

Option 24/25 Topic booklet



The American West, c1835–c1895

GCSE (9-1) History

Pearson Edexcel Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in History (1HI0)

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1. Overview

The history of the Native Americans and the American West has long fascinated people of all ages – from the romantic view of the Indian and tribal life to the dusty and bandana-wearing image of the cowboy that has been portrayed in literature and the media. In this option, students will have the opportunity to explore what the 'real' America West was like and examine the impact of government-sponsored expansion in the American outback, which had far-reaching consequences for both the Indians and the many settlers of the time.

This was a defining period in the history of the USA, as a huge number of people moved west to settle on the Plains and the frontier of settlement was pushed westwards – driven by the belief in Manifest Destiny to expand the United States from coast to coast. The lives of the Plains Indians changed dramatically over these 60 years, as railroads, the cattle industry and gold prospecting impacted on their previous ways of life and means of survival, and they were moved into reservations.

To aid this story of the American West, the unit has been divided into three sequential Key topics that help tell this fascinating and interesting story. Firstly, students look at the lives of the Plains Indians, early migration and settlement and problems of lawlessness in early settlements, as well as the tensions between the settlers and Plains Indians. They then move on to how settlement on the Plains developed, ranching and the cattle industry, and the impact on the Plains Indians' lives of events and developments between c1862 and c1876. Finally, students look at further changes in farming, the cattle industry and settlement, conflict and tension between different groups living on the Plains, and the destruction of the Plains Indians' way of life. All three Key topics are interconnected, however, with threads of settlement, conflict and tensions, and the changing lives of the Plains Indians running throughout. Consequently, students should be encouraged to see the period study as a whole rather than three separate topics.

1.1 Assessment

Students answer three compulsory questions for the period study.

- Question 1: this focuses on consequence.
- Question 2: this focuses on analytical narrative, in which students write an account that not only describes what happened, but also involves analysis to find connections and make sense of events and their impact to explain why events unfolded in the way that they did. This is likely to involve a mix of second-order concepts (i.e. causation, consequence, change).
- Question 3: students select two from a choice of three parts. Each focuses on the importance of an event/person/development in terms of what difference they made in relation to situations and unfolding developments (i.e. their consequence and significance).

Detailed information and guidance on assessment can be found in the separate Getting Started guide.

1. Overview

2. Content guidance

2.1 Summary of content

The first topic covers the early settlement of the West, c1835–c1862. Students should be aware that the Plains Indians were many different tribes and nations such as the Sioux. They should understand that life on the Plains could be difficult and be aware of the Plains Indians' means of survival. Students should be aware of the main beliefs of the Plains Indians about land, nature, warfare and personal property, and that these differed greatly from those of the Americans who were starting to settle on the Plains.

Students should understand that the government supported westward expansion and, while they allowed the Plains Indians to live on the Plains, by 1840 this was only to the west of the Permanent Indian Frontier, and in 1851 the Indian Appropriations Act created reservations, diminishing the Plains Indians' independence. Students should appreciate the range of factors that encouraged migration west, both those pushing people from the east, such as the economic conditions, and those drawing people to the West, such as the discovery of gold, as well as the belief that it was their right to seek out and claim free land for themselves and the creation of trails that showed the way for the new settlers. Students should appreciate, however, that migration west was not easy, as exemplified by the disastrous experience of the Donner Party and the more successful Mormon migration. They should understand the nature of the early settlements and the conditions that made farming difficult.

Students should consider how the growing number of settlers moving on to the Plains led to conflict between settlers and Plains Indians. They should examine the significance of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 and the promises made on both sides, including the lands given to the Plains Indians supposedly for all time. Students should understand why law and order was difficult to enforce in the early towns and settlements, and how the government and local communities tried to tackle these problems.

Key topic 2 covers the development of the plains, c1862–c1876. Students do not need to know the events of the Civil War itself, but should understand that its ending brought a new wave of settlers arriving on to the Plains, helped by government incentives such as the Homestead Act and the Pacific Railroad Act and the First Transcontinental Railroad. Students should be aware that, despite the government incentives to move to the West, homesteaders faced a range of difficulties in living on and farming the land, such as the lack of water, and the solutions that were found to deal with them, such as wind pumps. They should appreciate that the growing population in the West saw continued problems with law and order, despite government support, and they should understand the roles of law officers such as sheriffs. Students should be aware that as well as the increasing number of settlers at this time, the cattle industry was growing too, helped by factors including the railroads, individuals such as Goodnight and McCoy and cowtowns such as Abilene. They should be aware too of the move towards ranching started by Iliff and the resulting changes to the work of the cowboys.

Students should appreciate that tensions continued to grow between the settlers and the Plains Indians, but also between the settlers themselves such as the ranchers and the homesteaders. The expansion of the railroad, the growing cattle industry and gold prospecting all antagonised the Plains Indians. Students should be aware that despite this, the government still pursued a policy of encouraging the Plains Indians on to the reservations. They should understand that the 'Peace Policy' pursued by President Grant in 1868 was short-lived, with continued tensions between the US Government and the Plains Indians which spilt into open conflict between the two parties. Students should be aware of key conflicts during this period.

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The third key topic covers conflicts and conquest, c1876–c1895. Students should understand that changes in farming in this period, as a result of new inventions such as barbed wire and new technology such as dry farming, meant that most of the early problems the homesteaders had faced were now solved. They should understand too that this period saw the end of the 'open range', leading to the formation of new ranches, fenced with the new barbed wire. Students should be aware that the effects of the Civil War were still being felt, with the Exoduster movement from the South, and they should be aware too of the significance of the Oklahoma Land Rush, which opened up to settlers land that had previously been promised to the Cherokee Indians. They should understand the additional tensions and challenges this growth in settlement brought to law and order, including the significance of the notorious Billy the Kid, as well as key law enforcers such as Wyatt Earp and events at OK Corral. Students should understand the reasons for clashes between cattlemen and homesteaders in the range wars, including the key events of the Johnson County War of 1892.

Students should understand that the US Government and US Army were still engaged in conflict with the Plains Indians, reaching a climax with the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Wounded Knee Massacre, which effectively ended Indian resistance on the Plains. Students should appreciate the effects of the destruction of the buffalo, on which the Plains Indians had been so reliant, and the resulting changes that the Plains Indians faced in life on the reservations. They should be aware that this was against a backdrop of changing government attitudes, which had once sought to accommodate the Plains Indians but now wanted to remove them from the Plains altogether, and that this was reflected in government policy and measures such as the Dawes Act in 1887, and the closure of the Indian Frontier.

Period studies focus on an analytical narrative of events and therefore students should appreciate the chronology of key events, while understanding that some developments overlap several events. For example, separate waves of migration feature at several points in the narrative. Within that analytical narrative, students will need to see that events do not occur in isolation but unfold as a consequence of what has gone before. When discussing the significance of an event, students should be able to explain its impact and the way it changed the situation or attitudes.

Key terms

It may be useful at the start of the course to provide students with a list of key terms and concepts that they will need to be familiar with for this option. The list of terms below is not intended to be a comprehensive checklist, rather simply a useful starting point for teachers to produce their own list of terms that their students may not fully understand or have difficulty spelling.

Claim, corral, dry farming, federal, frontier, Ghost Dance, homesteader, Manifest Destiny, marshal, nomadic, railroad, ranch, reservation, rustling, sheriff, vigilante.

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2.2 Content exemplification and mapping

This section provides additional guidance on the specification content. It should be remembered that the official specification is the only authoritative source of information and should always be referred to for definitive guidance. Any examples provided here do not constitute additional specification content and other relevant material illustrating aspects of the specification can be used.

Key topic 1: The early settlement of the West, c1835–c1862		Exemplification	Changes from 2013 Edexcel History B (SHP) 2B American West
1	<p>The Plains Indians: their beliefs and way of life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and tribal structures, ways of life and means of survival on the Plains. • Beliefs about land and nature and attitudes to war and property. • US government policy: support for US westward expansion and the significance of the Permanent Indian Frontier. The Indian Appropriations Act 1851. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The different Indian tribes that existed on the Plains. Chiefs and braves. Indians' respect for nature and the land and their nomadic lifestyle. Their beliefs about the buffalo and their dependence on it; their reliance on use of horses. The reasons for and importance of war for Plains Indians and their beliefs about counting coup. • The government's role in dealing with Indian affairs. The introduction of the Permanent Indian Frontier in helping to drive all Indians west away from the settlers and on to their own area on the Plains. The Indian Appropriations Act, allocating funds for the Plains Indians to move on to reservations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first two bullet points have been covered previously. The Permanent Indian Frontier and Indian Appropriations Act may have been taught but were not previously specified in the old specification.
2	<p>Migration and early settlement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The factors encouraging migration, including economic conditions, the Oregon Trail from 1836, the concept of Manifest Destiny, and the Gold Rush of 1849. • The process and problems of migration, including the experiences of the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The different factors that led to migration to the West from the 1840s. Economic conditions in the east following the collapse of banks. The setting up of the Oregon Trail from 1836 with government encouragement. Manifest Destiny and the belief that white Americans had the right to populate all areas of America from East Coast to West Coast. The discovery of gold in 1848 and the subsequent mass movement of people west. • The different experiences of those who went west. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All three bullet points have been covered previously. The Oregon Trail from 1836 may have been taught but was not previously specified in the old specification.

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	<p>Donner Party and the Mormon migration, 1846–47.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development and problems of white settlement farming. 	<p>The disastrous outcome of the Donner Party's trek west, and the experiences of the Mormons driven west by persecution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems faced by new settlers attempting to farm on the Plains, for example, the weather and climate, prairie fires, grasshopper plagues, lack of water, few trees, lack of fencing to protect crops. 	
3 Conflict and tension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons for tension between settlers and Plains Indians. The significance of the Fort Laramie Treaty 1851. • The problems of lawlessness in early towns and settlements. Attempts by government and local communities to tackle lawlessness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of the growing number of settlers moving on to the Plains. The Indians' and government's responses to this problem. The significance of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, both for the Indians and for the settlers. • The impact of mass settlement on law and order. The lack of any real law and order in the towns and attempts to deal with lawlessness such as the work of vigilante groups. The problems in keeping effective law and order, such as the growing ethnic divisions between the different settlers and the geography of America. The role of territories in keeping law and order and their development into states. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both bullet points will have been covered previously.

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Key topic 2: Development of the plains, c1862–c1876		Exemplification	Changes from 2013 Edexcel History B (SHP) 2B American West
1 The development of settlement in the West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The significance of the Civil War and post war reconstruction, including the impact of the Homestead Act 1862, the Pacific Railroad Act 1862, and the completion of the First Transcontinental Railroad, 1869. Attempts at solutions to problems faced by homesteaders: the use of new methods and new technology; the impact of the Timber Culture Act 1873 and of the spread of the railroad network. Continued problems of law and order in settlements, and attempted solutions, including the roles of law officers and increases in federal government influence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The impact of the ending of the American Civil War on the West and the movement of ex-soldiers on to the Plains looking for a new and improved life. The role of the US Government in offering incentives for settlers to move and settle on the Plains in the Homestead Act. Support from the US Congress in the development of the Railroad across America in the Pacific Railroad Act 1862 and its subsequent completion in 1869. The difficulties faced by the homesteaders in farming the land and their attempts to resolve them, for example with better machinery, new crops, fencing and wind pumps. The Timber Culture Act and its consequences in encouraging more homesteaders on to the Plains and the effects of the railroad network in encouraging more homesteaders on to the Plains. Continued conflicts in law and order in the West and the government's response to law and order at this time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The significance of the American Civil War and its impact, the Pacific Railroad Act (1862), and the Timber Culture Act (1873) may have been taught but were not previously specified.
2 Ranching and the cattle industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cattle industry and factors in its growth, including the roles of Iliff, McCoy and Goodnight, the significance of Abilene 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reasons for the growth of the cattle industry at this time, such as demand for beef and the impact of the American Civil War. The role of Goodnight in developing a cattle trail, the role of McCoy in developing the first cow town at Abilene, and the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All three bullet points have been covered previously.

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	<p>and the use of the railroad network.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of changes in ranching on the work of the cowboy. • Rivalry between ranchers and homesteaders. 	<p>role of Iliff in developing ranching. The role played by the railroad network in driving demand for beef and impact on the cattle industry, for example the growth of the 'Cattle Barons'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The life of the cowboy and the changes as a result of the beginning of the 'long drive', including the problems that this entailed. The differences in ways of life in the new ranches, for example more comfortable living conditions but a lack of freedom. • Reasons for rivalry between the ranchers and the homesteaders, for example the impact of sheep farmers and, at the end of the period of this key topic, barbed wire in helping to create conflict between these two groups. The contribution of conflict between the ranchers and homesteaders to issues with law and order in the West. 	
3	<p>Changes in the way of life of the Plains Indians</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of railroads, the cattle industry and gold prospecting on the Plains Indians. • The impact of US government policy towards the Plains Indians, including the continued use of reservations. President Grant's 'Peace Policy', 1868. • Conflict with the Plains Indians: Little Crow's War (1862) and the Sand Creek Massacre (1864), the significance of Red Cloud's War (1866–68) and the Fort Laramie 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of the growing numbers of settlers on the Plains on the Plains Indians and their way of life. The impact of the railroads and the cattle industry, for example restricting freedom of movement and obstructing buffalo hunts. The impact of gold prospecting as treaties were broken in pursuit of gold. • The role played by the US government in helping to encourage settlers to move west on to the Plains while also encouraging the use of reservations to allow Indians to live peacefully without having to come into contact with the settlers. The use of the 'Peace Policy' by President Grant in encouraging a peaceful resolution to the 'Indian Problem' rather than the use of violence. • The increased tensions between the Plains Indians, settlers and US Government. The escalation of these tensions into the 'Indian Wars' between the US Government and the settlers, resulting in Little 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All three bullet points have been covered previously. President Grant's 'Peace Policy' (1868) may have been taught but was not previously specified.

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	Treaty (1868).	Crow's War (1862), the Sand Creek Massacre (1864) and finally Red Cloud's War (1866–68). The second Fort Laramie Treaty (1868) whereby the US Government left its forts and the Indians retreated to the reservations.	
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Key topic 3 : Conflicts and conquest, c1876–c1895		Exemplification	Changes from 2013 Edexcel History B (SHP) 2B American West
1	<p>Changes in farming, the cattle industry and settlement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in farming: the impact of new technology and new farming methods. Changes in the cattle industry, including the impact of the winter of 1886–87. The significance of changes in the nature of ranching: the end of the open range. Continued growth of settlement: the Exoduster movement and Kansas (1879), the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1893. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The continued challenges faced by farmers in the American West and their responses with new machinery. Changes in the nature of ranching, with the end of the open range and the use of barbed wire. The harsh winter of 1886–87 and loss of cattle. The impact of these changes on the lives of cowboys, for example riding the line, more comfortable living conditions, more regular hours and ranch rules. The continued increase in settlers on the Plains. The impact of the Exoduster movement of black Americans into Kansas following the Civil War on the Plains Indians but also on the other settlers. The Oklahoma Land Rush, which opened up to settlers land that had previously been promised to the Cherokee Indians. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All three bullet points have been covered previously. The Exoduster movement and Kansas (1879), the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1893 may have been taught but were not previously specified in the old specification.
2	<p>Conflict and tension</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent of solutions to problems of law and order: sheriffs and marshals. The significance of Billy the Kid, OK Corral (1881), Wyatt Earp. The range wars, including 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The continued growth of crime in the West and the US Government's response to this. The roles of town marshals, sheriffs, and US Marshals. The role played by Billy the Kid in promoting lawlessness in the West. The gunfight at OK Corral (1881) and the role played by Wyatt Earp in contributing to lawlessness in the West. The background and tensions to the Johnson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All three bullet points have been covered previously. The significance of Billy the Kid, OK Corral (1881), Wyatt Earp may have been taught but was not previously specified.

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	<p>the Johnson County War of 1892.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflict with the Plains Indians: the Battle of the Little Big Horn, 1876 and its impact; the Wounded Knee Massacre, 1890. 	<p>County War and the spark that ignited the conflict, the conflict itself and the subsequent trial and its consequences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The growing tensions between the US Government and the Indians over land in the West. The impact of the discovery of gold in the Black Hills of Montana and the subsequent Gold Rush and growing tensions between the US Government and Indians. The reasons why the Sioux Indians went to war and the events that followed at the Battle of the Little Big Horn (1876) and the subsequent consequences for the Plains Indians and the US Government. The Wounded Knee Massacre (1890) and assess its implications for the Plains Indians. 	
3 The Plains Indians: the destruction of their way of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The hunting and extermination of the buffalo. The Plains Indians' life on the reservations. The significance of changing government attitudes to the Plains Indians, including the Dawes Act 1887 and the closure of the Indian Frontier. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The US Government's policy of hunting and extermination of the buffalo and its effect on the Plains Indians. The Plains Indians' lives on the reservations and the impact of these changes on the Plains Indians. The role of the US Government in dealing with the Plains Indians. The effectiveness of the different methods that the US Government used in dealing with the Plains Indians, for example territorial, political, economic, religious, and educational. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All three bullet points have been covered previously. The closure of the Indian Frontier may have been taught but was not previously specified.

3. Student timeline

3. Student timeline

The timeline below could be given to students, and could be further edited and added to by them. Inclusion of dates and events in this timeline should not be taken as an indication that these are prescribed: the official specification and associated assessment guidance materials are the only authoritative source of information and should always be referred to for definitive guidance.

c1834	Permanent Indian Frontier set up
1843	First settlers arrive in Oregon encouraged by government legislation
1844	Mormon persecution in Nauvoo
1846	Donner Party head west but meet with disaster and death Mormons travel to the Great Salt Lake having been driven out of Nauvoo
1848	Gold discovered in California
1850s	First homesteaders move to the Plains
1851	Fort Laramie Treaty (1)
1858–59	Gold discovered in the Pikes Peak region of the Rocky Mountains
1859	Gold mines opened in Colorado and Nevada
1861	Start of the American Civil War between North and South America
1862	Homestead Act Little Crow's War Pacific Railway Act passed and work begins on the transcontinental railway
1864	Sand Creek Massacre
1865	End of the American Civil War Slavery abolished in the US
1866	Group of US army soldiers wiped out at Fetterman's Trap by Plains Indians Red Cloud's War on the US Government in their attempt to build forts in Montana Goodnight and Loving reach Fort Sumner with 1,700 cattle

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1867	Medicine Lodge Creek Abilene becomes the first cow town 'The Beef Bonanza'
1868	'The Winter Campaign' Fort Laramie Treaty (2)
1869	Railroad completed despite opposition from some Americans
1870	Cattle Ranching begins on the Plains which led to the 'Open Range'
1873	Timber and Culture Act
1874	Barbed wire begins to be mass-produced Wind-powered water pump introduced Custer leads expedition to the Black Hills ignoring the Treaty of Fort Laramie
1876	The Great Sioux War begins between the US Army and the Sioux Indians Battle of the Little Big Horn
1881	Sitting Bull and followers surrender to the American government
1885	All Plains Indians are resettled on to reservations Northern herd of buffalo is completely destroyed
1886	Severe winter leads to smaller ranches with barbed fences and wind pumps that eventually lead to the end of the cowboy era
1887	Dawes Act
1890	Battle of Wounded Knee US government closes frontier in which the Plains Indians had lost their land
1892	Johnson County War

4. Resources

The tables below list a range of resources that could be used by students and teachers for this topic. Inclusion of resources in this list does not constitute endorsement of those materials. While these resources – and others – may be used to support teaching and learning, the official specification and associated assessment guidance materials are the only authoritative source of information and should always be referred to for definitive guidance. Links to third-party websites are controlled by others and are subject to change.

4.1 Resources for students

Resource	Details
<i>Edexcel GCSE History (9-1) The American West, c1835–c1895</i> (Pearson, 2016)	New textbook written for this option in the new specification.
<i>Hodder GCSE History for Edexcel: The American West, c1835–c1895</i> (Hodder, 2016)	New textbook written for this option in the new specification.
Rosemary Rees, <i>Edexcel GCSE: History B – Schools History Project: The American West</i> (Pearson, 2009)	In-depth study of the American West written for the 2009 specification and updated for the 2013 specification.
SHP Essential: The American West: 1840–1895. The Struggle for the Plains (Hodder Education, 2005)	Overview of the American West more suited to lower ability students. Written for previous GCSE specifications.
BBC American West www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesizehistory/shp/americanwest	Overview on the American West and revision materials and quizzes to aid students with their revision.
<i>The West</i> (PBS 1996)	In-depth programme about life in the American West and the resulting conflicts between the Plains Indians, settlers and the US Government.
American West site www.americanwest.amdigital.co.uk	Website with overview of life in the American West through a series of original documents, useful for higher ability students.
Spartacus Educational www.spartacus-educational.com/USAamericanwest.htm	Overview of life in the American West with links to specific examples of key facts and information relating to the West.

4.2 Resources for teachers

Resource	Details
Dynamic Learning: The American West 1840–95 Teaching and Learning Resources (Hodder)	Digital resource covering the main aspects of life in the American West. Useful teaching and learning resource for use in lessons.
<i>SHP The American West 1840–1895: The Struggle for the Plains Teachers Resource Book</i> (Hodder Education, 1998)	Range of worksheets to support student activities in the classroom.
www.hoddereducation.co.uk/historynest	Free worksheets to support lower ability student activities in the classroom.
Zig Zag: <i>Edexcel B Unit 2B: American West Definitive Course Companion</i>	Detailed and definitive companion to accompany the American West course. Useful as a starting point for those not acquainted with the course.
Zig Zag: <i>Edexcel B Unit 2B: American West Revision Guide</i>	Detailed and informative revision guide on the American West, useful for students revising for assessments.
Zig Zag: <i>Edexcel B Unit 2B: American West Ultimate GCSE Activity Pack</i>	Useful range of activities to accompany lessons on the American West.
Zig Zag: <i>GCSE Edexcel B Unit 2B: American West c1845–c1890: Mind Maps</i>	Range of mind maps on the American West, useful for students revising for assessments.