

---

---

# **FOCUS: MIDDLE SCHOOL WORLD HISTORY**

---



COUNCIL FOR  
**Economic  
Education**

*Teaching Opportunity®*

---

## **AUTHORS**

### **Tawni Hunt Ferrarini**

*Sam M. Cohodas Professor*

Director of Center for Economic Education and  
Entrepreneurship  
Northern Michigan University

### **Douglas A. Haskell**

*Field Service Associate Professor of Economics*

Economics Center  
University of Cincinnati

### **Andrew T. Hill**

*Economic Education Advisor*

Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia\*

### **Jane S. Lopus**

*Professor of Economics*

Director, Center for Economic Education  
California State University, East Bay

### **Bonnie T. Meszaros**

*Assistant Professor of Economics*

Associate Director, Center for Economic Education  
and Entrepreneurship  
University of Delaware

### **Edward M. Scahill**

*Associate Professor*

Director, Honesdale National Bank Center for  
Economic Education  
The University of Scranton

### **Phillip J. VanFossen**

*James F. Ackerman Professor and Head, Department  
of Curriculum and Instruction*

Associate Director, Purdue Center for Economic  
Education  
Purdue University

### **Scott Wolla**

*Economic Education Specialist*

Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis\*

## **PROJECT DIRECTOR**

### **William D. Bosshardt Jr.**

*Associate Professor of Economics*

Director, Center for Economic Education  
Florida Atlantic University

## **ECONOMIC HISTORIAN**

### **Robert Whaples**

*Professor of Economics*

Department of Economics  
Wake Forest University

## **PROJECT COORDINATOR**

### **Kevin Gotchet**

*Director, Excellence in Economic Education (EEE)  
Program*

Council for Economic Education

## **EDITOR**

### **Dian Coleman**

*Special projects*

Salem, OR

## **FUNDING**

The Council for Economic Education gratefully acknowledges the funding of this publication by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, Excellence in Economic Education: Advancing K-12 Economic & Financial Education Nationwide grant award U215B050005-09. The contents of this book developed under the grant from the Department of Education do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Copyright © 2011, Council for Economic Education, 122 East 42 Street, Suite 2600, New York, NY 10168. All rights reserved. The visuals and student activities may be duplicated for classroom use, the number not to exceed the number of students in each class. Notice of copyright must appear on all pages. With the exception of the visuals and student activities, no part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any means without written permission from the publisher. Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN: 978-1-56183-758-8

\* Views expressed in this volume are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis or the Federal Reserve System.

---

## CONTENTS

---

<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	v
<b>About This Volume</b> .....	vi
<b>Standards</b> .....	vii
<b>Introductory Essay: Understanding Economic History</b> .....	ix
<b>Downloading Slides, Activities, and Related Materials</b> .....	xi
<b>Lesson Time Line</b> .....	xii
<b>Lessons</b>	
1 Out of Africa: Why Early Humans Settled Around the World .....	1
2 How Neolithic Farmers Increased Their Standard of Living .....	15
3 The Neolithic Agricultural Revolution .....	37
4 Great Civilizations Develop Around Rivers .....	55
5 Entrepreneurs in Mesopotamia .....	67
6 India and the Caste System in 200 B.C.E. ....	79
7 The Silk Road .....	93
8 Athens and Sparta: Imagine the Possibilities .....	109
9 Athens and Olive Oil .....	129
10 Fall of Rome .....	157
11 Economic Systems of the Incas and Aztecs .....	171
12 Mansa Musa: Inflation Then and Now .....	185
13 Paper Money of the Sung, Yuan, and Ming Dynasties .....	197
14 The Economic System of Medieval Europe .....	217
15 Wages and the Black Death .....	235
16 Business in the Middle Ages: Working in a Guild .....	251
17 Why Didn't China Discover the New World? .....	267

18	Christopher Columbus, Entrepreneur? Queen Isabella, Venture Capitalist? . . . .	281
19	What’s the Big Deal about Spices? . . . . .	305
20	The Columbian Exchange . . . . .	337
21	Renaissance Banking . . . . .	355
22	Mercantilists and the Midas Touch . . . . .	373
23	Morality in Markets: The Two Faces of Adam Smith . . . . .	385

---

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

The writing team thanks Kevin Gotchet and the Council for Economic Education staff for their help in bringing this project to fruition. Without them, projects such as this would not be done, and the opportunities for students to learn economic concepts would suffer.

Robert Whaples served as the economic historian for this project and wrote the introductory essay. His comments and insight provided valuable assistance, ensuring that the lessons reflect current thinking in economic history. We are extremely grateful for his help on this project.

The authors also want to express their appreciation for the field testers—teachers who took considerable time and effort to test assigned lessons and provide valuable input.

### FIELD-TEST TEACHERS

**Michelle Beguiristain**

*Lantana Community Middle School*  
Lantana, FL

**Paul Bernis**

*W.C. Young Middle School*  
Pembroke Pines, FL

**Debbie Bruister**

*Kossuth Middle School*  
Corinth, MS

**Lillian Dooies**

*Bak Middle School of the Arts*  
West Palm Beach, FL

**Barbara Estes**

*Bagley Junior High*  
Dora, AL

**Susan Guy**

*Hill Intermediate School*  
Houston, TX

**Jarred Haas**

*J. Henry Higgins Middle School*  
Peabody, MA

**April Higgins**

*Skyline Middle School*  
Wilmington, DE

**Jeffrey D. Huntington**

*Calvary Lutheran School*  
Indianapolis, IN

**Sharonnade Jones**

*Cincinnati Public School – A2E*  
Cincinnati, OH

**David Lumsden**

*Kingsbury Country Day School*  
Oxford, MI

**Shawna Morgan**

*Nova High School*  
Davie, FL

**Shanda Ramsey**

*Seymour Middle School*  
Seymour, TX

**Karen Ray**

*Eastbrook Academy*  
Milwaukee, WI

**Susan Smith**

*Eisenhower Middle School*  
Lawton, OK

**Cheri Stegall**

*Cocopah Middle School*  
Scottsdale, AZ

**Susan Vass**

*Our Lady of Calvary*  
Philadelphia, PA

---

## ABOUT THIS VOLUME

---

This volume of lesson plans covers a large spectrum of world history. Our goal is to provide middle school history teachers with lessons that incorporate economics into a variety of world history topics. We began the project by surveying the coverage of world history in middle schools across the country. Naturally, we found wide variance in what was covered and when. However, most middle school courses focus on the earlier parts of world history—generally from the beginning of human history through the Roman Empire and sometimes quite a bit further. The rest of world history is then saved for high school. We decided to do lessons from the beginning of human history to 1776, which is the latest any middle school seemed to go. We also think that Adam Smith is an appropriate endpoint for the volume.

While the lessons are geared for the middle school, many can be easily used at a high school level. The lessons generally include an activity that engages the students. We also use original documents in a couple of lessons to give the student a feel for history as it was originally written. Finally, each lesson includes a “Connections” section. The intent of the section is to connect the lesson to other concepts or to other points in time. How the connection is accomplished varies by lesson—some include ideas of how concepts apply to other times, some include small lessons or references to websites. The Connections section should help teachers relate the economic concepts in the lesson to other historic ideas.

The process for writing this book used a team approach. As a group, the authors decided on the topics and economic concepts to be covered in each lesson. Each author was given a set of lessons to write. After each lesson was written, other members of the team reviewed it—including our economic historian and the project director. The lesson was revised and sent for field testing by teachers in the classroom. Based on the teachers’ comments, the lessons were revised and finalized. For the record, we would like to identify the lead authors of each lesson (in order of appearance): Jane Lopus, lessons 1, 2 and 16; Douglas Haskell, lessons 3, 6, and 7; Tawni Hunt Ferrarini, lessons 4, 10, 23; Andrew T. Hill, lessons 5, 13, and 21; Scott Wolla, lessons 8, 9, and 17; Bonnie T. Meszaros, lessons 11, 12, and 14; Edward M. Scahill, lessons 15, 20, and 22; and Phillip VanFossen, lessons 18 and 19. Robert Whaples wrote the introductory essay.

# STANDARDS

Each lesson is correlated to two sets of standards:

- Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics, 2nd edition, by the Council for Economic Education. The standards are found at: <http://www.councilforeconed.org/ea/standards/standards.pdf>.
- World History Content Standards, Contents of National Standards in World History for Grades 5-12. The development of the History Standards was administered by the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California, Los Angeles under the guidance of the National Council for History Standards. The standards are found at: <http://nchs.ucla.edu/Standards/world-history-standards>.

## Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics, 2nd edition: Council for Economic Education

Standards \ Lessons	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
1. Scarcity		x						x								x							
2. Decision Making	x																						
3. Allocation						x	x			x			x							x			
4. Incentives	x												x				x						
5. Trade							x	x											x	x		x	
6. Specialization				x				x								x							x
7. Markets and Prices																			x				x
8. Role of Prices							x									x							
9. Competition and Market Structure																x							
10. Institutions																					x		
11. Money and Inflation												x	x										
12. Interest Rates																					x		
13. Income																x							
14. Entrepreneurship					x													x					
15. Economic Growth		x	x																				
16. Role of Government and Market Failure										x												x	
17. Government Failure										x													
18. Economic Fluctuations																							
19. Unemployment and Inflation												x											
20. Fiscal and Monetary Policy																							

## World History Content Standards: National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA

Lessons	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	
<b>Standards</b>																								
<b>Era 1: Beginnings of Human Society</b>																								
Standard 1	x																							
Standard 2		x	x																					
<b>Era 2: 4000 – 1000 B.C.E.</b>																								
Standard 1				x	x																			
Standard 2			x																					
Standard 3				x																				
Standard 4			x																					
<b>Era 3: 1000 B.C.E. – 300 C.E.</b>																								
Standard 1					x																			
Standard 2								x	x															
Standard 3						x	x																	
Standard 4																								
Standard 5			x			x	x																	
<b>Era 4: 300 – 1000 C.E.</b>																								
Standard 1											x													
Standard 2																								
Standard 3																								
Standard 4																								
Standard 5																								
Standard 6																								
Standard 7							x			x														
<b>Era 5: 1000 – 1500 C.E.</b>																								
Standard 1													x				x		x					
Standard 2														x		x						x		
Standard 3													x											
Standard 4												x												
Standard 5															x									
Standard 6											x							x			x			
Standard 7															x				x			x		
<b>Era 6: 1450 – 1770 C.E.</b>																								
Standard 1																								
Standard 2																			x					x
Standard 3																								
Standard 4																								
Standard 5																					x			
Standard 6																								
<b>Era 7: 1750 – 1914 [1776] C.E.</b>																								
Standard 1																								
Standard 2																								x
Standard 3																								x
End of this volume's coverage of standards																								



---

## UNDERSTANDING ECONOMIC HISTORY

---

### Robert Whaples, Wake Forest University

Studying history can be both fascinating and startling to the modern reader—young or old. Why *did* pre-modern people living hundreds or thousands of years ago do things so differently than we do? Students of history almost immediately begin to put themselves into the shoes of their ancient ancestors. Why did they do such peculiar things? Why were they so “backward”?

One knee-jerk reaction is to assume that their behaviors reflect a lack of intelligence. Economic historians are very hesitant to take this approach. We often conclude that the key difference between us and them is that we (individually and collectively) simply know a lot more than they did. Of course, mankind’s knowledge base has expanded dramatically over time (especially since the scientific revolution), and these improvements in technology have been our key advantage, allowing us standards of living unimaginable to our distant ancestors. Being knowledgeable, of course, doesn’t necessarily make you clever and having less knowledge needn’t make you dull.

Another key advantage people in modern democracies have is the checks and balances constraining those few with political/economic/military power; those with power are much less likely to seize the wealth and output of the vast majority. In undemocratic “closed societies” the incentive to put economic resources into their most productive use is dampened by the ever-present risk of expropriation by those in power, suffocating the innovations and actions that might lead to sustained economic growth.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, poor technology and concentrated power help explain why pre-modern people often seem to do things in what we would consider to be a backward way. The blessings of advancing technology and supportive institutions have allowed modern populations’ standards of livings to reach heights unimaginable to our distant ancestors. In 1900, the average income per person in the U.S. was a little under \$7,000, one of the highest levels in the world at the time. This level of income was well above those in India (\$1,050), China (\$1,100), Brazil (\$1,200), Japan (\$1,900), Mexico (\$1,950), Russia (\$2,050), Italy (\$2,850), France (\$4,800), or Germany (\$5,200). It’s hard to imagine someone living on \$7,000 a year, let alone a meager \$3 to \$4 per day—as did the typical person in India, China or Brazil about a century ago, and as do over 2 billion people today. The twentieth century brought unprecedented growth in all these places with real incomes rising over 200% in India and Russia, nearly 400% in Mexico, over 500% in Germany, almost 600% in the U.S., about 600% in France, nearly 700% in Brazil, over 850% in China, about 970% in Italy, and (hard to believe but true) over 1,700% in Japan.<sup>2</sup>

Modern societies take high standards of living for granted and rarely realize how extraordinary they are in the history of humankind. Our growth has come as new technologies have been devised and people (usually profit-seeking businessmen) are given encouragement to incorporate them in productive ways. Why didn’t the same thing happen in the “good bad old days”? The leading explanation is that new technologies came along so infrequently before the Industrial Revolution, that most societies were caught in or on the edge of a Malthusian trap. This argument says that most societies throughout history have had incomes only a little above the subsistence rate. Above the subsistence rate, incomes are high enough for women to become

---

<sup>1</sup>On “closed” societies versus “open” societies, see Douglas North, John J. Wallis and Barry Weingast, *Violence and Social Order: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History*, Cambridge University Press (2009).

<sup>2</sup>These figures are from Angus Maddison, *Monitoring the World Economy 1820–1992* (Paris: OECD, 1995) and IMF staff estimates in the *World Economic Outlook*, May 2000; and have been converted into year 2010 dollars.

more fecund and death rates tend to drop, so that population expands. Below the subsistence rate, incomes are so low that death rates exceed birth rates and the population contracts. The Malthusian argument suggests that technological improvements and the discovery of new resources temporarily increased the material standard of living as people became more productive, but as their incomes rose so did population which pushed incomes back down to where they began—near the subsistence rate. This theory helps explain why income levels stayed at a very low level for most people for millennia before our modern technological explosion allowed incomes to rise to unprecedented heights.

The lesson plans in *Focus: Middle School History* illustrate some of the hard tradeoffs that people have faced. Unlike most of us, they had little room for error. If they made big economic mistakes the results could be cataclysmic. In today's world declaring bankruptcy may mean losing your house and having to live in an apartment with indoor plumbing, air conditioning and adequate heat, eating brown bag lunches and losing cable TV. Poor economic decisions in the past resulted in sickness, starvation, and death (or sometimes even worse).

In the face of harsh constraints, ancient people found a range of economic solutions – sometimes simple, sometimes complex—that can often be illuminated with fairly simple economic analysis.

In the pages that follow, you'll see how just a little bit of economic theory goes a long way. Perhaps the most fundamental lesson is that trade isn't about winners and losers: there are gains to both parties from trade, and it has substantially increased the value of people's economic activities. Ancient Greece traded its valuable olive oil to acquire what it needed to build its society, as seen in one lesson.

Other intriguing lessons await you: Did the fleas and rats that spread the bubonic plague *improve* the lives of those who survived? Economic theory and empirical evidence suggest that they did. Did entrepreneurship start with John Rockefeller, Henry Ford, Bill Gates, and Oprah Winfrey? Hardly. Its roots are ancient, as reflected in the lesson on Mesopotamia. Encouragement of entrepreneurship helps explain why Christopher Columbus and the Spanish discovered and colonized the New World and not Zheng He and the Chinese. What happens when incentives stifle innovation, hard work, and the wise use of resources? The outcome for society is poor. What happens when the money supply grows rapidly? From ancient Rome, to China, to Mansa Musa and his hajj to Mecca, to Weimar Germany and modern Zimbabwe, inflation reared its ugly head. Finally, never forget the lessons of concentrated power. Concentrated power helps explain pre-modern economic arrangements that most modern observers consider dysfunctional—arrangements that are examined in chapters on India's caste system, ancient Sparta, feudalism, medieval guilds, pre-Columbian America and mercantilism.

History is complicated because people are complicated. The chapters that follow distill important lessons from the complicated record of human economic history. They invite you to impart these important lessons to the most important audience possible—our next generation of economic decision-makers.

---

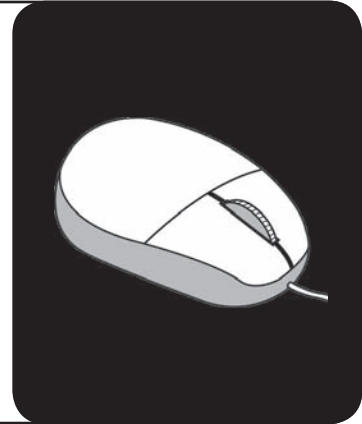
## DOWNLOADING SLIDES, ACTIVITIES, AND RELATED MATERIALS

---







### **On the Web**

To download the visuals and activities for each lesson, find online lessons to extend the student activities, and find related material for each lesson, visit:

**[http://www.councilforeconed.org/  
middle-school-history](http://www.councilforeconed.org/middle-school-history)**



# LESSON TIME LINE

4000 B.C.E.		<p>Lesson 1 Out of Africa: Why Early Humans Settled Around the World</p> <p>Lesson 2 How Neolithic Farmers Increased Their Standard of Living</p> <p>Lesson 3 The Neolithic Agricultural Revolution</p>
1000 B.C.E.		<p>Lesson 3 The Neolithic Agricultural Revolution</p> <p>Lesson 4 Great Civilizations Develop Around Rivers</p> <p>Lesson 5 Entrepreneurs in Mesopotamia</p>
300 C.E.		<p>Lesson 3 The Neolithic Agricultural Revolution</p> <p>Lesson 5 Entrepreneurs in Mesopotamia</p> <p>Lesson 6 India and the Caste System in 200 B.C.E.</p> <p>Lesson 7 The Silk Road</p> <p>Lesson 8 Athens and Sparta: Imagine the Possibilities</p> <p>Lesson 9 Athens and Olive Oil</p>
1000 C.E.		<p>Lesson 7 The Silk Road</p> <p>Lesson 10 Fall of Rome</p>
1500 C.E.		<p>Lesson 11 Economic Systems of the Incas and Aztecs</p> <p>Lesson 12 Mansa Musa: Inflation Then and Now</p> <p>Lesson 13 Paper Money of the Sung, Yuan, and Ming Dynasties</p> <p>Lesson 14 The Economic System of Medieval Europe</p> <p>Lesson 15 Wages and the Black Death</p> <p>Lesson 16 Business in the Middle Ages: Working in a Guild</p> <p>Lesson 17 Why Didn't China Discover the New World?</p> <p>Lesson 18 Christopher Columbus, Entrepreneur? Queen Isabella, Venture Capitalist?</p> <p>Lesson 19 What's the Big Deal about Spices?</p> <p>Lesson 20 The Columbian Exchange</p> <p>Lesson 21 Renaissance Banking</p>
		<p>Lesson 18 Christopher Columbus, Entrepreneur? Queen Isabella, Venture Capitalist?</p> <p>Lesson 19 What's the Big Deal about Spices?</p> <p>Lesson 22 Mercantilists and the Midas Touch</p> <p>Lesson 23 Morality in Markets: The Two Faces of Adam Smith</p>

**Note: The lesson time line is based on the history standards covered in the lesson.**