

# Using *Understanding by Design* as a Curriculum Framework

## *How does a unit fit into an entire course or K-12 program?*

While backward design certainly applies to the design of individual units, the process is also an effective way of mapping a coherent curriculum. When applying backward design to curriculum mapping, we consider our “desired results” including content standards and other exit outcomes, then map backward (e.g., 12 to K) to insure that all of the important results are explicitly addressed through the courses and units. Backward mapping in this way helps to identify any gaps and/or redundancies in the curriculum, and target needed curriculum revisions/additions.

Understanding by Design suggests a particular “spin” on the mapping process: Instead of simply listing the topics taught, a UbD map specifies the “big ideas” and essential questions that are addressed at various points in the curriculum. This approach helps to identify the overarching ideas and essential questions that provide important “throughlines” in the curriculum. For example, in social studies, an overarching EQ might be, *Why do people move?*. This same question would then be examined in 3rd grade when we study the explorers, 5th grade for the westward movement, and 10th grade with immigration.

Additionally, we propose that a UbD map should include “core” assessment tasks that all students would perform to demonstrate their understanding of key ideas and processes. (Of course, these tasks would be accompanied by agreed-upon scoring rubrics.) We believe that such curriculum mapping brings conceptual clarity and coherence to the curriculum.

The following pages contain samples of district curriculum maps based on the *Understanding by Design* framework.

# A Sample UbD Curriculum Map for Stage 1\*

## 7<sup>th</sup> Grade United States History

Course Understandings	Course Essential Questions	Course Skills
<p>Students will understand <i>that...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Preambles to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution establish the ideal for why we need government and principles that should guide the government's decision-making – providing a framework by which we can evaluate our nation's progress and suggest means for improvement.</li> <li>• Progress often comes at a price – the extent of which allows history to judge its success.</li> <li>• Specific individuals, even outside of elected leaders, can have a profound impact on history.</li> <li>• America abandoned its isolationist policy as economic and geo-political interests began to change, becoming the dominant world power with new challenges and responsibilities.</li> <li>• In order to promote the general welfare, the government has attempted to balance the need to let the market operate freely with the need to regulate in order to safeguard public interests.</li> <li>• Geography continues to influence the economic, political and social development of our nation.</li> <li>• Throughout American history, wartime fears and perceived threats to security have led to the denial of certain civil liberties.</li> <li>• American culture reflects the events of the day and shapes how Americans perceive themselves.</li> <li>• Ratification of the Constitution did not end the debate on governmental power; rather, economic, regional, social, and ideological tensions that emerged and continue to emerge further debates over the meaning of the Constitution and the proper balance between federal and state power.</li> <li>• The government and public commitment to civil and equal rights has advanced.</li> </ul>	<p><i>1. Are we becoming the nation we set out to be?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What price progress?</li> <li>• How do individuals make a difference?</li> <li>• How did the United States become <i>the</i> world power?</li> <li>• What issues determine our involvement in foreign affairs?</li> <li>• Why did the US abandon its traditional isolationist foreign policy?</li> <li>• Should commitment to the ideals in the constitution extend beyond our borders?</li> <li>• What is the government's responsibility to promote the general welfare?</li> <li>• Should the government be more hands-on or hands-off with regards to the economy?</li> <li>• How does geography influence history?</li> <li>• Historically, why is there a struggle between security and liberty?</li> <li>• How has the cultural identity of America changed over time?</li> <li>• How has the struggle between state's rights and federal power played out over time?</li> <li>• How has the government's commitment to "establish justice" changed over time?</li> <li>• How has the definition of "justice" changed historically to become more inclusive?</li> </ul>	<p>The student will develop skills for historical and geographical analysis, including the ability to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify, examine, and interpret primary and secondary source documents to increase understanding of events and life in US history;</li> <li>• Make connections between the past and the present;</li> <li>• Sequence significant events in United States history from Constitutional times to present;</li> <li>• Interpret ideas and events from different historical perspectives;</li> <li>• Evaluate and discuss issues orally and in writing;</li> <li>• Create and explain maps, diagrams, tables, charts, and graphs;</li> <li>• Analyze and interpret maps to explain relationships among landforms, water features, climatic characteristics, and historical events;</li> <li>• Analyze political cartoons, political advertisements, pictures, and other graphic media;</li> <li>• Distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information;</li> <li>• Review information for accuracy, separating fact from opinion;</li> <li>• Identify a problem and recommend solutions;</li> <li>• Select and defend positions in writing, discussion, and debate.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">* courtesy of Mark Wise and the Middle School Social Studies Team, West Windsor-Plainsboro, New Jersey</p>

# A Sample UbD Curriculum Map for Stage 1

## 7<sup>th</sup> Grade United States History – Unit on the Constitution – Stage 1

### Unit Understandings

Students will understand that...

1. The *Declaration of Independence* and *Constitution* establish the ideal for why we need government and principles that should guide the government's decision-making.
2. The *Constitution* was written as a reaction to the government under the *Articles of Confederation's* inadequacy in providing for protection of natural rights and in promoting democratic ideals.
3. Geography influenced the economic, political and social concerns of the founders, which was reflected in the compromises made within the *Constitution*.
4. The *United States Constitution* is the most enduring and successful blueprint for self-government in human history because it established a government that derives its power from the people, shares power between national and state governments, protects the rights of individuals, and provides a system for orderly change through amendments and interpretation.

### **Individuals That Made a Difference**

John Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Daniel Shays, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton

### Unit Essential Questions

1. Why Do We Need a Constitution? (Related Course EQ's: How do individuals make a difference? What is the government's responsibility to promote the general welfare?)
2. Why is the Constitution Structured the Way It Is? (Related Course EQ's: How do individuals make a difference? What price progress? What is the government's responsibility to promote the general welfare? How does geography influence history? How has the struggle between state's rights and federal power played out over time?)
3. Why Is the Constitution Called a "Living" Document? (Related Course EQ's: What is the government's responsibility to promote the general welfare? How has the government's commitment to "establish justice" changed over time? How has the cultural identity of America changed over time?)

### **Resources**

**History Alive! *The Constitution in a New Nation*** – The Roots of Government (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4); The Creation of the Constitution (2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 1.4); The Creation of the Bill of Rights (3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 1.4); The Constitution in Action 1789-1820 (4.1, 4.2, 1.4); The Constitution in Action Today (5.1, 5.2, 5.3)

### **Primary Source Documents**

- John Locke's writings on natural rights
- The Declaration of Independence
- The Constitution of the United States of America
- Federalist Papers #10 and #51

**New Hope-Solebury School District  
Social Studies Curriculum Framework**

**Grade Level: 6<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Course Title: Social Studies**

**National and State Standards Guiding Program**

- National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)
- I. Culture
    - a. Compare similarities and differences in the ways groups, societies, and cultures meet human needs and concerns.
    - b. Explain why individuals and groups respond differently to their physical and social environments and/or changes to them on the basis of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs.
  - II. Time, Continuity & Change
    - b. Identify and use key concepts such as chronology, casualty, change, conflict, and complexity to explain, analyze, and show connections among patterns of historical change and continuity.
  - VIII. Science, Technology, & Society
    - a. Examine and describe the influences of culture on scientific and technological choices.
  - X. Civic Ideals & Practices
    - a. Examine the origins and continuing influence of key ideals of the democratic and republican form of government.

**Enduring Understandings:**

- Archaeologists learn about ancient human cultures by studying the artifacts left behind by those cultures.
- Early people survived by learning to work together and utilizing available resources appropriately.
- Technology includes all the tools, methods, and materials that people use to control and improve their lives.
- The culture of a society is the beliefs, customs, traditions, art, and achievements that are passed from one generation to another.
- Civilizations emerge as a result of 5 basic characteristics: a stable food supply, a form of government, specialization of labor, social levels, and a highly developed culture which includes art, architecture, religion, music, law, and a system of writing.
- Achievements from ancient civilizations have affected the modern world.
- The governments of ancient Greece and Rome have influenced the government of the United States.

**Assessments**

- Oral presentations
- Essays
- Reports
- Simulations
- Tests & quizzes
- Maps
- Timelines
- Posters
- Projects
- Plays
- Picture books
- Creative writing—poems, stories

**District**

**Content Topics**

- Unit 1. Archaeology, Early Man, and the Development of Societies
- Unit 2. Ancient Mesopotamia
- Unit 3. Ancient Egypt
- Unit 4. Ancient India
- Unit 5. Ancient China
- Unit 6. Ancient Greece
- Unit 7. Ancient Rome

**Essential Questions:**

1. How have historians and archaeologists learned about the ancient past?
2. How do geographic factors affect and influence the rise of civilizations?
3. What role has technology played in the rise of ancient civilizations?
4. How did cities emerge?
5. How did early people eventually create a stable food supply?
6. What are the various forms of government and how did they affect ancient civilizations?
7. What caused specialization of labor?
8. How did social levels evolve?
9. How does a culture become highly developed?
10. How are the 5 characteristics of a civilization found in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China, Greece, and Rome?

**Key Skills**

- Reading
- Comprehension
- Research
- Note taking
- Outlining from notes
- Oral Presentations
- Focused Writing
- Application/Synthesis
- Map Making/
- Reading
- Quality Visual Aids
- Organization
- Visual/ graphic formats
- Essay writing
- Cooperative learning

**Connected Co-Curricular Support**

**Activities/Experiences**

- Field trip to University of Pennsylvania Archaeological Museum
- Greco-Roman Day
- Guest speakers & presentations
- Field trips to cultural presentations ( ie. Asia Dance, Chinese restaurant)

# Example - Program-Level Core Assessments in Writing

Greece Central School District, NY

Grades 6-12

GRADE	Expository	Persuasive	Literary Analysis	Creative/ Expressive
Grade 6	Research report	Position paper	Literary essay on setting or conflict	Original myth
Grade 7	Autobiography	Policy evaluation	Literary essay on character	Literary persona
Grade 8	Research report	Problem/solution essay	Literary essay on symbolism	Narrative fiction
Grade 9	Cause/effect essay	Editorial	Analysis of multiple literary elements	Poetry
Grade 10	Research report	Social issue essay	Critical Lens essay	Historical Persona
Grade 11	Definition essay	Argumentative essay	Comparative genre essay	Parody/satire
Grade 12	Research paper	Position paper	Response to literary criticism	Irony