

BUILDING FROM THE GROUND UP:

Below is an illustration on how the Social Studies Standards in First Grade support the legal requirement to teach the United States Constitution. This is an illustration that provides an example of how the standards are spiraled throughout the K-12 experience to foster successful teaching and learning.

The South Dakota Constitution and state codified law mandate that all accredited school students receive instruction in America's constitutional principles and institutions.¹ A thorough understanding of those principles and institutions requires an understanding of American civics, economics, geography, and history, as well as familiarity with the main elements of world history. A good sense of South Dakotans' place in the world and in our country also requires such an education.

The goal then is to graduate students with a working knowledge of why the Constitution says what it says, how it has played out in practice, how it has been amended and why, and how this impacts their future as citizens.

For a concise indication of the links between the early-grades and the understanding of America expected of high school graduates, it will be useful to show how the Founders themselves thought about these same topics we proposed in the first grade. To be clear, the goal is high school graduates who understand these topics, not first graders. But to be successful with high school graduates, knowledge needs to start being built in the elementary years. This concept results in the spiraling of subjects with greater depth as the students progress toward graduation.

As insight into what the founders' thought about the Constitution was, we have their own words. The most authoritative commentary on the United States Constitution written by some of the principal founders themselves was *The Federalist*. As will be seen, many of the first-grade standards have a direct tie to topics Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay addressed in *The Federalist*, or, more generally, to the historical events and context of their work.

FIRST GRADE

World History to 315

1.SS.4: "The student demonstrates knowledge of ancient civilizations in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and the eastern Mediterranean Sea."

Students understand themselves not only by looking at their own country and state but by comparing their own lives to those of others, both in terms of space (other civilizations) and times (in this case, antiquity). This was something the Framers were well aware of and compared their thinking drawing from past human experiences around the world. This first taste of elementary knowledge of earlier civilizations thus forms the first foundation for

¹ SD Constitution Article 8, SDCL 13-33-4, 13-33-6.1

study of our own constitutional history. The notion that children are unable to learn about things long ago and far away is unsupported by research.²

An important topic within this standard is ancient Greek history. *Federalist* 6 and 8 discuss the crucial question of national union and disunion with reference to the experiences of the ancient Greeks, and *Federalist* 9 does the same regarding the danger of domestic faction and insurrection, which destroyed many of the Greek regimes. Madison's important discussion of whether a republic can exist over an extended territory in #14 and Hamilton's discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of confederacies in #16 both draw upon Greek examples. *Federalist* 26 cites the history of Sparta in its account of the Constitution's approach to national defense; #38 addresses the key idea of what a political founding is, citing both Greek and Roman examples. These examples from ancient Greece then necessitates an introduction to the people, places, and events upon which further knowledge can be built.

Follow on standards in 3rd grade, 6th grade, 7th grade, and High School

1.SS.5. "The student demonstrates knowledge of Roman history and the Roman Empire."

Roman history In *Federalist* 41, on constitutional powers, Madison considered the danger of military despotism or Caesarism. He took up the example of Rome in a more positive light in #63, where he argues for the importance of a senate in a republic.

And of course, the very name, "Publius," refers to a figure in Roman history featured in Plutarch's *Lives*. The inscriptions on our Great Seal, "*Novus ordo seclorum*" and "*Annuit coeptis*" come from the preeminent Roman poet, Virgil, whose great poem describes the Roman founding.

Follow on standards are in 2nd grade, 3rd grade, 4th grade, 6th grade, 7th grade, and High School

American History, 1492-1787.

1.SS.6. "The student demonstrates knowledge of pre-Columbian indigenous peoples of North America."

A substantial part of American history relating to the application, or failure of application, of the principles of the Declaration of Independence and of Constitutional law relates to Native Americans, whose original systems of social and political life therefore need to be studied.

Follow on standards are in 3rd grade, 5th grade, 7th grade, High School

² Krahenbuhl, K.S. (2019). The problem with the expanding horizons model for history curricula. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(6): 20-26. Professor Krahenbuhl provided proponent testimony regarding this at the BOES meeting in Aberdeen, Sept 19, 2022.

1.SS.7. “The student demonstrates knowledge of European exploration and settlement of what would become the United States.” This includes study of the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies.

Hamilton’s description of dissensions among the states looks at the history of the colonies in #6, while Madison’s analysis of elections draws from that history in #53. The important colonial figures of William Bradford and James Winthrop are also introduced in the first grade Standards. Inasmuch as the Articles of Confederation system grew out of the original colonies, Hamilton’s critique of the Articles in #17 has direct relevance to materials on the colonial period.

Also under 1.SS.7: “The student explains why rules and laws are important for ensuring that people live safely and in peace.” This directly ties into the need for federal and state constitutions.

1.SS.8. “The student demonstrates knowledge of European exploration and settlement of what would become the U.S.”

Under this topic, the Triangle Trade introduces the critical issue of slavery; the Magna Carta reinforces the importance of the rule of law; the colonial way of life shows how American colonists formed habits and practices of self-government prior to the Revolution; and the conduct of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin during the French and Indian War shows the colonists’ capacity for both military and diplomatic action.

Both 1.SS.7 and 1.SS.8 have follow-on standards in 3rd grade and High School

1.SS.9. “The student demonstrates knowledge of events leading to the American Revolution.”

This topic, particularly the “reasons for the Revolution,” parallels Hamilton’s summary in #17. But the most important discussion of this topic is presented by Madison in #39, where he clearly and carefully links the revolutionary principles to the republican form of government instantiated by the Constitution. The first grade Standards also introduce students to the Declaration of Independence, cited in *Federalist* 40, again by Madison, linking the natural, unalienable rights cited in the Declaration to the Constitution. In #22, Hamilton offers a cogent demonstration of how the Declaration’s central principle, equality, is translated into Constitutional law. There are numerous references to the principle of liberty throughout *The Federalist* (most famously in 10, in relation to the problem of faction). The principle of the consent of the governed is one of the very first topics when Hamilton contrasts government by “reflection and choice” with governments by “accident and force.”

Follow on standards are in 3rd grade, 4th grade, 6th grade, 7th grade, and High School

1.SS.10. “The student demonstrates understanding of the Declaration of Independence based on the arguments of the leading founders.”

The relevance of this standard to the founding is, to borrow a phrase from the document itself, self-evident.

Also under this standard, the relevance of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson to the understanding of the American form of government also needs no elaboration. With regard to the Roman history studied in first grade, it might be noted that Washington was often compared to the great Roman statesman, Cato, and that Washington himself had Joseph Addison's play, *Cato*, performed for his troops during the winter at Valley Forge. As for Jefferson, in a famous letter he explained that the principles of his Declaration of Independence were derived from the writings of an ancient Greek (Aristotle), and ancient Roman (Cicero), along with the 'moderns' John Locke and Algernon Sydney, both of whom advocated republicanism and showed how it could be adapted to the conditions of modern states.

Follow on standards are in 2nd grade, 4th grade, 7th grade, 8th grade, and High School

To conclude, the purpose of this illustration is to show that understanding the US Constitution, for example, is not something that can only take place in grades 8 - 12. Relevant pre-requisite knowledge must be thoughtfully presented to students in the elementary grades so that they can analyze the more complex issues as described in *The Federalist* in High School. Such requisite knowledge rests on having an introduction to ancient Greece, Rome, and other parts of the world in a thoughtful and repetitive way in the elementary and middle school years.