

Portfolio Project #1 – World History and Geography website
(a.k.a. “WorldHistGeo” ... unless I come up with a better name)
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*** If you are interested in partnering on the project, don't worry about the history resources unless you want to help with that. I'll take care of that side and we can work together on the coding. ***

1. Introduction

The WorldHistGeo site is intended to be student focused, rather than teacher/adult-learner focused, unlike (it seems) a majority of history websites. The increase in virtual learning as well as student class sizes and the increasing role that technology use plays in education all point to an increased need for engaging student-focused learning platforms that allow for rich learning experiences for students of diverse reading abilities and backgrounds.

While the end goal for this website would be to cover each of the eras included in the current [Tennessee 7th grade Social Studies standards](#) (that's 65 standards ... what !?!), the current portfolio project will include materials on the final 8 course standards (7.58-7.65) focused on the topic of the Age of Exploration originating in Western Europe and exploring especially the Americas. This project will have tangible academic benefits for myself, other 7th grade Social Studies teachers in Tennessee, and (hopefully especially) our students as we prepare together to meet the expectations of this state curriculum. The intangible benefits of this site would be to play a small role in helping any site user to experience the many intangible benefits of studying history (e.g., understanding people and societies, developing our own sense of identity, relating to others, etc.). The [American Historical Association](#) expresses it well.

2. Expected List of Features

Anticipated Features:

- Visuals – Maps, images, primary source excerpts, persons, student artwork, video links. I would really like the main page to eventually be driven around an interactive of some sort... at least once we reach that point in our knowledge of coding.
- Interactives (eventually... and need to add more here once I know how to code it) such as timelines, interactive maps(?),
- Short readings about historical content, with option to add more text later
- Self-grading quizzes with form submission and eventually a back-end storage and/or database, possibly porting directly into a course gradebook.

To avoid redundancy and increase sleep quantity, justifications of these features are explained more in the market survey.

3. Market Survey - Survey the web to find c.5 websites similar to yours – compare/contrast

The CMS Curriculum Companion is a website designed by G. M. Dyrek, the Library Media Specialist at Cleveland Middle School, around the Tennessee Social Studies standards. The main goal of this website seems to be to provide resources which teachers can use to instruct their students in a classroom setting, as its use by numerous teachers throughout the state also demonstrates. While this website is highly beneficial and I plan to utilize it for resources and possibly a few design elements in this project, recent increases in virtual learning cause me to sense a greater need for a site where students can navigate through the topics learning at their own pace effectively regardless of whether they are in a classroom setting with additional instruction or learning in a more independent fashion.

IXL Social Studies provides an enormous collection of Social Studies topics divided by grade and topic areas, as well as brief Q&A sessions to determine student understanding. While the content is readily available for free use, without a per student membership on this site the content appears loosely connected and useful mainly for brief select topics assigned by a teacher or else researched by a highly motivated student. In my opinion, the average student user seems unlikely to find the free version of this website to be engaging or user friendly. I do not have experience with the paid version. WorldHistGeo is intended to be a free (at least for now) student user friendly experience that is engaging, informative, and (eventually) useful for both general knowledge and classroom-based instruction and assessment.

World History for Us All provides lots of broad historical information in a sequential era based format, which could become a useful approach for WorldHistGeo, but is highly text dependent. While this fits well for a university website, many middle school students struggle with reading comprehension at a sufficient grade level to engage most history curriculum. Based on my experience with numerous print and electronic history resources, most middle school history resources are written above the reading grade level for the content standards on which they are focused. While reading comprehension is important and WorldHistGeo will include the appropriate technical language and text-based resources, greater use of visual resources (maps, images, links to helpful videos) should make it accessible to a younger audience.

Digital History provides a more similar example of the types of resources and methods I foresee in this project, with lots of timelines, interactive tools, maps, and visuals. However, these visual and technology-based features are largely separated from the text-based narrative, requiring student users to navigate to look for those materials. For younger learners, a more integrated approach of visual and technological materials and tools seems best. This site also focuses mostly on U.S. History, where WorldHistGeo will look at Western Europe and the Americas from about the 1400s to the 1700s.

Later additions to the site could include student interactives like those available on sites like the Utah Education Network. More comparison research will be needed in this area once we begin to study those coding skills.

4. References

<https://www.socialstudiescms.com/age-of-exploration> - CMS Curriculum Companion

This link points to the unit covering the same topics as the initial focus of the current project.

<https://www.ixl.com/social-studies/grade-7>

<https://whfua.history.ucla.edu/eras/era6.php> - World History for Us All – UCLA Department of History. This link also points directly to the era which overlaps with the present focus on the “Age of Exploration” as the Tennessee curriculum refers to the period, especially in Western Europe and the Americas.

<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>

https://www.uen.org/3-6interactives/social_studies.shtml

Additional resources which may be considered (some here are more for content than coding):

<https://historyexplorer.si.edu/>

<https://besthistorysites.net/>

<https://www.weareteachers.com/social-studies-websites/>

www.khanacademy.com – great collection of educational videos in many areas, including world history and geography. Very useful for teachers or motivated student researchers.

https://www.monroe.k12.tn.us/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=1135949&type=d&pREC_ID=1492262

www.brainpop.com – great video resource, mostly paid, but some free videos or resources

<https://study.com/academy/course/7th-grade-social-studies-world-history-ii.html> - largely subscription based