

# Teaching for Understanding

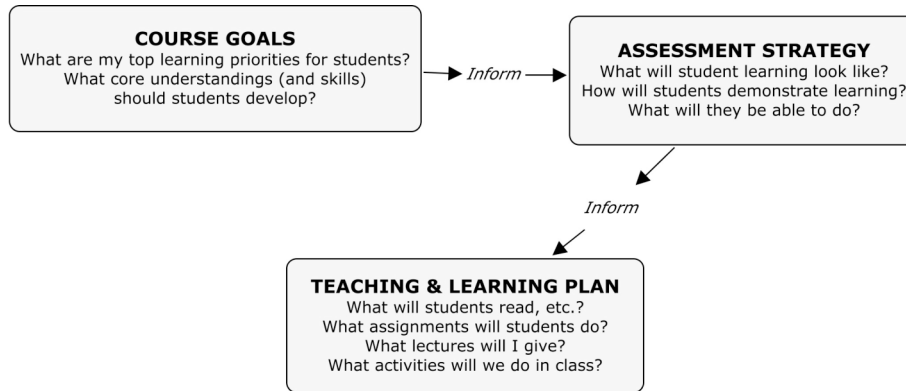
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July 2008

## ***Understanding by Design***

Grant Wiggins & Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (1995, 2005)

- Teaching for Understanding
- Backward Design Process
- “Big Ideas” and “Essential Questions”
- Central Role of Assessment
- Decisions about reading, assignments, activities, etc., come last.

## Backward Design Process



Adapted from Wiggins and McTighe, *Understanding by Design*

## Course Outcomes

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Contrary to popular lore, historians are not mainly encyclopedias of dates and names. Rather, we use the available sources from the past to understand the significance of historical events and to look for meaningful patterns and connections. In that spirit, this course will center on inquiry into the following key questions. These questions will doubtless suggest many other questions, few of which will have a single, simple answer.

1. What do historians do? How do they approach the past? How do they learn about the past? Why might the study of history be valuable?
2. How did America change between the height of the Anasazi and Mississippian civilizations (about one-thousand years ago) and the time of the American Civil War in the early 1860s? What major forces—demographic, biological, economic, technological, military, cultural, etc.—best help explain these tremendous changes?
3. How was political, social, and economic power distributed in British North America and in the early United States, from the 1600s to the Civil War? Who exercised the most power, and how did the dominant groups justify and maintain their power? How did this power shift?
4. What political ideals helped build support for the American Revolution and the founding of the United States? How did these ideals shape the governance, culture, and economy of the early United States, and how did they contribute to major conflicts, such as the Civil War? How did these ideals evolve over time?

## **Defining Historical Thinking**

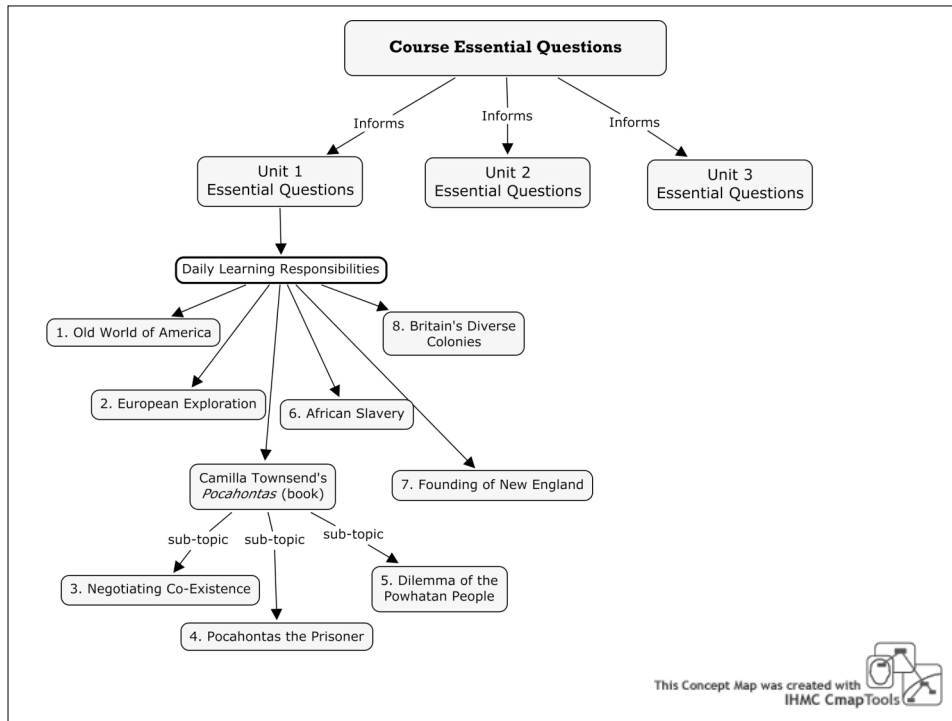
Contrary to popular lore, historians are not mainly encyclopedias of dates and names. Rather, we use the available sources from the past to understand the significance of historical events and to look for meaningful patterns and connections. The main work of historians, then, is interpreting and arguing. In that spirit, this course will center on inquiry into the following key questions. These questions will doubtless suggest many other questions, few of which will have a single, simple answer. Nevertheless, historical interpretations do not boil down to mere “opinion”—they are rooted in evidence—and I will require you to provide support for your interpretations.

## **Course Outcomes: Skills**

### **ESSENTIAL SKILLS**

In addition to evaluating your understanding of the core issues above, I will assess your ability to:

1. think historically, with attention to context, multiple perspectives, and complex causation.
2. read and interpret primary sources (documents from the time period being studied).
3. explain and evaluate historical interpretations and arguments.
4. express and support your ideas in writing and in public discussion.



## Essential Questions for Units 1 & 2

### Unit 1: Old Worlds Collide || Essential Questions:

1. How do historians create historical narratives and interpretations?
2. What was North America like during the centuries before 1492? How did American Indian societies compare to and contrast with European societies?
3. How and why did Europeans come to settle in America? How and why were they able to secure land and eventually thrive?
4. How did American Indians continue to shape American history after European arrival?
5. How did the British-American colonies develop, socially and economically, up to the 1750s?
6. What are some common misconceptions about the “colonial period”? Why might this distant period still be considered relevant today?

### Unit 2: Making a Nation || Essential Questions:

1. What long-range and short-range causes help explain the American Revolution?
2. To what extent were the American Revolution and Constitution democratic? How did the revolutionaries try to adhere to the concept of “popular sovereignty”?
3. How did antebellum democracy develop? What were its achievements and limitations?
4. Explain the “market revolution” and its impact on antebellum politics.
5. What implications did the American Revolution and market revolution have for white women? For American Indians? For enslaved African Americans and slavery itself?
6. How did religious liberty develop in the new republic?

## **European Exploration**

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Explain why and how Europeans came to “discover” America.
2. Explain the significance of the exploratory voyages of Cristoforo Colombo (a.k.a., Cristobal Colon and Christopher Columbus).
3. Describe any prior knowledge that you may have regarding Pocahontas and early Virginia. (So you are prepared to modify what you already know, if necessary.) <<< This is a discussion question tied to a Class Portfolio assignment.

## **For and Against Instructions**

**DIRECTIONS:** For the statement given below, use the available space to write a brief paragraph that summarizes the best evidence that you can give FOR the statement. Then, write another brief paragraph that summarizes the best evidence that you can give AGAINST the statement. (Label the sections as “For” and “Against.”) Be as detailed as possible. Include approximately 6-7 separate points, with as much balance between the two sides as the statement permits. Include only accurate evidence. Do not exaggerate the facts. Explain how the evidence you present supports or undermines the statement. Write legibly in complete sentences. Do not use bullet points.

## Sample "For and Against" Statements

- Christopher Columbus discovered the New World in 1492.
- Colonial New England was a much better place to live than colonial Virginia.
- The early United States was a Christian nation.
- Slavery was the main long-term cause of the Civil War.

### Sample Exam Response

#### 1. Christopher Columbus discovered a New World in 1492. (Required)

**FOR:** There are good reasons to argue Christopher Columbus discovered a "new" world. First, it could be considered "new" because the continent he discovered was a land that was not known to exist by ~~most~~ Europeans. Most did not know such a land mass existed between Europe and Asia by sailing west. Second this world could be seen as "new" because it was a land ~~with~~ <sup>full</sup> of "new" societies, cultures, and people that were much different than anything the Europeans knew to exist. ~~Best~~ Finally the continent was "new" because it was a completely new area for the Europeans to settle. They could escape religious persecution, establish their own settlements and start over.

**Against:** However there are many good reasons to argue this "new" world was not so new after all. First Columbus died convinced that this was not an entirely new continent at all, but in reality he really believed he had discovered how to reach Asia by sailing due west. Second in reality the Vikings had discovered this completely new continent hundreds of years earlier, and had even established a ~~settle~~ settlement. But finally and most importantly this was not a "new" world because it already contained millions upon millions of people. All had their own unique cultures, beliefs, and societies. They had well established trade routes, governments, and religious beliefs. They had been there thousands of years so to them this world was ~~already~~ <sup>already</sup> ~~not~~ <sup>already</sup> ~~new~~.

1. Christopher Columbus discovered a New World in 1492. (Required)

FOR: There are good reasons to argue Christopher Columbus discovered

AGAINST: Christopher Columbus did not discover a new world in 1492. The people who truly discovered “the New World” had been living there for thousands of years. In fact they had been living there for so long that it wasn’t a new world at all, but an old world. As far as Europeans are concerned, Christopher Columbus wasn’t the first to discover the continent. The Vikings had been there far sooner but had shown little interest in the land. The ironic thing is Columbus died before ever understanding what it was he had found.

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