

**Our American Story**  
Session 3, 2011-2012  
**Lori Peters, Instructor**

**Course Objective and Overview:**

Students will acquire a general overview of the 8th grade social studies standards, but will be given a template for more extended research. (Please note: not all important events and concepts can be presented). According to the CA Dept of Ed. content standards, students in grade 8 should study the ideas, issues and events starting with the framing of the Constitution up until right before WWI. Students should review the development of American democratic institutions, founded on the Judeo-Christian heritage and English parliamentary traditions, particularly the shaping of the Constitution. Students should be able to trace the development of American politics, society, culture and economy, and relate them to the emergence of major regional differences. They will learn about the challenges facing a new nation, with an emphasis on the causes, course, and consequences of the Civil War. They will make connections between the rise of industrialization, and contemporary social and economic conditions. Students will be encouraged to follow up each class with some research of their own (added key terms to be provided), and a review of the material. The course will culminate with each student presenting some findings or a project on a topic of their choice related the birth of our nation (a topic list will be provided in week 2). Students will also receive a packet for independent study, to use how they wish, which will provide key concepts in grades 6-8 in the form of sample test questions. This review would benefit students taking the state tests, but would also be a good way for history buffs to strengthen their historical literacy.

**Course Expectations:**

- Read proficiently at a 7<sup>th</sup> grade level or above
- Arrive on time and be prepared to learn. Note taking is expected.
- This class will move quickly! Students should be willing to keep up with pace of the class as best they can. If not, it is highly recommended that ALL materials be reviewed again at home.
- Be open to ideas, discussion, and collaboration.
- Materials needed: Spiral notebook, folder, assignment notebook, and pencil/pen. Some independent reading will be assigned, and all materials should be brought to class. Optional: dictionary for personal use (check to make sure it has advanced historical terms in it).

***Important: There is a lot to cover in each class, and there will be little “down time”; many concepts will need further review and independent research to understand fully.***

**1/26** What does it mean to be free? What does it mean to have individual rights? What was our Judeo-Christian heritage? We will review some events and sentiments leading up to the American Revolution. Concepts such as the Great Awakening will be explored, as well as key phrases in the Declaration of Independence (“All men are created equal” and “unalienable rights”). How did the American Revolution impact other nations, such as France?

**2/2** What led up to the writing of the US Constitution, and what is the Constitution’s significance? How did English parliamentary traditions lead to a consensus-driven model of democracy? (“checks and balances”). We will explore some early documents that paved the way to the Constitution, such as the Magna Carta, the English Bill of Rights, the Mayflower-Compact, as well as Paine’s *Common Sense*. We will also define various models of government. We will look at parts of the Constitution, such as the Bill of Rights and the Articles of Confederation, as well as the significance of the First Amendment and the concept of the separation of church and state. Students will receive a topic list to choose from, and will have one week to decide on their project.

**2/9** Who were the major players in the development of our country and its governmental structure? We will look at some of the contributions of Madison, Hamilton, and Jay (Federalist Papers), and the roles that Jefferson, Madison, Washington, and others had in writing and ratifying major documents. We will also look at how these leaders had the foresight to set the foundation for the American political system that we have today, including the place of the Supreme Court in defining policy. Remarkable!

**2/16** What were some major celebrations, conflicts and problems that defined the ideals of early Americans? We will touch upon famous speeches, the birth of capitalism (and what that means), industrialization, to daily life traditions. We will make connections as to how a people once united around a single purpose slowly developed their own territorial and political divisions. We will look at the divergent paths of people in the south, from 1800 to the mid-1800s and the challenges they faced, while comparing the lives of blacks in the south to the free blacks in the north. A timeline of events to follow up with will be presented, including: Monroe Doctrine, Mexican-American War, Henry Clay's American System, Great Irish Famine (immigration boost), Jackson's presidency, settlement and expansion.

**2/23** What led up to the Civil War, and who were the agrarians and the industrialists? Who were the major players on both sides of the war? We will look at the general roles, ambitions, and needs of the Confederates and those supporting the Union. We will connect the tremendous impact of Lincoln, and his speeches that kept a nation from staying divided.

**3/1** How did a nation reconstruct itself? We will explore the bitter divisions that remained after the Civil War, and how former slaves lived, such as the Buffalo Soldiers, and the rise of racial segregation (Jim Crow, Ku Klux Klan). We will look at the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments as related to the Reconstruction.

**3/8** What was the Industrial Revolution, and how did it transform a nation? Who were some key players in transforming a nation? We will touch upon Rockefeller and Carnegie, as well as some policies that affected the labor movement, unions, and so forth.

**3/15** Share American Story study projects. Parents are encouraged to attend.