analysis; the capacity both to listen sympathetically to multiple points of view and to engage in free and fearless debate that avoids *ad hominem* attacks; the willingness to be judged for their ability to produce timely and competent work; and independence of conscience and mind. *American Birthright* should align with pedagogies that foster these traits and capacities.

Every student should be educated to be another Harry Truman—a high-school graduate who, without ever graduating from college, has a solid grasp of history and is capable of serving as an officer, a judge, a senator, and president.

Students cannot learn social studies properly unless they read and write fluently. We therefore encourage states and school districts to abandon the Common Core English Language Arts standards. These standards have worsened students’ literacy since they were adopted and degrade social studies courses by turning them into a form of remedial reading instruction. Social studies classes must free themselves from the chains of Common Core.

We do not provide targeted recommendations for special needs students, save to say that all students are Americans who deserve to learn about their birthright: that, in the words of the Declaration of Independence, “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” We encourage schools, teachers, and parents to challenge both special needs and gifted children as much as possible, whether by extra help, tracking, dual enrollment in college classes, or any other means that will propel them to use all their mental resources.

While we endorse no theoretical pedagogy, we recommend that states and school districts adopt these twelve pedagogical rules of thumb:

1. **Facts:** Provide students with an extensive catalog of historical facts, including dates, places, people, and laws, so they can assess conflicting historical interpretations and evaluate for themselves the evidence for various moral and philosophical claims.
2. **Primary Sources:** Base historical instruction on primary sources, including the documents of liberty, speeches, and firsthand accounts of important events; and teach students how to understand the intellectual background of primary sources and to comprehend their language.
3. **Rigor:** Test students for knowledge of an entire subject matter rather than provide selective lists of what should be studied that too often are regarded as telling students what need not be studied.
4. **Skills:** Leave skills-training to individual teachers and only require skills specific to social studies inquiry, such as source evaluation and historical comparison.
5. **Historical Integrity:** Teach disciplined inquiry that aims to understand the past rather than cherry-pick decontextualized facts to support modern sociopolitical arguments.
6. **Impartiality:** Provide students material they can use to argue for a wide range of political beliefs rather than material tailored to advance narrow sociopolitical arguments.
7. **Individuals:** Instruct students that it is individuals who make history, not impersonal forces, and tell them enough about famous individuals that they can see how character and individual action changed the course of history.
8. **Contingency:** Teach students that the past could have gone in different directions and that our present circumstances, whether good or bad, were not pre-ordained.
9. **Humility:** Train students to avoid the narrow perspective that only judges the past by today's moral standards, and to recognize that all human beings share a flawed and limited nature.
10. **Broadmindedness:** Inform students that they can empathize intelligently with the beliefs and experiences of people living in widely varied times and places and provide them with the information they need to do so.
11. **Charitable Interpretation:** Teach students to interpret the beliefs of historical subjects in the most rational way possible, and to learn the strongest possible arguments that support those beliefs.

12. **Truth:** Help students search for a way to assemble historical facts into a true understanding of humanity and our world; show them that all human beings have an equal capacity to discern the truth.

We also endorse the traditional American pedagogy oriented toward instruction in virtue. At its best, American civics education has taught a doctrine of republican virtue that argues that the survival of the American republic depends on educating young Americans to possess individual good character—and that liberty depends on learning to aspire to virtue while asking and giving forgiveness when fallible human beings fall short of their ideals. Students must learn to base the liberty guaranteed by the Constitution on the virtue prescribed by the Golden Rule, that *Champion liberty for others as you would have them champion liberty for you* follows naturally from *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*.

We realize that the citizens of a pluralist republic will always differ about the precise nature of individual virtue and that our public schools should not conflate virtue with the beliefs of a particular denomination. We realize even more acutely that we should not attempt to catalog virtues in this document as we catalog the facts of history and geography. But *American Birthright* catalogs facts that Americans need to know to develop a spirit of republican virtue. We hope that parents and teachers will build on these facts to instill in their children and students a love of virtue to match their love of liberty.

## Disciplinary Methodologies

States and school districts should avoid teaching methodological skills that are presumed to apply interchangeably to all subjects. It is much more effective to teach students methodologies specific to each discipline. We therefore provide brief sketches of methodologies appropriate for History, Geography, Civics, and Economics.

- *History:* Historians and students of history use primary sources (first-hand accounts of a topic) and secondary sources (narrative or analytical accounts of a topic by people who had no direct connection to it) to learn what facts are known about the past, what arguments have been made about how to interpret these facts, and how to evaluate the reliability of historical evidence and the persuasiveness of historical argumentation.
- *Geography:* Geographers and students of geography learn how to make and understand maps, inform themselves of the natural and political contours of the world, and use this knowledge to illuminate their understanding of economics and history.

- *Civics*: American students learn the ideals on which their country was founded, the history of how their country was founded and those ideals put into practice, how their republican government works to preserve American ideals and well-being, and how they should behave as citizens to preserve their republic and their nation.
- *Economics*: Economists and students of economics build on the insight that people usually pursue their self-interest to analyze the choices individuals and groups make as they engage in the production, distribution, and consumption of scarce resources, and also to evaluate the wisdom and effectiveness of government action to influence these choices.

States and school districts will know best how to expand and modify our sketches to suit their students.

## Civics and English Language Arts

We believe that civics instruction can and should be integrated with English Language Arts. Elementary students can practice handwriting by copying the Declaration of Independence—and they can also use the Declaration of Independence to practice their ability to read cursive. English Language Arts texts, moreover, should include books with a civics focus. We therefore include at the beginning of each grade’s learning standards a section of *Additional Reading*, drawn from the Civic Literacy Reading List in *Florida’s B.E.S.T. Standards: English Language Arts*. We encourage English Language Arts teachers to select from these texts for readings in every grade.

## Intensive Content Standards for Democratic Education

*American Birthright* provides intensive content standards, which ask students to learn a comprehensive array of facts, including dates, places, and concepts. We know that some educators argue that schools should limit content instruction because so-called “disadvantaged” students (which these educators have variously defined as minorities, immigrants, women, or the poor) cannot master substantial course content. These educators denigrate the abilities and potential of the children they claim to champion, and they do so even though a large body of education research has shown their arguments are misguided. Notable works such as Thomas Sowell’s *Black Education: Myths and Tragedies* (1972), E. D. Hirsch’s *The Schools We Need and Why We Don’t Have Them* (1996), Annette Lareau’s *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (2003), and Abigail and Stephen Thernstrom’s *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning* (2004) point out that disadvantaged children need intensive content instruction the most. Better-off students receive large amounts of content knowledge from their families and peers, but disadvantaged students must receive this content in school if they are to receive it at all. When disadvantaged students do receive this intensive content instruction, they learn eagerly and well.

Content standards that focus on skills and abbreviate content especially harm the education of disadvantaged children, and in so doing foster an unequal society. *American Birthright* offers intensive content standards not least because they will make sure that America's schools fulfill the promise of equal educational opportunities for everyone.

## Assessment

*American Birthright* also provides intensive content standards to facilitate reliable assessment, whether by national companies such as the Educational Testing Service (ETS), state-level testing, or tests by school districts and individual teachers. Our content standards will provide enough material to make it easy both for teachers and for large organizations such as ETS to create tests that accurately assess student knowledge. They will be particularly helpful in making it possible for school district committees and individual teachers, who have fewer test-creation resources, to create effective assessments of their own and not rely solely on state-wide or national examinations.

## Curricula

*American Birthright* does not provide curricula. We are reluctant to provide a formal stamp of approval for specific curricula, for fear that it would become the first step toward a mandated national curriculum. But we should give some sense of the sort of curricula that we believe align well with *American Birthright's* standards. Hillsdale College's *The Hillsdale 1776 Curriculum* aligns well with *American Birthright*. So too does Great Hearts Academies' general approach to social studies instruction and 1776 Unites' focused lesson plans on African-American history. We anticipate that AAT Education's American history curriculum, designed around Wilfred M. McClay's U.S. history textbook *Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story* (2019), also will align with *American Birthright* when it is released. These are not the only models for social studies curricula, but they are good ones.

The Civics Alliance will provide lists of recommended curricula on its website in order to inform parents, teachers, and school districts. But we emphasize that these will be *recommendations* only, not mandates. We do not wish our preferences to constrain any American school district's liberty to set its own curricula.

## Teacher Training

America needs teachers who are capable of teaching this material. We strongly suggest teacher licensure reform, so that public K-12 teachers receive intensive subject matter training in Economics, Western Civilization, World History, United States History, and Civics. (Teachers of other classes, such as English, Math, and Science, should receive intensive subject matter training as well.) Policymakers might also consider requiring K-12 teachers to take a class in American History and Government Primary Sources, which would introduce teachers to a core series of these documents and teach them how to use these sources in the classroom. Teachers should also be able to read and write well enough

themselves to be capable of educating and assessing students as they produce substantial written assignments. Given the intense commitment of many of America's schools of education to ineffective pedagogies, we also recommend reforms to allow prospective teachers to receive teaching licensure without having to take courses in education schools and departments. The troubling fact that U.S. students rank about thirtieth in international standings in Mathematics, Reading, and Science suggests that the public education establishment could do a significantly better job at educating students.

We have crafted *American Birthright* to serve as a model for proper teacher training. If teachers do not already know this material, we intend it to serve as a guide for their professional development. We also intend it to guide the teachers of teachers, as they create their own courses. *American Birthright* is an invitation to learning for all, teachers and students alike.

## Sources

We have not tried to reinvent the wheel with *American Birthright*. Instead, we have adapted material from several sources that we believe do a particularly good job of providing structure and content for social studies instruction. The largest source of *American Birthright* is the 2003 Massachusetts History and Social Sciences Curriculum Framework, whose own sources include Indiana's 2001 Academic Standards for Economics and Government. We also have drawn on the draft Florida Civics Standard and on the National Association of Scholars' report *Disfigured History: How the College Board Demolishes the Past*. We have drawn on many other sources as well, but these three are the largest contributors. We base *American Birthright* on the best existing practices of education professionals.

## Implementation

Many different components of government and civil society must act to reform America's social studies instruction. Several specific actions at the federal and state level will help facilitate adoption of state standards modeled on *American Birthright*.

### Federal Government

1. Withdraw from regulating or funding any aspect of K-12 education, including social studies instruction. Federal involvement in these matters violates fundamental principles of American federalism.



### State Governments

2. Disentangle state social studies standards from national frameworks created by the education establishment, such as Educating for American Democracy's *Excellence in History and Civics for all Learners* and *Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy* and the National Council for the Social Studies' *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards*.
3. Pass laws to prohibit the use of discriminatory pedagogies and action civics in public K-12 social studies classes.
4. Pass laws to require high school social studies instruction in Western Civilization, United States History, and Civics.
5. Pass laws to require all existing academic standards, and all forthcoming revisions, to be submitted to the state legislature and the governor for review and possible veto, unless an elected state board of education already has the authority to revise and approve academic standards.
6. Pass laws to reduce the authority of state education departments and to increase the power and autonomy of school districts.
7. Reform teaching licensure to increase the number of required history and civics courses and to end the gatekeeping power of the education schools and departments.

### School Boards

8. Provide leadership and oversight to ensure that teachers adopt a proper social studies curriculum.
9. Provide parents and taxpayers with transparent assessments of how well students are learning social studies.

These reforms will go a long way toward achieving successful social studies reform—which we will achieve when all our children know that liberty is America's touchstone, and its companions love and the law.

## Conclusion

*American Birthright* is a model—not a set structure to be imposed on states and school districts. We have crafted rigorous standards not least to make it straightforward for policymakers to create equally rigorous equivalents with different priorities, whether by abbreviating some topics and primary source readings, expanding others, or modifying the course sequences. A Civics course, for example, might focus on Founding Documents and reduce the number of *Seminal Primary Documents to Read* devoted to Supreme Court decisions. States and school districts that find *American Birthright*'s broad outlines valuable should and will modify it in detail.

We do not wish to use the vast network of federal bureaucracies and non-governmental organizations that work together to impose homogenous, inferior, and politicized education on America. We would rather eliminate their power to coerce the states and school districts. We submit *American Birthright* directly to state policymakers and school boards, and to the citizenry of America, for their consideration. America's schools and curricula should be democratically accountable to our elected representatives at the state and local level.

*American Birthright* is a means to an end. We learned as children to revere our country, conceived in liberty, and we wish to pass that devotion on to our own children. Proper social studies standards are a linchpin in the work to educate a new generation of Americans who understand and appreciate their nation's past and who respect and are prepared to sacrifice for their country. Our children should be equipped to continue the work bequeathed to us by the Founders—to establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity. We proffer *American Birthright* to our fellow Americans to help them craft the standards, the curricula, the textbooks, and the lessons that will sustain our republic and our nation.

## Further Readings

- A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983)  
Bruce Frohnen, *The American Republic: Primary Sources* (2002)  
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E. D. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987)  
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Wilfred M. McClay, *Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story* (2019)  
The President's Advisory 1776 Commission, *The 1776 Report* (2021)  
David Randall, *Disfigured History: How the College Board Demolishes the Past* (2020)  
David Randall, *Learning for Self-Government: A K–12 Civics Report Card* (2022)  
Thomas Sowell, *Black Education: Myths and Tragedies* (1972)  
Abigail and Stephen Thernstrom, *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning* (2004)