

Teaching History

Reasons Why Teaching History Is Important

- The purpose of teaching history is to help students understand the world so they can more effectively serve God in it.
- History is messy and many ugly things have happened. History class is a chance to dive into that messiness and see how God is working to redeem this broken world.
- History class is a chance to teach students foundational truths about the world and about people, such as the following:
 - People are created in God's image. They are intelligent, creative, and resourceful, and can be brave and compassionate. Humanity can do great things.
 - People and the world are fallen. Sin has corrupted humanity. People are idolatrous, vain, foolish, selfish, and stubborn. Sin has broken the relationship between humanity and the universe.
 - People act in their best interests as they perceive them. People do not act randomly; rather, they act according to their desires. However, human desires are corrupt and short-sighted, tending to lead to misery.
 - People set themselves in opposition to those they perceive as different, leading to war, genocide, and exploitation.
 - Very few of history's conflicts involve the good guys vs. the bad guys. We have a natural tendency to look for narratives of good vs. evil, but it's usually the bad guys vs. the other bad guys, and sometimes the bad guys vs. the worse guys.
 - God is redeeming the world through Jesus. God's grace has been at work throughout all of history, and He promises to redeem the world fully one day. We can teach history with hope.
- History class is a chance to explore topics like God's sovereignty and His hand at work in world events.

General Advice and Teaching Tips

- Keep the purpose of teaching history in front of you (to help students understand the world so they can serve God more effectively). Don't worry about getting students to memorize every bold term in the history textbook. Instead, teach them how the world got to be the way it is. This teaching will include many of those bold terms, but they must be part of the story and not substitutes for the story.
- It's important not to bend history to fit into a narrative you are trying to teach your students. Sometimes people tend to learn what they feel like learning from history. Instead, it takes a lot of work to teach the skill of seeing what the past has left to us and *drawing* conclusions from that instead of *imposing* conclusions on it.
- Suggestions for making history more engaging for your students:

- Show actual pictures. Use drawings when pictures are not available.
- Put the students into the scenario being studied. Guide them in using their imaginations to do this.
- Embrace project-based, hands-on, and discovery-driven learning.
- Use mnemonics to memorize facts.
- Use primary sources when possible.
- Beware of subtle messaging that may be present in history textbooks, even Christian ones. Christian nationalism, just war theory, and America-centric statements need to be addressed as contrary to the way of Jesus.
- Strong history teaching requires preparation beyond facts. It's important to also emphasize the following:
 - Cohesive worldview—a right view of God as sovereign and redemptive, a right view of this world as fallen, and a right view of humans as unique in God's eyes but fallen and imperfect.
 - Development of skills—history class should offer the building of text-reading, geography, and research skills.
 - Storytelling—history should be seen and taught as a broader story, not an isolated telling of certain events.

Recommended Resources

Below you will find some general, multi-use application resources. However, the Dock contains hundreds of history resources shared by teachers, such as worksheets, powerpoints, study guides, tests, and more. Go to <https://thedockforlearning.org/> and search for your specific curriculum or time period—you may find that another teacher has shared something that can be useful to you.

- Online Resources for Pennsylvania History: [Online Resources for Pennsylvania History - The Dock for Learning](#)
- World History Culmination Project: [World History Culmination Project - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Historical Figures Ethics Debate Activity: [Historical Figures Ethics Debate Activity - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Family Tree History Project: [Family Tree History Project - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Ideas for Teaching World History: [Teaching World History Ideas - The Dock for Learning](#)

Sources

- To Better Serve God with His People: Teaching Church History by Peter Goertzen [To Better Serve God with His People: Teaching Church History - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Teaching History Beyond Names and Dates by Peter Goertzen [Teaching History Beyond Names and Dates - The Dock for Learning](#)

- Finding Their Place in the World: Teaching History with a Redemptive Perspective by Austin Shenk [Finding Their Place in the World: Teaching History with a Redemptive Perspective - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Building a Framework for Making Sense of History by Peter Goertzen [Building a Framework for Making Sense of History - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Five Go-to Practices to Energize Your History Class by Deana Swanson [Five Go-to Practices to Energize Your History Class - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Who Are We? The Role of History Books and Teachers by Patrick Heatwole [Who Are We? The Influence of History Books and Teachers - The Dock for Learning](#)