

Sectional Tensions (1820–1860) Unit 7 Overview: U.S. History, 7th Grade

Driving Concept 4: Invasion and Control: Conquest of the Nation (1800–1860)

Through this driving concept, students will study the expansion of the United States by interrogating the idea of Manifest Destiny and analyzing the experiences of different individuals as the United States expanded west. Students will study the treaties, financial agreements and wars that precipitated expansion, as well as the political and indigenous opposition to territorial acquisition. Throughout this driving concept, students will analyze the continued growth of slavery and how it perpetuated an imbalance of power between slave states and free states.

Driving Concept 5: Emerging Social Movements (1800–1877)

Through this driving concept, students will consider the complexity of American history by examining primary and secondary sources that reveal the horrors and brutality of enslavement. Students will also investigate the means by which enslaved persons resisted bondage and maintained humanity. Students will contextualize the emergence of varying forms of abolitionism within a broader social and religious movement that called for reforms to American social and political life.

Essential Question

How did the interplay of territorial expansion, regional differences, and political ideologies fuel the sectional crisis?

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About This Unit

Unit 8: Sectional Tensions (1820–1860) examines how the expansion of U.S. territory in the mid-19th century deepened conflicts over slavery, identity, and political power. The unit begins by exploring the ideas behind Manifest Destiny and how westward migration catalyzed significant changes, spurring both new opportunities and continued oppression. Next, students analyze how the Mexican-American War transformed the physical and political landscape of the nation. Students investigate the Mexican Cession and its consequences—particularly how new land reignited debates over slavery and disrupted the balance between North and South. Through the lens of compromise, conflict, and ideology, students explore how sectional differences grew sharper in the 1850s and how events like the Fugitive Slave Act, Bleeding Kansas, and the Dred Scott decision pushed the country toward civil war. The unit ends with an Annotated Source Collection, where students evaluate a variety of sources from the period to explain how expansion and disagreement over slavery fractured the nation.

Use the Best Practices Repository for information on implementing every strategy and lesson activity!

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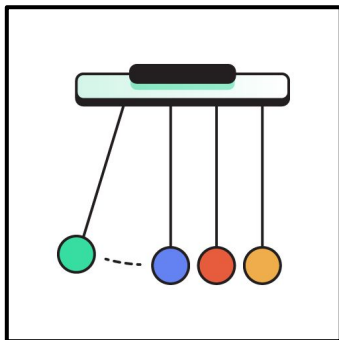
Priority Standards	
7.48	Assess the extent to which perspectives toward American territorial expansion, including Manifest Destiny and Indigenous resistance, changed over time, including an understanding that the removal of Indigenous Nations was not inevitable.
7.49	Compare and evaluate the different ways in which the United States acquired territory from 1800 to 1860, including an evaluation of the Louisiana Purchase.
7.52	Compare and evaluate the actions taken and rationales provided by the United States government to acquire western or Indigenous territory in the 1800s, with particular attention given to the policies and campaigns of President Andrew Jackson and the consequences such actions had on the land and people
7.55	Evaluate the impact of territorial expansion, immigration, and Northern industrialization on the institution of slavery and American politics.
7.57	Analyze the complex and varied lives and experiences of enslaved people and free Black Americans between 1800-1877.
7.58	Evaluate the growth and international context of the Abolitionist movement, including the effectiveness of various tactics and leaders by analyzing primary and secondary sources — including the perspectives of abolitionists such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Elizabeth Freeman, Henry Highland Garnet and Frederick Douglass.
7.59	Evaluate the reasons for Asian and European immigration to the United States, the political, social and economic opportunities and challenges faced by Asian and European immigrants, and the ways individuals demonstrated resilience between 1800-1877.
7.63	Evaluate the impact of territorial expansion and the conflict over the expansion of slavery on sectional tensions between Northern and Southern states.

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Additional Standards	
7.50	Evaluate the reasons different individuals, including Federalists, Abolitionists and Democratic-Republicans, supported and opposed American territorial expansion.
7.51	Analyze the experiences of free Black communities in the American Northwest.
7.53	Analyze the perspectives and actions (both adaptation and resistance) of Indigenous Nations in response to territorial invasion between 1800 and 1860 using primary and secondary sources.
7.54	Evaluate the causes and consequences of the Mexican-American War, with specific attention to the impact of the war and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo.
7.60	Evaluate the political, social, and economic opportunities and challenges faced by Indigenous Nations, Mexicans and Genizaros living in land incorporated into America after 1848.
7.61	Compare gender rights and roles in different geographic regions and communities within the United States, and evaluate the goals and tactics of the women's suffrage movement.

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Unit Preview		
<i>Subtopic(s)</i>	<i>Compelling Question</i>	<i>Standard(s)</i>
Manifest Destiny	Was Manifest Destiny a story of opportunity, oppression, or both?	7.48, 7.50, 7.51, 7.53, 7.57, 7.59, 7.61
War with Mexico	How did the idea of Manifest Destiny affect foreign relations, rights, and land in the 1800s?	7.48, 7.49, 7.50, 7.52, 7.53, 7.54, 7.60
Sectional Division	Why did efforts to compromise over slavery fail to hold the nation together?	7.48, 7.49, 7.50, 7.52, 7.54, 7.55, 7.57, 7.58, 7.63
Assessment: Annotated Source Collection		All Unit Standards



Unit Focus Skill: Causation

Thinking historically means considering why certain things happened and what effects occurred because of an event, development, or process. It also means recognizing that there are multiple causes of and multiple effects from any event, development, or process.

Manifest Destiny: Topic Overview

	<u>LESSON 1 (60 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 2 (60 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 3 (90 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 4 (60 MINS)</u>
SUPPORTING QUESTION	How did political, economic, and social factors combine to drive U.S. expansion across North America?	Whose stories are told—and whose are left out—when we learn about westward expansion?	What types of challenges did women face in the West as American migration increased?	How did Manifest Destiny shape both U.S. immigration patterns and the government's role in westward expansion?
STANDARD(S)	7.48, 7.50, 7.53	7.48, 7.51, 7.53	7.48, 7.51, 7.53, 7.57, 7.61	7.59
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Contextualization Causation Perspective	Contextualization Causation Perspective	Contextualization Evaluating Evidence Perspective	Evaluating Evidence Perspective Causation
DO FIRST	Frayer: Manifest Destiny Image Alive	Frayer: Oregon Trail A-Z Guide	Frayer: Overlander Notice, Wonder, Think	Frayer: Transcontinental Quickwrite
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Inquiry Journal Topic 1: Supporting Questions	The Oregon Trail Video Introduction	Women on the Trail Video Introduction	Transcontinental Railroad Podcast Reflection
ACTIVITY 2- PRACTICE	Manifest Destiny Guided Notes	Mapping the Trails Research	Source Jigsaw	Chinese Experience Rainbow Highlighting
ACTIVITY 3 - EXHIBIT	Classroom Mingle	Mapping the Trails Illustrations	Inside/Outside Circle	N/A
CONCLUSION	Causation Graphic Organizer	Exit Ticket: Gallery Walk	Exit Ticket: Letter Writing	Unit 8 Inquiry Journal Topic 1: Compelling Question

War with Mexico: Topic Overview

	<u>LESSON 5 (60 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 6 (60 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 7 (90 MINS)</u>
SUPPORTING QUESTION	How did Manifest Destiny influence the different methods used to acquire new territory?	What factors contributed to the increase in tension between Mexico and the United States?	In what ways did the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo change rights, land, and identity for people in the Southwest?
STANDARD(S)	7.48, 7.49, 7.50, 7.52, 7.54	7.49, 7.54	7.49, 7.52, 7.53, 7.54, 7.60
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Contextualization Causation	Causation Historical Significance	Contextualization Causation Historical Empathy
DO FIRST	Frayer: Acquisition Prediction	Frayer: Annexation Anticipatory Guide	Frayer: Treaty Quote Analysis
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Inquiry Journal Topic 2: Supporting Questions	Causes of War with Mexico Guided Notes	The Mexican-American War Video & Map Introduction
ACTIVITY 2- PRACTICE	"What is the Context?" - Territorial Acquisition Reading	"The Manifest Press" Newspaper Activity	Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo Gallery Walk
ACTIVITY 3 - EXHIBIT	†Document Analysis - President James K. Polk on Expansion (THINKS)	Review Anticipatory Guide (Optional)	N/A
CONCLUSION	Exit Ticket: DOK Question Generation	Exit Ticket: Triangle, Square, Circle	Unit 8 Inquiry Journal Topic 2: Compelling Question

Sectional Division: Topic Overview

	<u>LESSON 8 (60 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 9 (90 MINS)</u>	<u>LESSON 10 (90 MINS)</u>
SUPPORTING QUESTION	How did the land gained from the Mexican Cession intensify debates over slavery and reshape American politics?	How did American politicians attempt to compromise about slavery during the Antebellum Period?	How did people and events in the 1850s increase tension between the North and South over slavery?
STANDARD(S)	7.49, 7.50, 7.52, 7.54, 7.55, 7.63	7.48, 7.54, 7.55, 7.57, 7.63	7.55, 7.57, 7.58, 7.63
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Continuity and Change over Time Causation Historical Significance	Continuity and Change Over Time Perspective Causation	Contextualization Causation Historical Significance
DO FIRST	Frayer: Cession Notice, Wonder, Think	Frayer: Compromise Scenario Response	Frayer: Sectional Give One, Get One
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Inquiry Journal Topic 3: Supporting Questions	Antebellum Compromises Introduction Videos	"What is the Context?" - Voices of Division Reading
ACTIVITY 2 - PRACTICE	Impact of the Mexican-American War Reading Jigsaw	Perspectives on Compromises Predictions	U.S. Capitol Visitor Center Artifact Explorer Webquest
ACTIVITY 3 - EXHIBIT	Inside/Outside Circle	Classroom Mingle	Causation Graphic Organizer
CONCLUSION	Exit Ticket: Quickwrite	†Form Assessment - Fugitive Slave Act - CAU	Unit 8 Inquiry Journal Topic 3 Compelling Question

Assessment: Topic Overview

	LESSON 11 (60 MINS)	LESSON 12 (120 MINS)
SUPPORTING QUESTION	Place-Based Lesson Extension <i>See page 10 for lesson options and view Best Practice Repository for additional information about implementation</i>	How did the interplay of territorial expansion, regional differences, and political ideologies fuel the sectional crisis?
STANDARD(S)		All Unit Standards
FOCUS SKILL(S)		Historical Significance Evaluating Evidence Causation
DO FIRST		Frayer: Annotation Give One, Get One
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH		Introduce and Model Source Annotation
ACTIVITY 2 - PRACTICE		Source Selection and Annotation
ACTIVITY 3 - EXHIBIT		Peer Review
CONCLUSION		Unit 8 Inquiry Journal Essential Question

Place Based Lesson Extension

	LESSON 11 (60 MINS)
SUPPORTING QUESTION	
STANDARD(S)	
FOCUS SKILL(S)	
DO FIRST	
OPTION 1 - PODCAST	
OPTION 2 - SYNCHRONOUS PRESENTATION	
OPTION 3 - FIELD TRIP	
CONCLUSION	

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Unit Commentary:

Unit 8: Sectional Tensions (1820–1860) challenges students to examine how the forces of expansion, identity, and ideology fractured the United States in the decades leading up to the Civil War. The unit uses the historical thinking skill of causation to explore how different regions experienced and responded to change—and how competing visions of the nation escalated into crisis.

Topic 1 introduces the driving idea of Manifest Destiny, a belief that shaped U.S. territorial ambitions and justified the displacement of Indigenous and Mexican communities. Students analyze how political, economic, and social factors—including immigration and transportation infrastructure—fueled the movement west, while also uncovering whose voices and stories have been omitted from traditional narratives. Through contextualization and perspective-taking, students explore how Manifest Destiny created both opportunity and oppression.

Topic 2 examines the Mexican-American War, a pivotal moment in American expansion. Students investigate the roots of the conflict and analyze how the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo altered borders, rights, and identities. They consider how new territories gained through conquest intensified debates over slavery and challenged the nation's ideals. Through activities like document analysis and gallery walks, students explore the long-term impacts of war on land, citizenship, and sovereignty.

Topic 3 focuses on the deepening sectional divide of the 1850s. As the nation struggled to reconcile expansion with competing political ideologies, students evaluate how attempts at compromise—including the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850—ultimately failed to maintain unity. Through the study of pivotal events such as Bleeding Kansas, the Fugitive Slave Act, and the Dred Scott decision, students analyze how slavery's expansion became a moral and political flashpoint.

The culminating assessment, an Annotated Source Collection, asks students to synthesize evidence from across the unit to evaluate how territorial growth and ideological conflict shattered the fragile balance of the nation. This performance-based task reinforces the unit's essential question and supports deeper engagement with primary and secondary sources.

Throughout the unit, students apply historical thinking skills—especially causation, contextualization, and evaluating evidence—to better understand the roots of division in American history. By tracing how expansion and difference shaped competing visions of the nation, students gain a clearer picture of how the sectional crisis unfolded—and why it still matters today.

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Suggested Readings and Helpful Resources:

For information on:

Unit Pedagogical Resources:

- What is Causation? Guide
- [What is Causation? Video](#)

Museum Component:

- Optional Field Trip: U.S. Capitol Visitor Center