

# Approaches to Teaching History



[Click here for Brown and Schell's \(2024\) article.](#)



[Click here for essential question examples from a host of academic fields \(McTighe, 2024\).](#)



**History may have occurred in chronological order, but does this mean that we have to teach history in a linear fashion?** In this one-pager, we offer ways to think about teaching history and provide a few resources to inform your thinking.

*Brown and Schell (2024) wrote, "Events of the 1970s and 1980s may be recent history for some teachers, but they are as remote to current high school students as the Civil War and World War I. A second problem exists [with teaching history chronologically] as more and more history accumulates each year."*

**Use Chronological Units.** This approach does allow some predictability in students' learning, and faculty members are able to build on knowledge of one unit as they progress through the curriculum chronologically (Grand Canyon University, 2024). Additionally, teaching in chronologically order could be "easier to understand" and "successful in teaching cause-effect relationship" (Turan, 2019).

**Teach Thematic Units.** Grouping units around a particular theme allows instructors and students to study events that happened at different time periods. This can enable students to understand historical events in the context of contemporary events. Brown and Schell (2024) shared themes identified by Mary Connor (2014): "The American Character and the American Belief System" and "Making a New Start: The Immigrant Experience" and the College Board: "Identity," "Politics and Power," and "Ideas, Belief, and Culture."

**Design Inquiry-Based Units.** Designing a course or a unit around a particular essential question provides students with an opportunity to constantly refine their answer to the question as their historical knowledge increases. Essential questions are broad, open-ended questions that do not have a clear "yes" or "no" answer. Examples of historical essential questions include the following: What is the price of war? What does freedom look like? What are the tenets of democracy?

**Include Interactive Timelines.** Invite students to create personal timelines while at the same time creating a visual class timeline on which events are placed as they are discussed in class. Using different colors to correlate with different units can aid a visual clue for students. Timelines can be used with multiple methods of teaching history (Brown & Schell, 2024).