

Eighth Grade Humanities

Humanities is a collaborative course for eighth grade students, taking the connection between U.S. History and Literature to a higher level. Students work together on several units in both U.S. History and Literature providing opportunities to discuss, share, write, and analyze historical events and literary themes.

Colonial Society and The Scarlet Letter

This unit begins with an in-depth look at the development of Puritanism and its philosophies. As an anti-transcendentalist, Nathaniel Hawthorne criticized the theocracy in Puritan Salem through his characterization, plot, themes, and symbols in The Scarlet Letter. Students consider issues of the human heart and soul; they empathize with characters' inner turmoil and the stigma placed on them in society. In so doing, students understand that there are consequences for the choices they make, which affect the individual and others with whom they interact.

Essential Questions:

- Why did the Puritans come to Massachusetts Bay Colony? What did it mean for them to create a “city upon a hill?”
- How did the family being at the center of economic life influence roles for women?
- How did the Salem Witch Trials illustrate social crisis during this period?
- How does the time in which one lives impact one's beliefs and actions?
- Is sin a conflict with oneself, society, or God? Should there be punishment, and if so, by whom?
- How are women held to a different moral standard than men?

Revolutionary America and The Odyssey

Students explore the essential question, What is a Hero?

In our study of The Odyssey, we define the epic poem and its roots in oral tradition. We understand the epic hero cycle and how to recognize the pattern of events and elements in Odysseus' journey. We interpret the historic journeys in light of the epic hero cycle.

In US History, we study different forms of heroism during the Revolutionary War period.

Essential Questions:

- What is a hero?
- How does the literary epic hero influence our perception of the historic hero?
- How does modern society judge heroism?

Slavery in America and Frederick Douglass' Narrative of the Life of an American Slave

Students read Douglass' autobiography in conjunction with learning about the institution of slavery in the South during the antebellum period. Students explore how slavery was a political, social, cultural and economic institution in the South, and how this institution permeated politics, society, culture and economics in the North. Other important historical and social concepts we explore are the abolitionist movement, and other reform movements in the early 19th C, and the connection between education and freedom.

Essential Questions:

- In the novel, The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, how is education related to human freedom?
- How did enslaved people create community and a culture that allowed them to survive in an oppressive society?
- How does literature affect social justice, reconciliation and transformation.
- What was economic rationale for slavery in the South and in the North?
- Why is reading comprehension a statement about freedom?
- What is a human right?