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## Why Learn World History

World history is a subject that embraces all humanity, not just certain nations, ethnic groups, or civilizations. Why should schools ask teachers and students to investigate a subject that encompasses the whole world and its peoples? World History for Us All emphasizes three rationales for investigating the human past.

### 1. Knowing who we are

Study of world history is the broadest and most searching approach to the question of who we are as both individuals and members of groups. Exploring how humankind has changed since its hominid ancestors walked the earth is the best way to grapple with the question of what makes us special, in fact, unique, in relation to other living species. National history teaches us what is distinctive about a particular land and people. World history throws light on the distinctive characteristics of human beings and how their thought, behavior, and interactions have changed over time.

The National Standards for History remind us:

Historical memory is the key to self-identity, to seeing one's place in the stream of time, and one's connectedness with all of humankind. We are part of an ancient chain, and the long hand of the past is upon us—for good or ill—just as our hands will rest on our descendants for years to come. Denied knowledge of one's roots and of one's place in the great stream of human history, the individual is deprived of the fullest sense of self and of that sense of shared community on which one's fullest personal development as well as responsible citizenship depends.

In short, world history helps us think about what it means to be human and about the characteristics that all humans have in common.

### 2. Preparing to live in the world

World history helps prepare young people for college studies, international experience, and active participation in civic life. It helps get them ready for the roles they will inevitably play as citizens of both their country and the world. A "global citizen" is simply a national citizen who knows and cares about the history and contemporary affairs of all humankind, a person who can in some measure think, speak, and write about world issues and problems intelligently and confidently.

Most of us are generally aware of world interconnections and interdependence. We know that the internet allows people to trade stocks at blinding speed, that hundreds of millions of people simultaneously watch the Olympic Games, and that the threat of global warming requires cooperation among all governments. We know that we live in a border-crossing, migration-prone, multiple identity-taking world. Intelligently addressing today's world conditions, however, requires

more than vague awareness of these realities. World history education helps us better understand how and why the world got to be the way it is. It gives attention to the histories of nations, civilizations, and other groups and the differences among them. But it particularly emphasizes the history, problems, and challenges that humans have shared simply because they are humans.

### 3. Attaining cultural literacy on a world scale

World history contributes to our cultural literacy. Human beings, unlike other species, have the gift of language, that is, symbolic thinking and communication. That means that humans also have what World History for Us All calls [collective learning](#), the ability to learn from one another and to transmit knowledge from one generation to the next.

Communicating intelligently in any language, whether English, Spanish, or Vietnamese, requires that we share a common fund of knowledge, information, vocabulary, and conceptual tools. We need shared knowledge and understandings partly because we live in a world where people in specialized occupations and professions tend to use special words, terms, and concepts that "outsiders" do not understand.

Making world history a core subject in schools broadens the fund of knowledge that we all share. It helps us speak and write to one another in clearer and more intricate ways. This does not mean that world history courses should be exactly the same in every school district. But societies should aim for general agreement regarding the common stock of both world-scale knowledge and historical thinking skills that children ought to possess when they graduate from high school.

All past societies that we know of have had an endowment of collective knowledge. World history is shared knowledge that citizens, whatever their country of allegiance, need to function on our planet in the twenty-first century. The complexity of human interrelations today means that cultural literacy must be global in range and depth.

#### [National Standards for History: Significance of History for the Educated Citizen](#)

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