

**SYLLABUS OF A COURSE OF
ELEMENTARY INSTRUCTION
IN UNITED STATES HISTORY
AND CIVIL GOVERNMENT**

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Syllabus of a Course of Elementary Instruction in United States History and Civil Government
by James MacAlister

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BY

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Superintendent Public Schools, Philadelphia.

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The Author.

"That which constitutes History, properly so called, is in great part omitted from works on the subject . . . Only now, when the welfare of nations rather than of rulers is becoming the dominant idea, are historians beginning to occupy themselves with the phenomena of social progress. That which it really concerns us to know, is the natural history of society. We want all facts which help us to understand how a nation has grown and organized itself. Among these let us, of course, have an account of its government."—HERBERT SPENCER.

"C'est une vérité banale que l'étude de l'histoire est indispensable aux peuples libres, appelés à se gouverner eux-mêmes. La connaissance du passé fait seule bien comprendre le présent et aide à éviter les écueils sur lesquels nos ancêtres ont fait naufrage."—PAUL FRÉDÉRIQ.

"Nothing is really worth recording in final history except what promotes the permanent welfare of man."—JAMES PARTON.

"The American Constitution is the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man."—GLADSTONE.

"That which contributes most to preserve the State is to educate children with reference to the State: for the wisest of laws, although ratified by the consentient voice of the whole civic body, will be of no avail unless the citizens are trained by habit and education in the principles of the Constitution."—ARISTOTLE.

PREFATORY NOTE.

The following Syllabus was prepared for the use of the Public Schools of Philadelphia, with a view to securing better methods of instruction in the History and Government of the United States, a branch of study which is certainly second to no other in importance in the education of American children, but which has not generally been found to yield the results desired. A small edition has been issued in this form for distribution among those specially interested in this department of school-work. The plan and scope of the instruction are set forth in the introductory suggestions and in the special directions and notes scattered throughout the body of the Syllabus. The "grades" into which the Syllabus is divided refer to the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth years respectively of the general Course of Instruction.

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UNITED STATES HISTORY AND CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS TO TEACHERS.

1. The purpose of the oral lessons in the Ninth Grade is to familiarize the pupils with a few of the leading events and the lives of the most striking personages in the history of our own country. This is no easy task, and success will depend very much upon the intelligent interest which the teacher takes in the work. Regard must be had for the youth of the pupils, and no attempt should be made to load the memory with dates and disconnected facts.

2. The teacher must bear constantly in mind that the object of these lessons is not so much to communicate knowledge as to excite an interest in the subject. All the work should be of the most general character, and only such events, incidents and persons should be admitted into the lessons as shall be certain to attract the attention of the pupils, to stimulate a desire to know more of the subject, and to lay a broad foundation for the more extended study which follows in the succeeding grades.

3. These oral lessons in History will furnish excellent material for language lessons suitable for Ninth Grade pupils. A lesson should not be considered as finished until the facts or incident communicated and learned has been embodied in a simple composition.

4. The topical method should be followed in the more formal work of the Tenth and Eleventh Grades, and it will be found desirable to adhere strictly to the syllabus. Instead of requiring the pupils to memorize portions of the

text-book for verbatim recitations, the pupils should be trained to use it as the source of information upon that portion of the syllabus which the class is studying. The habit of stating in their own language what they have learned from the book should be sedulously cultivated.

5. Preparatory to the recitation, the paragraphs of the text-book covered by the lesson should be read by the class, and all necessary explanations made by the teacher.

Judicious use should be made of illustrative literature, such as poems, biographical sketches, narrative and descriptive pieces calculated to vivify and enlarge the information gathered from the text-book.

6. The history of a country cannot be learned without constant reference to its geography. The pupils should therefore be made familiar with such geographical features of a locality as may be necessary to understand the incidents taking place there. Map-drawing is therefore an essential feature of the instruction. It is the only true means of acquiring clear and definite ideas of the discovery and exploration of territory and of military campaigns. Some kinds of political and statistical information can also be more readily understood and acquired when graphically represented. For these reasons the map-drawing prescribed for the Tenth and Eleventh Grades should under no circumstances be neglected. It will be found an invaluable aid in the study of the topics to which it is applied.

7. One of the dangers to be avoided, is the lavish use of Chronology. The dates of the most important events, are of course, a necessity; but the number *should be made as small as possible*. The exact date of events is of much less importance than their orderly succession and continuity. The unity of History is the great principle which should guide all historical study—even the most elementary. Nowhere is this more important than in studying the history

of our own country, and the teacher should strive to make pupils realize this fact by applying it constantly to all their work.

8. Frequent general reviews should be given. Comprehensive chronological summaries should be made at the end of each of the epochs or periods and utilized as one mode of reviewing the ground gone over. The construction of synoptical tables is another excellent expedient for general reviews. Topical reviews under such heads as explorations, settlements, founders of colonies, statesmen of the successive periods, presidents, political parties, important battles, etc., will suggest themselves to every teacher.

9. The teacher should keep constantly in mind that the chief purpose of the instruction in History is to inspire the young with a broad, sound, generous patriotism, and to train them for the right discharge, in due time, of the duties of citizenship. The pupils should be made to see the evolution of the political institutions of the United States in the progress of events, from the planting of the colonies to the present time, and to find in these political institutions the source of the freedom, stability and power of the Nation. If the instruction, closing with the Federal and State Constitutions in the Twelfth Grades, is pursued in this spirit, the history lessons will constitute no unimportant part of the pupils' school training. And if the final stage of the study—that pertaining to the civil polity of the country, is divested of abstractions and technicalities, and its practical relations fully developed, a knowledge of the structure and working of the Government can be made a vital part of the consciousness of every pupil.

NINTH GRADE.

Oral lessons upon general topics—historical and biographical.