



Teacher's Guide

The Contemporary World

Semester A

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Overview

Plato Courses are developed to give the instructor a variety of ways to engage different learning modalities and to give the student an opportunity to experience a range of standards and objectives to ensure academic success.

Plato Courses integrate online curriculum, electronic Learning Activities, and supporting interactive activities. An array of assessment tools allows the instructor to correctly place students at the appropriate learning level, to evaluate strengths and needs, to create individualized learning goals, and to determine proficiency. Reports assist the student in understanding where he or she needs to focus to be academically successful as measured against objectives. Guidelines and tools are provided to track student progress and to determine a final course grade.

Plato Courses give the instructor control over the instructional choices for individual students as well as for the classroom. The instructor may use all of the components as sequenced or select specific activities to support and enhance instruction. Plato Courses can be used in a variety of ways to increase student achievement.

Course Components

Learning Activities

Three types of learning activities form the building blocks of active learning for this course: Lessons, Unit Activities, and Online Discussions.

- **Lessons.** Each lesson in this course contains one or more learning components. All contain an interactive tutorial and a Lesson Activity.
 - **Tutorials.** Tutorials provide direct instruction and interactive checks of understanding. Students check their understanding and practice their skills with a wide variety of technology-enhanced practice interactions, including drag-and-drop interactions, matching questions, graphic interactions, multiple-choice questions, and fill-in-the-blank questions. Tutorials also often include links to informational websites, interactions and videos, which enable students to broaden their understanding.
 - **Lesson Activities.** Lesson Activities are embedded in each tutorial. These activities are written assignments that allow students to develop new learning in a constructivist way or to apply learning from the tutorial in a significant way. Lesson Activities are designed to be an authentic learning and assessment tool.
- **Unit Activities.** The Unit Activity at the end of each unit aims to deepen understanding of key unit objectives and tie them together or tie them to other course concepts. Unit Activities are similar to Lesson Activities but are intended to combine and leverage concepts developed throughout the unit. Unit activities are teacher graded. The student version includes a simple rubric, if appropriate, while the teacher version may contain more complex rubrics, answer keys, and modeled sample answers.
- **Online Discussions.** Online discussion with instructors and other students is a key activity, based on 21st-century skills, that allows for higher-order thinking about terminal objectives. An online threaded discussion mirrors the educational experience of a classroom discussion. Instructors can initiate a discussion by asking a complex, open-ended question. Students can engage in the discussion by responding both to the question and to the thoughts of others. Each unit in a course has one predefined discussion topic; instructors may include additional discussion topics. A rubric for grading discussion responses is included in this guide.
- **Videos and Animations.** Lessons incorporate videos to better engage students while they are learning. Instructional videos from outside sources are linked to course content whenever applicable, and several lessons in this course have video content that was custom made for this course.

Tools

The following tools are available to assist students as they work through a course. Clicking an icon opens access to the tool. Clicking again closes the tool.



- **Notes (tutorials).** Students can record notes and retain them for later reference.
- **Resources (tutorials).** Students can access key tools and references designed to support their learning.
- **Dictionary (tutorials).** Students can see a definition in English or Spanish for any text that they enter or copy and paste into the provided text field.
- **Text to Speech (tutorials and mastery tests).** Students can play the audio narration for any text they enter or copy and paste into the provided text field.
- **Translate (tutorials).** Students can see a translation to another language for any text they enter or copy and paste into the provided text field.

Learning Aids

These learning aids assist students within the courseware activities:

Reader Support (Tutorials and Mastery Tests) enhances learning by enabling students to highlight text in the lesson and

- play audio narration for the selected text (text to speech);
- see a translation to another language for the selected text;
- see a dictionary definition in English or Spanish for a selected word; and
- see a glossary definition for Social Studies specific terminology.

Assessment and Testing

Best practices in assessment and testing call for a variety of activities to evaluate student learning. Multiple data points present a more accurate evaluation of student strengths and needs. These tools include both objective and authentic learning tools.

- **Objective Assessments.** A specific learning objective is associated with each lesson in this course. Each lesson objective is assessed through objective assessments at three different points during the course: at the end of the specific lesson, at the end of the unit, and at the end of the semester. In addition, pretests based on these objectives are available at the beginning of each unit, if desired by the teacher.

Assessment items are presented in more than a dozen technology-enhanced item formats, parallel to those found in many state standard assessments.

Typical item formats include multiple choice, multiple select (more than one answer), drag-and-drop matching, graphic placement, and text fill-in.

- **Mastery tests** at the end of each lesson provide the instructor and the student with clear indicators of areas of strength and weakness. These multiple-choice tests are taken online.
- **Unit pretests** are optional assessments, typically designed for credit recovery use. If a student shows mastery of a lesson's objective (80% proficiency), the student may be automatically exempted from that lesson in the upcoming unit. Courses for first-time credit typically do not employ unit pretests. The tests are multiple-choice and are provided online.
- **Unit posttests** help instructors track how well students have mastered the unit's content. The tests are multiple-choice and are provided online.
- **End-of-Semester tests** assess the major objectives covered in the course. By combining the unit pretest and unit posttest information with the end-of-semester test results, the instructor will gain a clear picture of student progress. The tests are multiple-choice and are provided online.
- **Authentic Learning Assessment.** Of the assessment tools available in this course, three are designed specifically to address higher-level thinking skills: Lesson Activities, Unit Activities, and Online Discussions. These authentic learning activities allow students to develop deep understanding and provide data for the teacher to assess knowledge development. These three types of activities are described in the Learning Activities section above. The following comments address their use for assessment.
 - **Lesson Activities** are designed to encourage investigation and to provide practice. Some activities have an answer key that provides answers for single-answer questions and sample answers for open-ended questions. Other activities have objective rubrics. Students need to submit some of these activities for instructor evaluation and feedback. Other activities can be checked by students themselves using the answer key. Keep in mind that some students may need guidance to successfully self-check open-ended questions against a model.
 - **Unit Activities** give students the opportunity to apply and integrate concepts they have learned across lessons within a unit and thereby demonstrate higher-order thinking skills. Students submit their work for grading by the instructor.
 - **Online Discussions** encourage students to reflect on concepts, articulate their thoughts, and respond to the views of others. Thus, discussions help teachers assess students' critical-thinking skills, communication skills, and overall facility

with the unit concepts. Each unit in this course has one predefined discussion topic. Instructors can customize the course, however, to include additional discussion topics. Online discussions may use whatever rubric the instructor sets. A suggested rubric is provided below for reference.

Online Discussion Rubric				
	D/F 0–69 Below Expectations	C 70–79 Basic	B 80–89 Proficient	A 90–100 Outstanding
Relevance of Response	The responses do not relate to the discussion topic or are inappropriate or irrelevant.	Some responses are not on topic or are too brief or low level. Responses may be of little value (e.g., yes or no answers).	The responses are typically related to the topic and initiate further discussion.	The responses are consistently on topic and bring insight into the discussion, which initiates additional responses.
Content of Response	Ideas are not presented in a coherent or logical manner. There are many grammar or spelling errors.	Presentation of ideas is unclear, with little evidence to back up ideas. There are grammar or spelling errors.	Ideas are presented coherently, although there is some lack of connection to the topic. There are few grammar or spelling errors.	Ideas are expressed clearly, with an obvious connection to the topic. There are rare instances of grammar or spelling errors.
Participation	The student does not make any effort to participate in the discussion.	The student participates in some discussions but not on a regular basis.	The student participates in most discussions on a regular basis but may require some prompting to post.	The student consistently participates in discussions on a regular basis.

Course Implementation Models

Plato Courses give instructors the flexibility to define implementation approaches that address a variety of learning needs. Instructors can configure the courses to allow individual students to work at their own pace or for group or class learning. Furthermore, the courses can be delivered completely online (that is, using a virtual approach) or can include both face-to-face and online components (that is, using a blended approach).

Depending on the learner grouping and learning approach, instructors can choose to take advantage of peer-to-peer interaction through Online Discussions. Similarly, if students have prior knowledge of the concepts taught in certain lessons, instructors can decide to employ unit pretests to assess students’ prior knowledge and exempt them from taking the lessons. Note, however, that this feature is primarily designed for credit recovery purposes. For first-time credit, students are typically not allowed to “test out” of course lessons. Following are two common implementation models for using Plato Courses, along with typical (but not definitive) implementation decisions.

- **Independent Learning**

The student is taking the course online as a personal choice or as part of an alternative learning program.

Learner grouping	independent learning
Learning approach	blended or virtual
Discussions	remove from learning path
Unit pretests	students do not take pretests

- **Group or Class Learning**

The online course is offered for a group of students. These students may not be able to schedule the specific course at their local school site, or they may simply want the experience of taking an online course.

Learner grouping	group interaction
Learning approach	blended or virtual
Discussions	use; additional discussion questions may be added
Unit pretests	students do not take pretests

The Contemporary World, Semester A, Overview

Pedagogical Approach

Plato social studies courses employ a balance of direct instruction and constructivist learning experiences designed to support both concept acquisition and knowledge-building skills. These courses are also designed to meet widely-accepted content and process standards. These include the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for ELA as applied to social studies, the C3 (College, Career and Civic Life) framework, and the NCSS National Curriculum Standards.

The CCSS ELA Standards

All social studies lessons and activities are tracked against the Common Core state standards for ELA as applied to social studies. This tracking ensures that each course includes active practice with the reading and writing skills students need to succeed. For example, lesson activities and unit activities require students to read critically, evaluate sources, and interpret primary sources. The activities vary in length and include a wide variety of writing types, short and long, argument-based and more descriptive, all with varied audiences and purposes.

Additionally, students find and interpret information in many different forms, including maps and other visual representations. Glossary links in lessons support learning vocabulary of social studies-specific terms. Skills-focused units and lessons help students explore how historical, geographical, and cultural context shape the point of view of a text. Supplemental documents are also available to explain or review specific aspects of writing and research.

Plato social studies courses are used by students working independently as well as by students working with classmates. Some activities employ group interactions, such as peer reviews, to meet Common Core standards, but teachers are also provided with alternative approaches for learners working outside the classroom.

The C3 Framework

The [C3 Framework](#) (National Council for the Social Studies) provides a set of guidelines designed to ensure that social studies curricula get students actively involved in the content through inquiry, the application of knowledge, the development and use of questions, the evaluation and use of evidence, the communication of knowledge, and the use of informed action. Here are some of the ways Plato social studies courses support the C3 framework.

Developing questions and planning inquiries: A warm-up task begins each lesson, usually with an open-ended question or set of questions that asks students to connect their prior knowledge (or their prior misconceptions) with the lesson's content. Thought-provoking slideshows and videos encourage students to look at their lesson content in new ways, increasing critical thinking skills. Lesson activities provide a forum in which students must go beyond a simple concept and explain their reasoning. Unit activities take inquiry to a higher level by having students synthesize the concepts they learned in all the lessons for that unit, often in the form of open-ended tasks or projects.

Applying disciplinary concepts and tools: Courses differ in scope and topic, but aspects of civics, economics, geography, and history permeate each course. Each course includes a unit with lessons that focus on core social studies concepts and skills. These lessons may probe the meaning of primary and secondary sources, how to interpret historical data, what chronology means, how to use maps and other geographic tools, or the importance of visual presentations of historical data. These skills also shape lessons whose main focus is a historical or economic topic.

Evaluating sources and using evidence: Dedicated lessons in each course focus on historical inquiry. Students analyze information, gather and evaluate sources, and develop evidence-based conclusions. Further, source evaluation and use is integrated throughout the course, especially in lesson and unit activities.

Communicating conclusions and taking informed action: In lesson activities, students often need to explain their reasoning, delving deeper into questions of how and why. In unit activities, students engage in open-ended tasks or projects in which they incorporate larger concepts from lessons and communicate conclusions. Both types of activities also include scenarios in which students explore and express their own relationship to a social studies concept, such as doing one's civic duty or examining the ethical or moral implications of governmental structures.

Critical thinking, problem solving, and collaborative skills: Students use critical thinking and problem-solving skills as they engage in warm-up questions, interactions within tutorials, and lesson activities. Unit activities also require these skills and sometimes include a collaboration requirement as a component—for example, working with a peer group to review a paper.

The NCSS National Curriculum Standards

Plato social studies course incorporate the ten thematic strands of social studies set out by the [National Council for the Social Studies](#) through the following means:

- Culture—Lessons illustrate the many facets of human culture: the process of humans creating and adapting to culture, the diversity and commonalities of cultures in the world, and how cultures change over time.
- Time, Continuity, and Change—Investigation of the history and structure of human institutions is central to Plato social studies courses. Students probe causes and effects of events and major eras of change, identify personal and cultural roots of the modern world in history, and evaluate historical sources and accounts and their interpretations of events.
- People, Places, and Environments—Human history and cultural formation is intimately dependent on physical and environmental conditions (including access to water, fertile soil, and ports). In turn, how we live shapes the environment that sustains us. Plato social studies courses trace this interplay so students can learn how maps and other geographical tools help us to understand our environment.
- Individual Development and Identity—Students have the opportunity to study the lives of individuals, including their own. Plato social studies courses trace individuals as separate entities and as products of social and cultural forces. Some activities require students to examine their own ethical impact on the world and how and why others hold different values than their own.
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions—Students learn about key individuals, groups, and institutions throughout history. They explore how critical institutions and groups came into creation, what purposes they serve, and how they continue to evolve. Students also examine how individuals are affected by and can affect these groups and institutions.
- Power, Authority, and Governance—Plato social studies courses trace many forms of government that humans have used to exert power over one another, as well as the consequences and limitations of those types of government. This historical background shapes student understanding of constitutional government, conflicts between majority rule and individual rights, and the civic duties of citizens in a democracy.
- Production, Distribution, and Consumption—Each course traces the methods that humans have used to provide for their needs. These methods clearly vary with technological developments, and they vary in terms of how goods are traded and what

role government plays in keeping economies productive. Students' understanding of this concept helps them become educated participants in increasingly interdependent global and domestic economies.

- **Science, Technology, and Society**—Changes in technology and science dramatically alter how we as people provide for our needs, define ourselves as humans, understand our relationship to the world and the universe, and battle waves of disease and infection. As students explore these changes, they become better able to wrestle with the myriad of moral dilemmas they produce.
- **Global Connections**—Plato social studies courses include the recent history of the global interdependence of economic, social, and political systems. This history enables students to learn about and place themselves in our world's rapidly changing environment.
- **Civil Ideals and Practices**—By examining ways in which people organize themselves in society—over time and in various regions of the world—students are better situated to practice civic behavior in their own lives. Students are required to look at ideals and the gaps between them and actual practices to see both the strengths and the shortcomings of their own governmental systems. As a result, they will be better positioned to explore ways to close those gaps.

Instructional Strategies

Each unit in *The Contemporary World, Semester A*, provides learners with a cohesive and connected learning experience. Research strongly supports the use of connections to increase learner achievement. The majority of lessons focus on a particular period in contemporary world history, analyzing the events, people, and social trends involved in how we view that time period. Some lessons instruct students on the process of historical inquiry and apply that process to high-level themes across the entire arc of contemporary world history.

Each lesson is aligned to one or more of the Essential Standards for the Contemporary World course. To generate skills for lifelong learning, many of the lessons in this course use student-driven, constructivist approaches for concept development. The remaining lessons employ direct-instruction approaches. All lessons generate student engagement with vibrant, thought-provoking graphics and videos.

Lesson Activities and Unit Activities are designed to promote inquiry skills proposed by the [National Council for the Social Studies](#). These inquiry skills are the basis for the Common Core Social Studies framework, which promotes civic-mindedness.

Lesson Activities and Unit Activities help foster meaningful learning and a civic-minded mentality by guiding students to

- recognize patterns in current and historical societal development;
- consider the impact of globalization and technology on the development of American history and culture; and
- gather, evaluate, and synthesize data related to real-world issues.

Common instructional strategies include a structure that provides for both individual and group learning. Learners are expected to use the Internet to research historical issues; analyze current and historical events; identify problems; evaluate and suggest solutions; analyze and respond to historical artifacts, images, and documents; create presentations to share information; create timelines and graphic organizers; respond to writing prompts; and use grading rubrics to understand expectations.

The Contemporary World, Semester A, Curriculum Contents and Pacing Guide

This section provides a brief summary of each unit in the semester. This semester is divided into four units spread over 90 days. The Unit Pacing Guide provides a general timeline for presenting each unit. It is designed to fit your class schedule and is adjustable. The guide is based on a typical 180-day school year schedule with 90 days per semester.

The pacing guide lists the title and the primary content objective of each lesson. For more information about each lesson, consult this [detailed set of lists](#), which correlates lessons with standards. Notice that within the Contemporary World Scope and Sequence tab, lessons are correlated with specific state standards. Within the Coverage Grid tab, state standards are listed, and column B gives the total number of lessons or other activities that address that standard. Across the top of the spreadsheet, you'll find the title of each Lesson or Unit Activity, by unit. In the cells under the titles, the number 1 indicates that the Common Core standard of a given row is addressed in that title.

Unit 1: Geographic Thinking

Summary

In the first unit, students will explain how geography is used to understand the world and its people. They will analyze spatial organizations of people, places, and environments. They will also analyze geographic, political, and cultural divisions within the United States, as well as in other countries and regions. Lastly, students will describe physical and human characteristics of places and regions.

Day	Activity/Objective	Type
1 day: 1	Syllabus and Plato Student Orientation <i>Review the Plato Student Orientation and Course Syllabus at the beginning of this course.</i>	Course Orientation
3 days: 2–4	Geography Tools <i>Explain how geography is used to understand the world and its people.</i>	Lesson

Day	Activity/Objective	Type
4 days: 5–8	Map Skills <i>Analyze spatial organizations of people, places, and environments.</i>	Lesson
4 days: 9–12	The United States: Regions, States, and Cities <i>Analyze geographic, political, and cultural divisions within the United States.</i>	Lesson
4 days: 13–16	Countries and Regions of the World <i>Analyze geographic, political, and cultural divisions of countries and regions.</i>	Lesson
4 days: 17–20	Physical and Human Characteristics <i>Describe physical and human characteristics of places and regions.</i>	Lesson
5 days: 21–25	Unit Activity and Discussion—Unit 1	Unit Activity/ Discussion
1 day: 26	Posttest—Unit 1	Assessment

Unit 2: Cultures and Societies

Summary

The lessons in this unit discuss the impact of historical events, culture, science and technology, and cultural diffusion on contemporary societies.

Day	Activity/Objective	Type
4 days: 27–30	Contemporary Societies <i>Explain how historical events influence contemporary societies.</i>	Lesson
4 days: 31–34	Culture <i>Analyze the role of culture within contemporary societies.</i>	Lesson

Day	Activity/Objective	Type
4 days: 35–38	Science, Technology, and Society <i>Describe the influence of science and technology on contemporary societies.</i>	Lesson
4 days: 39–42	Cultural Diffusion <i>Explain the impact of cultural diffusion on contemporary societies.</i>	Lesson
5 days: 43–47	Unit Activity and Discussion—Unit 2	Unit Activity/ Discussion
1 day: 48	Posttest—Unit 2	Assessment

Unit 3: Human Systems

Summary

In this unit, students will describe how social institutions affect contemporary societies. They will explain the relationship between the arts and society and examine the impact of geographic factors on the use and development of economic resources. Toward the end of this unit, students will describe the characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations.

Day	Activity/Objective	Type
4 days: 49–52	Social Institutions <i>Describe how social institutions affect contemporary societies.</i>	Lesson
4 days: 53–56	Expressions of Culture <i>Explain the relationship between the arts and society.</i>	Lesson
4 days: 57–60	Economic Activities and Geography <i>Explain how geographic factors affect the use and development of economic resources.</i>	Lesson

Day	Activity/Objective	Type
4 days: 61–64	Migration and Population Distribution <i>Describe the characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations.</i>	Lesson
5 days: 65–69	Unit Activity and Discussion—Unit 3	Unit Activity/ Discussion
1 day: 70	Posttest—Unit 3	Assessment

Unit 4: Environment and Society

Summary

In the last unit, students will analyze the effects of physical processes on the environment. They will describe the uses and distribution of natural resources throughout the world. Further, students will identify ways that people have adapted to and modified physical environments.

Day	Activity/Objective	Type
4 days: 71–74	Physical Processes <i>Analyze the effect of physical processes on the environment.</i>	Lesson
4 days: 75–78	Natural Resources <i>Describe the uses and distribution of natural resources throughout the world.</i>	Lesson
4 days: 79–82	Human Interaction with the Environment <i>Identify ways that people have adapted to and modified physical environments.</i>	Lesson
5 days: 83–87	Unit Activity and Discussion—Unit 4	Unit Activity/ Discussion
1 day: 88	Posttest—Unit 4	Assessment

Day	Activity/Objective	Type
1 day: 89	Semester Review	
1 day: 90	End-of-Semester Exam	Assessment