



LESSON PLAN:

WHAT IS THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA?

Elementary School (4-6)

OVERVIEW:

Students use maps to explore both the concept of the United States of America and its geographic boundaries over time. Geographic expansion is explored during the Colonial Period (1776-1790), after the Louisiana Purchase (1791-1810), during Westward Expansion (1811-1850), Worldwide Expansion (1851-1900), and today.

Resources include maps, background information, population data, demographics, and immigration information during different time periods. As written, students color in a map while the teacher leads a PowerPoint guided lesson and discussion. Resources are flexible and can be used in a variety of ways.

Estimated time: 1 class period, 35-45 minutes total

STANDARDS:

Social studies standards vary by state. This lesson can be used to teach the following standards and similar wording may be found in your state standards.

National Council for the Social Studies Standards

- NCSS.D2.Geo.1.3-5: Construct maps and other graphic representations of both familiar and unfamiliar places.
- NCSS.D2.Geo.5.3-5: Explain how the cultural and environmental characteristics of places change over time.
- NCSS.D2.His.2.3-5: Compare life in specific historical time periods to life today.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will define the United States of America.
- Students will describe ways the United States has changed geographically over time.
- Students will describe ways the United States has changed culturally over time.

RESOURCES NEEDED:

- What is the United States of America? PowerPoint presentation
- Copies of "What is the United States of the America?" student worksheet (one per student)
- Colored pencils (recommended that each student have 5 different colors)



LESSON ACTIVITIES:

- Introduction/Anticipatory Set: 5-10 mins

- Display PowerPoint Slide 1, and lead a class discussion around the question “What is the United States of America?”

Prompting questions may include:

- Can you identify some different parts of the United States?
- Do you know when the United States was first formed?
- What do you think it means to be American?
- What is something that unites Americans?
- After a few minutes of discussion, show the world map on PowerPoint Slide 2 and ask students to identify the United States. After locating on the map, ask if students know of any additional parts of the U.S.
- Display PowerPoint Slide 3, and point out Alaska and Hawaii as states, and Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa as territories. Explain that answering the question “What is the United States of America?” can be difficult, because the country has changed geographically and culturally throughout history. In this lesson, students will learn about changes to the borders and population of the United States, and how we define the United States today.

- Periods of Expansion: 20 mins

Depending on your class’s prior understanding of American history and geography, and your own instructional objectives, you may choose to spend more or less time on each slide in the presentation (or skip some altogether!). You are encouraged to use the notes included in this lesson plan to inspire discussion about the changing nature of the United States, but do not necessarily need to share every detail.

- Provide each student with a copy of the “What is the United States of America?” student worksheet and instruct students to turn to the side with the 48 contiguous states.
- Display PowerPoint Slide 4 and instruct students to color their own map to match the one on the screen.
- While students color, use the notes in this lesson plan to share background information about what was happening in the United States during this period of expansion.
- Once students have colored their United States map, instruct them to turn over to the side with the World Map. Display PowerPoint Slide 5, and instruct students to color in the portion representing the original United States.
- While students color, share information about the population of the United States during this time period – who were they and where did they live? Instruct students to draw arrows from western Europe, the British Isles, and western Africa to represent where most immigrants and enslaved peoples at this time originated from.



- Repeat this process for each period of expansion – have students color the newly acquired territory and draw arrows representing the origins of major immigrant populations while you share information about the United States during that time.

For “Worldwide Expansion” and “The United States Today,” students will not need to color anything on the side with the 48 contiguous states.

- Conclusion: 10-15 mins
 - Display PowerPoint Slide 14
 - Explain that today The United States of America is a country made up 50 states, a federal district, five territories, and nine uninhabited islands, all governed by the United States federal government. Even though many different people from many different countries and backgrounds have come to live here, our laws and government are still based on the U.S. Constitution written in 1787.
 - Instruct students to complete the three prompts on their handout:
 - List 2 ways the United States is similar to when it was first formed
 - List 2 ways the United States has changed since it was first formed
 - Describe one way you hope the United States will change in the future

LESSON EXTENSIONS:

- Share student responses for how they hope the United States will change in the future by posting on Twitter with the hashtag #ANCEducation
- Mark your current location and identify during which period of expansion it became part of the United States.
- Encourage students to explore their family history and draw their own family patterns of movement and immigration.
- Check out the University of Oregon’s Mapping History Project (available here: <https://mappinghistory.uoregon.edu/english/index.html>) for online, interactive maps depicting historical events and developments



Planning a Visit to Arlington National Cemetery?



Arlington National Cemetery uniquely represents our nation’s history, with graves of service members from every major conflict. If you are interested in more information and discussion questions to use with your class during a visit to the cemetery, detailed walking tours are available here: <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/education>



NOTES FOR PERIODS OF EXPANSION

The Original United States (1776-1790) (Slides 4-5)

Background: In 1776, the thirteen British Colonies of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire declared their independence and formed the United States of America. By 1790, all thirteen states had ratified the Constitution, agreeing to the system of government we still use today. To avoid the national capital being located in any state, land was taken from Maryland and Virginia and used to create the federal district of Washington, District of Columbia.

Who were Americans? Most residents of the original United States were the descendants of white western Europeans, and most immigrants came from England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands, Wales, France, Sweden. Africans were forcibly brought as slaves from West and Central Africa (today's Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Upper Guinea, Togo, Ghana, Benin, Ivory Coast, Senegal, The Gambia, and Nigeria), sometimes directly from their homes in Africa and sometimes after having already lived in slavery in the Caribbean. At this time, Native American people were not counted in the census, but it is estimated that in 1790 there were fewer than 100,000 Native Americans living in the area included in the original United States.

1790 Census

Total Population: 3,929,214

White: 3,172,006

Black: 757,208

(other races not included in this census)

Where did Americans live? In 1790, the most populous states were:

- Virginia – 691,937
- Pennsylvania – 434,373
- North Carolina – 393,751

Only 5.1% of the population lived in urban areas (cities). The most populous cities were:

- New York, New York – 33,131
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – 28,522
- Boston, Massachusetts – 18,320



The Louisiana Purchase (1791-1810) (Slides 6-7)

Background: The Mississippi River was, and remains, an important route for trade, and in the 1700s the river was mostly controlled by Spain and France. In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson sent representatives to France to purchase the city of New Orleans, which would allow the United States to control more trade on the Mississippi River. Surprisingly, France agreed to sell not only New Orleans, but an additional 828,000 square miles of territory to the United States – an area that came to be known as the Louisiana Purchase.

Who were Americans? Immigration rates to the United States during this time period were low, as many European countries were at war. Additionally, in 1808 Congress banned the importation of slaves from outside the country. At the time of the Louisiana Purchase, there were about 60,000 people of French, Spanish, Mexican, or African descent living in this newly acquired area, and around half of these people were slaves. We do not know how many Native Americans were living within the Louisiana Purchase, but it included land populated by Plains Indian tribes.

1810 Census

Total Population: 7,239,881

White: 5,862,073

Black: 1,377,808

(other races not included in this census)

Where did Americans live? In 1810, the most populous states were:

- New York – 959,049
- Virginia – 877,683
- Pennsylvania – 810,091

7.3% of the population lived in urban areas (cities). The most populous cities were:

- New York, New York – 96,373
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – 53,722
- Baltimore, Maryland – 46,555



Western Expansion (1811-1850) (Slides 8-9)

Background: From the beginning of the United States, Americans had been moving outside the country's borders, settling on land claimed by Native Americans, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Mexico. This caused many conflicts, which were resolved in a variety of ways.

In 1821, Spain grew tired of trying to defend its claim to Florida and ceded it (gave it up) to the United States.

Oregon Country had been claimed by the United States and the United Kingdom, but as more American settlers moved into the region, the United Kingdom agreed on a border in 1846.

Texas declared its independence from Mexico in 1836, and was annexed by (added to) the United States in 1845. Mexico did not want to give up Texas, and disputes over the land led to the Mexican-American War. After the American victory, Mexico ceded its land north of the Rio Grande river in 1848, and about 70,000 Mexican residents of that area became Americans.

It's important to note that all the land included in these periods of expansion was the home of countless Native Americans. European and American settlers "claimed" these lands through wars and treaties. Native American tribes are recognized by the U.S. government as their own governments. At various times, the United States has set aside portions of land to be lived on and governed by members of a Native American tribe. These areas are called reservations, and there are currently 326 of them in the U.S. In many cases, a reservation was far from a tribe's traditional home or was poor land to live on, and many suffered during this time. Native Americans were not granted American citizenship until 1924, and many tribes continue today to fight for recognition and preservation of their lands.

Who were Americans? One driving factor for American expansion in this period was the booming immigration rate. Many Europeans were fleeing famine and poverty in their home countries, with the largest groups of immigrants during this time coming from Ireland, Germany, Britain, and France.

1850 Census

Total Population: 23,191,876

Non-Hispanic White: 19,553,068

Black: 3,638,808

Hispanic: 116,943

(other races not included in this census)



Where did Americans live? In 1850, the most populous states were:

- New York – 3,097,394
- Pennsylvania – 2,311,786
- Ohio – 1,980,329

15.4% of the population lived in urban areas (cities). The most populous cities were:

- New York, New York – 515,547
- Baltimore, Maryland – 169,054
- Boston, Massachusetts – 136,881

Worldwide Expansion (1851-1900) (Slides 10-11)

Background: In order to support international trade and compete with European empires, the United States became interested in acquiring land overseas. During this time of growth, the United States became a world power. All this expansion was controversial at the time, as some Americans did not believe the United States should be involved in what was happening in other countries, or that this expansion went against American values of liberty and democracy.

The United States purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867, interested in its potential for expanding trade with Asia.

Hawaii had been ruled by a monarchy since the 1700s, but this was overthrown with strong American support in 1893. In 1898, Hawaii was annexed by (added to) the United States.

The United States went to war with Spain in 1898, and after American victory, Spain ceded (gave up) Guam and Puerto Rico, and sold the Philippines for \$20 million in 1899. Guam and Puerto Rico remain U.S. territories, but the Philippines became an independent nation in 1946.

Americans had been using American Samoa for trade and to support Navy ships in the Pacific, and in 1900 the islands were formally annexed by (added to) the United States.

Who were Americans? As the United States expanded its influence and came to be seen as a land of opportunity, floods of immigrants arrived from all around the world. During the 1850s, the California Gold Rush attracted immigrants from China, Latin America, and Australia. Many Europeans continued to arrive from Germany, Scandinavia, and the British Isles, but an increasing number came from eastern



and southern European countries like Italy, Greece, Poland, and Russia. Japanese, Korean, and Filipino immigrants often went to Hawaii for work before making their way to the west coast. The decline of the Ottoman Empire also meant an increase in the number of immigrants from modern day Turkey, the Balkans, and Middle East.

1900 Census

Total Population: 75,994,575

Non-Hispanic White: 66,809,196

Black: 8,833,994

Hispanic: 503,189

American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut: 237,196

Asian and Pacific Islander: 114,189

Where did Americans live? In 1900, the most populous states were:

- New York – 7,268,894
- Pennsylvania – 6,302,115
- Illinois – 4,821,550

39.6% of the population lived in urban areas (cities). The most populous cities were:

- New York, New York – 3,437,202
- Chicago, Illinois – 1,698,575
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – 1,293,697

The United States Today (1901-Present) (Slides 12-13)

Background: Since 1900, the United States has not expanded much in terms of land and territory, but its influence has grown through trade, war, and American popular culture. This influence can be seen in things like the spread of democracy, the worldwide use of the internet, and even the popularity of Hollywood movies in other countries.

Since 1900, the United States has acquired two new territories:

- The U.S. Virgin Islands were purchased from Denmark in 1917
- The Northern Mariana Islands had been governed by Japan, but after World War II they were administered by the U.S. In 1978 they agreed to be formally governed by the United States.



Who are Americans? Immigrants continue coming to the United States for many reasons – opportunities for jobs, joining family members already living here, or seeking freedom and safety. Most immigrants now come from Asia and Latin America; the highest rates are from Mexico, China, India, the Philippines, Vietnam, El Salvador, Cuba, Korea, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Canada. As of the 2010 census, 13% of the population was born outside the United States, and people from all over the world come to live here.

2010 Census

Total Population: 308,745,538

Non-Hispanic White: 196,817,552

Black: 38,929,219

Hispanic: 50,477,594

American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut: 2,932,248

Asian and Pacific Islander: 15,214,265

Some other race: 19,107,368

Two or more races: 9,009,073

Where do Americans live? In 2010, the most populous states were:

- California – 37,253,956
- Texas – 25,145,561
- New York – 19,378,102

In 2010, 80.7% of the population lived in urban areas (cities). The most populous cities were:

- New York, New York – 8,175,133
- Los Angeles, California – 3,792,621
- Chicago, Illinois – 2,695,598



What is the United States of America? Teacher Guide



List 2 ways the United States is similar to when it was first formed.

Student answers will vary, but may include: laws are based on U.S. Constitution, capital is Washington, D.C., original states are still states, largest city is New York City, largest race population is non-Hispanic white, many immigrants come here to live, American values of democracy and personal liberty.

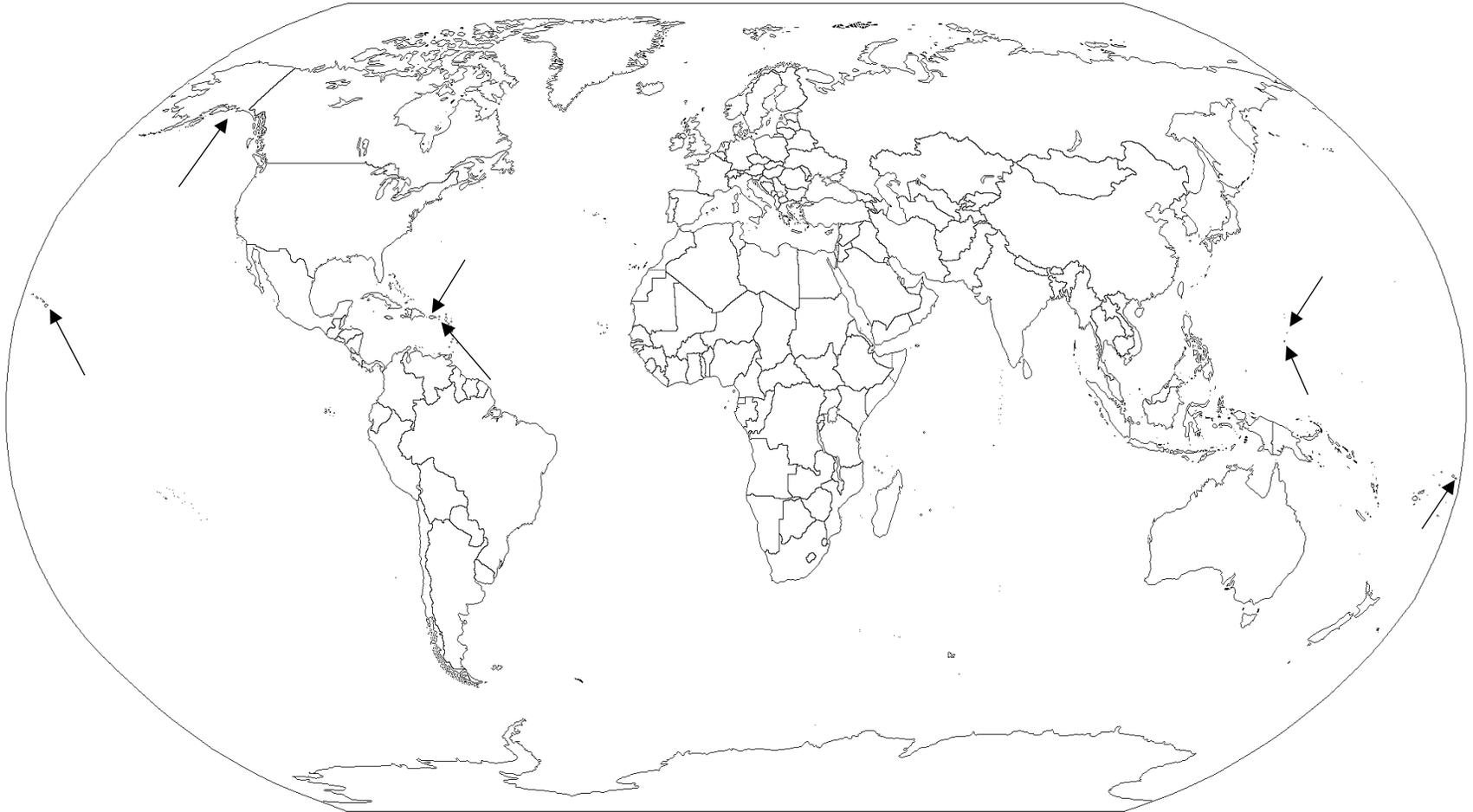
List 2 ways the United States has changed since it was first formed.

Student answers will vary, but may include: country is much larger in size, population is much larger and more varied, population is majority urban, immigrants largely come from Latin America and Southeast Asia.

Describe one way you hope the United States will change in the future.

Student answers will vary.

What is the United States of America? Teacher Guide





RUBRIC

Use this rubric to assess student performance on the What is America? Student Worksheet.

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Feedback
Student colored map sections to match American periods of expansion.					
Student correctly identified two ways the United States is similar to when it was first formed.					
Student correctly identified two ways the United States has changed since it first formed.					
	Total:				

1 = criteria not met; 2 = criteria partially met; 3 = criteria met; 4 = exceeds expectations



SOURCES

WHAT IS THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA? LESSON PLAN

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<https://mappinghistory.uoregon.edu/english/index.html>

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“The Foreign-Born Population in the United States.” U.S. Census Bureau. Accessed April 1, 2020. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/pdf/cspan_fb_slides.pdf

IMAGES

Slide 4: Copley, John Singleton. *The Copley Family*. Painting. 1776-1777. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art. <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.46098.html>

Slide 4: Stearns, Junius B. *Washington as a Farmer*. Painting. 1851. Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. <https://www.vmfa.museum/piction/6027262-8051761/>

Slide 6: Johnson, Joshua. *Family Group*. Painting. 1800. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art. <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.59883.html>

Slide 6: Paxson, Edgar S. *Lewis and Clark at Three Forks*. Painting. 1912. Montana Historical Society. <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/Capitol/Art/House-Lobby>

Slide 6: Sheppard, William L. *The First cotton-gin / drawn by William L. Sheppard*. Illustration. December 18, 1869. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/91784966/>

Slide 8: *The effects of the proclamation - freed Negroes coming into our lines at Newbern, North Carolina*. Illustration. 1863. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/95501775/>

Slide 8: Onderdonk, Robert Jenkins. *Fall of the Alamo*. Painting. 1903. Texas Governor’s Mansion. Available on Wikimedia. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:FalloftheAlamo.jpg>

Slide 8: Lindneux, Robert. *The Trail of Tears*. Painting. 1942. Woolaroc Museum. PBS. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h1567.html>

Slide 11: Levick, Edwin. *Immigrants on an Atlantic Liner*. Photograph. December 10, 1906. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/97501073/>



Slide 11: [RS 27464, Chin Quan Chan; Seattle District, Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files, Applications to Reenter, c. 1892-1900]: Chin Quan Chan Family, Chinese Exclusion Act Case File, circa 1911., Photograph. National Archives. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5585730>

Slide 11: *Immigrants, Ellis Island.* Photograph. Bain News Service. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2014681556/>

Slide 11: *The Hawaiian boys may have their bananas plentiful and fresh.* Photograph. 1902. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018647353/>

Slide 12: Sourgoose, Marilyn. *Kutturan Chamoru Performers (KCP) at the 2010 Pacific Islander Festival Association in San Diego.* Photograph. September 25, 2010. Originally posted to Flickr <https://flic.kr/p/8EekXT>, also available on Wikimedia https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chamorro_performers.jpg

Slide 13: Bauso, Emma. *Family Of Four Walking At The Street.* Photograph. April 30, 2019. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/family-of-four-walking-at-the-street-2253879/>

Slide 13: *Girls on White Red Jersey Playing Hand Game.* Photograph. April 27, 2007. Pixabay. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/girls-on-white-red-jersey-playing-hand-game-163465/>

Slide 13: *Boy in Green Sweater Writing on White Paper.* Photograph. March 23, 2020. CDC. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/boy-in-green-sweater-writing-on-white-paper-3992949/>

Slide 13: *Untitled.* Photograph. March 24, 2020. CDC. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/lunch-kids-student-cafeteria-3997717/>

Slide 13: Wilcox, Kat. *Four Men Sitting on Platform.* Photograph. September 16, 2017. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/four-men-sitting-on-platform-923657/>

Slide 14: Rains, Tim. *Denali, Fall.* Photograph. January 11, 2011. Denali National Park. National Park Service. <https://flic.kr/p/aS1CAB>

Slide 14: *Flag Change.* Photograph. Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine. National Park Service. <https://www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery-item.htm?pg=912388&id=26D9A904-1DD8-B71B-0B2D528AB4559EE8&gid=1C27E1E2-155D-451F-6739965D63726B10>

Slide 14: *Golden Gate Bridge.* Photograph. September 8, 2014. Pexels. <https://www.pexels.com/photo/america-architecture-bay-boat-208745/>

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