HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The period from the fall of the Roman Empire to the spread of new ideas based on science and reason across Eurasia established the basis of what would become the modern nations that we know today. It bridges the ancient and modern worlds, covering over a thousand years of history.

Europe formed from the remnants of the western Roman Empire. North Africa and the Middle East prospered under the spread of Islamic rule. Civilizations clashed and combined in the newly discovered Americas. Powers around the globe expanded their trading networks along with their knowledge of the world. Two of the major themes include the solidification, expansion, and power of Christian and Muslim doctrine and influence, and the development of technology and scientific knowledge to enable long-distance travel, trade, and communications. Another theme is the growth of a worldview based on reason—in opposition to religious influence but parallel to the advance of scientific knowledge—which led to the European Enlightenment and global cultural exchange.

This period of history not only sets the stage for modern world history, but it also provides context for the settlement of the American colonies and the founding of the United States.

ADDITIONAL LINKS

- World Digital Library
- World History Links Guide
- Medieval History newsletter (March 2013)
- World History & Cultures newsletter (September 2009)
- Browse by Topic: World History & Cultures

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

With the shift in 7th-grade teaching from geography to World History and Geography, teachers are in great need of resources to cover the additional material. Therefore, this primary source set is geared towards the 7th grade Social Studies curriculum standards. The curricular units, such as “Africa, 400 A.D./C.E.-1500s” and “The Renaissance and Reformation,” are retained here in the subheadings, about two per page, and follow the order in the standards. Seventh grade teachers can use this set throughout the year as they cover different civilizations and events.

Several of the following primary sources are parts of online exhibitions that would make good secondary source reading assignments for students, due to the explanatory narrative and development of world history themes.
THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Constantinople, Mosque of St. Sophia and Constantinople [approximately 1900 to 1920]

Evidence of medieval boredom: an image from a fourteenth century manuscript of Justinian’s Institutes from the rare book collection of the Law Library of Congress (LCCN: 2004596530) [detail; for more about the law codes of Justinian, click here]

The ecclesiastical history of Eusebius Pamphilus : Bishop of Caesarea, in Palestine. / In ten books translated from the original by the Rev. C.F. Crusé. [1833; see pp. 426 and following for parts about Constantine; see also these excerpts from Eusebius’ Life of Constantine]

EISLAMIC WORLD, 400 A.D./C.E.-1500s

Muslim distribution : [Islamic countries]. [2002, detail]

Agra, Taj Mahal [between 1890 and 1900]

Panel of Illumination, Qur’anic verses [9th century, front and back]

Letter of Suleyman the Magnificent to Francis I, King of France, Istanbul, 1536 [scroll to 14th image]
AFRICA, 400 A.D./C.E.-1500s

This map shows the trip to Mecca made in A.D. 1324 by the fabulously wealthy king Mansa Musa... [1375, detail]

Ethiopian Gospels [around 1300 CE—1350 CE]

The Psalm of David, Ge'ez Manuscript Psalter [15th or 16th century; scroll to 6th panel]

Gwinea propria, nec non Nigritiae vel Terrae Nigrorum maxima pars... [1743, detail]

CHINA, 400 A.D./C.E.-1500s

[Da Ming yu di tu]. 大明與地圖. Atlas of the Ming Empire [between 1547 and 1559, detail]

The history of Genghizcan the Great, first emperor of the ancient Moguls and Tartars; in four books [1722]

Inscribed stones, the reputed writings of Confucius. Temple of Confucius, Peking, China [1902]

Camel train from Mongolia via Nan-kow Pass, coming through the Great Wall of China [1902]

Hall of Supreme Harmony - main hall in the Forbidden City, Beijing, China, where the emperor met his ministers each morning; includes inscription in Chinese language characters in right margin [between 1860 and 1900]
JAPAN, 400 A.D./C.E.-1500s

One Million Small Wooden Pagodas and Dharani Prayers [770 C.E.]

Genji Monogatari
a.k.a. Eiribon
Genji Monogatari
tale of Genji
[1654; see also this version]

Ronin, or masterless Samurai, fending off arrows [1869, detail]

Shinto funeral ornaments [1878, detail]

Itsukushima Shinto Shrine, Japan [1908, detail]

MIDDLE AGES IN WESTERN EUROPE, 400 A.D./C.E.-1500s

Map of the Far East and adjacent Pacific [1290s, detail]

Denier [ca. 812-814]. For excerpts from Einhard’s Life of Charlemagne, click here.

Medieval book collector sitting at desk, reading [1494, detail]

Quai vert, Bruges, Belgium [between ca. 1890 and ca. 1900]

Mount Hermon and vicinity, Hasheya, The Shihab Castle, Late medieval incorporating Crusader remains [approximately 1920 to 1933]

Einsiedeln, schoolhouse and monastery, Lake Lucerne, Switzerland [between ca. 1890 and ca. 1900]
**The Renaissance and Reformation**

- **The Gutenberg Bible** [1455]
- **Reproduction of page from notebook of Leonardo da Vinci showing giant crossbow** [between 1894 and 1904 (reproduction)]
- **Das Zeitalter der Reformation** [18 —]
- **Reproduction of rough sketch by Isaac Newton showing a reflecting telescope and its components** [1959-1977 (reproduction), detail]

**The Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution**

- **A new and correct map of the world: laid down according to the newest observations & discoveries in several different projections including the trade winds, monsoons, variation of the compass...** [1702]
- **Compound microscope as rendered by artist in Descartes "La Dioptrique"** [1637, detail]
- **Montesquieu to George Washington, April 25, 1785, in French, with Translation and Copy** [detail; transcription of translation available here]
- **The muscles of the left leg, seen from the front, and the bones and muscles of the right leg seen in right profile, and between them, a patella. Drawing by Michelangelo Buonarroti, ca. 1515-1520.**
- **Ninety-Five Theses** [1517, detail; see translation here]
THE AGE OF EXPLORATION

Concerning Discovered Islands: Letter of Christopher Columbus, to Whom Our Age is Greatly Indebted, Concerning Islands Recently Discovered in the Indian Ocean [1493; p. 5 shown at right]. For an English edition of this letter, see A Letter of Christopher Columbus. For excerpts from Columbus's journal, click here.

Universalis cosmographia secundum Ptolomaei traditionem et Americi Vespucci aliorumque lustrationes. [1507] See lesson plan built around this primary source.


World Map in [Donnus Nicolaus Germanus] Cosmographia, Claudius Ptolemaeus, Ulm, 1482. [scroll to 3rd item]

Tortuguero Box, Tabasco, Mexico. Maya, Classic Period. [681] See interactive presentation built around this primary source.

Huexotzinco Codex [1531] See lesson plan built around this primary source.
from several Oriental authors, and European travellers; whose names, with an abridgment of their lives, are added to this book.

Petis de la Croix, Francois. “The history of Ghenghiscan the Great, first emperor of the antient Moguls and Tartars; in four books: containing his life, advancement and conquests; with a short history of his successors to the present time; the manners, customs and laws of the antient Moguls and Tartars; and the late geography of the vast countries of Mogolistan, Turquestan, Capschac, Yugurestan, and the Eastern and Western Tartary. Collected from several Oriental authors, and European travellers; whose names, with an abridgment of their lives, are added to this book. By the late M. Petis

**attachment:**


**Islamic World, 400 A.D./C.E.-1500s**


- Panel of Illumination, Qur’anic verses. Manuscript. 9th century. From Library of Congress, African and Middle East Division/Global Gateway: Selections of Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Calligraphy. [Website](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?nlmtdl:ascbib:@field%28DOCID+@lit%28ascs000140%29%29)

**Africa, 400 A.D./C.E.-1500s**

- This map shows the trip to Mecca made in A.D. 1324 by the fabulously wealthy king Mansa Musa (reigned, 1312?-1337) of the Mali Empire. With the map is an explanation of some of the symbols it uses. Map. 15th century. From Library of Congress, Africana Collections: Library of Congress: An Illustrated Guide. [Website](http://www.loc.gov/rr/amed/guide/afri-encounters.html)

**China, 400 A.D./C.E.-1500s**

- [Da Ming yu di tu]. Map. China, 1547-1559. From Library of Congress, Geography and Maps Division. [Website](http://www.loc.gov/item/96687096/)

**Teachers:** Providing these primary source replicas without source clues may enhance the inquiry experience for students. This list of citations is supplied for reference purposes to you and your students. We have followed the Chicago Manual of Style format, one of the formats recommended by the Library of Congress, for each entry below, minus the access date. The access date for each of these entries is 11/12/14.


Japan, 400 A.D./C.E.-1500s


Middle Ages in Western Europe, 400 A.D./C.E.-1500s


The Renaissance and Reformation


The Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution

Godson, W. A new and correct map of the world : laid down according to the newest observations & discoveries in several different projections including the trade winds, monsoons, variation of the compass, and illustrated with a coelestial planisphere, the various systems of Ptolomy, Copernicus, and Tycho Brahe together with ye apearances of the planets &c. / . Map. London: George Willdey, 1702. From Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division. http://www.loc.gov/item/200629779/


The Age of Exploration


