

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 664

SO 025 753

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TITLE NAEP Assessment in U.S. History, 1994.
INSTITUTION National Center for Education Statistics (ED),
Washington, DC.
REPORT NO NCES-95-809
PUB DATE Oct 95
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT Focus on NAEP; v1 n3 Oct 1995

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Comparative Testing;
*Educational Assessment; Elementary Secondary
Education; Grade 4; Grade 8; Grade 12; History
Instruction; *National Norms; Private Schools; Public
Schools; Social Studies; Student Evaluation; Test
Norms; *Test Results; *United States History
IDENTIFIERS *National Assessment of Educational Progress

ABSTRACT

This newsletter introduces the 1994 NAEP U.S. history assessment, which tested a representative sample of 22,000 4th-, 8th-, and 12th-grade students across the United States. This issue presents a context for understanding the U.S. history assessment. The newsletter is divided into the following sections: (1) "The NAEP U.S. History Framework"; (2) "Key Features"; (3) "Dimensions"; (4) "Historical Themes"; (5) "Major Periods"; and (6) "Ways of Knowing and Thinking." Sample questions for each grade level are provided.
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Focus on NAEP

Vol. 1, No. 3

October 1995

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1994 NAEP Assessment in U.S. History

In the spring of 1994 a representative sample of 22,000 4th-, 8th-, and 12th-grade students across the nation participated in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) analysis of the study of U.S. history. As with past assessments, the students assessed were presented with both background questions and cognitive tasks. The background questions asked students about the types of classroom instruction they had received. The cognitive sections included stimulus materials and associated tasks designed to assess students' historical knowledge and skills.

To help teachers, policy analysts, and others understand the assessment, the *Focus on NAEP* series presents a context for understanding the assessment. The framework that guides the assessment was developed by the National Assessment Governing Board in 1991-92 through a national consensus process involving experts in U.S. history, teachers, business representatives, policymakers, and others who brought national, state, and classroom perspectives to the discussion. Sample questions from the 1994 assessment are also presented. The NAEP U.S. history scores are reported on a scale that ranges from 0 to 500. Results are also reported according to U.S. history achievement levels—basic, proficient, and advanced.

The NAEP U.S. History Framework

The framework for the 1994 NAEP U.S. history assessment describes historical study as an exciting enterprise that introduces students to new (and sometimes conflicting) ideas. Historical study, according to the framework, involves investigating connections among diverse people and events, and

analyzing change and continuity over time. Further, history includes not just politics and diplomacy, but the full range of social and economic activities that influence the ways in which people live their lives.

Finally, the framework envisions the study of history as an active process of building understanding in addition to acquiring important factual knowledge.

With this orientation, the 1994 NAEP U.S. history assessment framework includes multiple-choice items and performance measures that require students to demonstrate historical reasoning skills such as judging evidence responsibly and critically, comprehending multiple causation, and formulating and defending generalizations about the past.

Key Features

Consistent with the framework, the NAEP assessment has the following characteristics:

- It includes tasks in which students are required to analyze primary and secondary source documents and provide their analyses via written responses.
- It utilizes assessment questions that require students to demonstrate knowledge of facts, events, and people, and display understanding, appreciation, and a broad view of history.
- It ensures at least 50 percent of test-taking time is devoted to open-ended or performance exercises.
- It makes use of a variety of stimulus materials that are appropriate to U.S. history: primary documents, graphs, political cartoons, charts, photographs, pictures, maps and timelines.

Dimensions

The 1994 U.S. history framework identifies three dimensions for the assessment: *Themes in U.S. History*, *Periods in U.S. History*, and *Ways of Knowing and Thinking About U.S. History*.

Historical Themes

The four historical themes identified in the framework (shown in table 1) are designed to organize the people, events, and ideas in U.S. history. The themes establish important emphases within the periods and ensure continuity from one era to another.

Table 1.—Historical themes in the 1994 NAEP U.S. history assessment

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. <i>Change and Continuity in American Democracy: Ideas, Institutions, Practices, and Controversies.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– What political, legal, philosophical, and religious traditions did Americans draw upon for their conceptions of democracy?– Why is the procedure allowing for compromise, continuity, and change considered fundamental to the American political system?– What core civic ideas (e.g., individual rights) have been forces for unity?– What are basic principles and assumptions of American constitutional government about the sources of political power and individual rights?– How has the cultural diversity shaped the nation's civic cultures, and political institutions and practices? <p>2. <i>The Gathering and Interactions of Peoples, Cultures, and Ideas.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– What racial, ethnic, religious and national groups formed this nation?– Why have so many immigrated to what became the United States and what have been the patterns and conditions of this immigration?– What common and diverse cultural traditions did Americans develop?– What have been the changing patterns of social organization in American society?– What have been the roles of men and women in American society? | <p>3. <i>Economic and Technological Changes and Their Relation to Society, Ideas, and the Environment.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– How did the United States develop from a rural, agricultural economy to an urban, industrialized superpower?– What ideas, values, and practices contributed to the development of the American capitalistic system?– How has the economic system adapted to changing conditions and changing demands?– How have geography and economic and technological developments influenced society and its values?– What have been major American advancements in science and technology? <p>4. <i>The Changing Role of America in the World.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– How have the geographical location, resources, ideals, and power of the United States influenced its role in the world?– How have other nations affected the United States?– Who played significant roles in international affairs?– What is the role of public opinion?– How has life inside the United States been affected by the nation's role in the world? |
|--|---|

Major Periods

Because history is concerned with the experiences of people over time, it is critical to establish a basic chronological structure for tracing, reconstructing, and connecting the stories of those experiences. Eight periods structure the 1994 U.S. history assessment. NAEP presents a series of questions that define the content and interpretative emphases for each period. The questions are designed to trace the four historical themes through each of the following periods:

Three Worlds and Their Meeting in the Americas
(Beginnings to 1607)

Colonization, Settlement, and Communities
(1607 to 1763)

The Revolution and the New Nation
(1763 to 1815)

Expansion and Reform
(1801 to 1861)

Crisis of the Union: Civil War and Reconstruction
(1850 to 1877)

The Development of Modern America
(1865 to 1920)

Modern America and the World Wars
(1914 to 1945)

Contemporary America
(1945 to present)

In addition to defining the content of the assessment, the 1994 NAEP U.S. history framework describes the specific cognitive skills to be measured. As mentioned earlier, this dimension is called Ways of Knowing and Thinking About History.

Ways of Knowing and Thinking

The study of U.S. history engages students' minds with the facts and complexities that give insight into the development of the nation. Studying history requires specialized ways of knowing and thinking, habits of mind, and cognitive processes that typify historians' approaches to the past. The 1994 assessment defines the cognitive domain along two dimensions: historical knowledge and perspective, and historical analysis and interpretation.

- *Historical knowledge and perspective* refers to students' ability to identify and define specific factual information, themes, movements, and general principles operating in U.S. history; to deduce

meaning; and to comprehend patterns. For example, students are asked to demonstrate their ability to

- name, recognize, list, identify, and give examples of people, places, events, concepts, and movements;
 - place specifics in a chronological sequence and construct and label historical periods;
 - define historical themes and give examples of the ways themes relate to specific factual information;
 - describe the past from the perspectives of a variety of men and women of the time;
 - summarize the contributions of individuals and groups to U.S. history and the meaning of historical sources (such as original documents, speeches, cartoons, artifacts, folklore, etc.) and
 - link people and sources to general themes.
- *Historical analysis and interpretation* refers to students' ability to distinguish value judgments in historical information, weigh evidence, synthesize information, apply knowledge, make judgments, formulate generalizations, and draw conclusions. More specifically, students are required to demonstrate their ability to
 - specify and explain cause-and-effect relationships and connect contemporary events to their origins in the past;
 - categorize information and develop strategies for organizing a large body of facts;
 - examine multiple causes of historical developments;
 - explain points of view, biases, and value statements in historical sources;
 - determine the significance of people, events, and historical sources;
 - weigh and judge different views of the past as advanced by historical figures, historians, and present-day commentators and public figures;
 - demonstrate that the interpretation and meaning of the past are open to change as new information and perspectives emerge;
 - develop sound generalizations and defend these generalizations with persuasive arguments;
 - make comparisons and recognize the limitations of generalizations; and
 - apply knowledge, draw conclusions, and support those conclusions with convincing evidence.

Sample Question 1 (Grade 4)

Your teacher has asked you to teach your classmates about ONE of these famous places where an important event in American history happened:

- the Alamo
- Pearl Harbor
- Gettysburg
- Roanoke Island

My famous place in American history is _____

Write down three facts about the place that you have chosen that will help you teach your classmates about the place.

- Fact 1 _____
- Fact 2 _____
- Fact 3 _____

The above question is an example of:

- Theme: The changing role of America in the world
- Period: Cross-chronological
- Skill: Historical analysis or interpretation
(19 percent correct, standard error 1.4)

Sample Question 2 (Grade 8)

- A. From the advertisement, (illustration 1) one can tell that in 1830 the United States
- *A. traded with both Europe and the Caribbean
 - B. relied primarily on European farming and industry to meet its basic needs
 - C. had Prohibition laws
 - D. was already using steamships in the Atlantic trade

The above question is an example of

- Theme: The changing role of America in the world
- Period: Expansion and reform (1801 to 1861)
- Skill: Historical analysis or interpretation

*Key (47 percent correct, standard error 1.3)

Illustration 1—Sample questions 2A and 2B refer to this grocery advertisement.

GROCERIES.

NEW GROCERIES.


THE Subscriber has just received a new supply of FRESH GROCERIES, which he offers for sale at reduced prices. Among which are the following articles:

Cogniac and Cider Brandy
Holland and American Gin
Jamaica, St. Croix and N. Rum
Port, Lisbon, Malaga and Currant

WINES

Wintergreen, Peppermint, & Aniseed Cordials

TEAS.



Hyson Young Hyson, and Souchong Teas

Loaf, Lump and Brown SUGAR
Coffee; Chocolate; Alspice, Pepper; Ginger
Nutmegs; Cinnamon; Cloves; Raisins
Peanuts, Almond, and Madeira Nuts
Oranges and Lemons; Figs
Wheat and Rye Flour
Fresh Bread; crackers and Cheese
Butter; Pork; Lard; Herrings
Dry and Pickled Codfish; Mackerel
Soap; Candles; Poland Starch; Copperas
Spanish and American cigars.
Allum; Spanish Indigo; Licorice
Winter strained Lamp Oil
Snuff; Tobacco; Writing Paper
Powder; St of all sizes
Shoe, scrubbing, and white wash Brushes
Mustard, warranted good
Brooms; good Molasses; Rice
Tamarinds, Tapers, &c. &c.
Candlewick and Cotton Batting

G. D. JENNINGS.

Norwalk. July 26. 1830.

Reference Library, Norwalk Museum, Norwalk, CT

- B. Which product in the advertisement was probably produced in the United States?
- A. cloves
 - *B. wheat flour
 - C. tamarinds
 - D. coffee

The above question is an example of

Theme: Economic and technological changes and their relation to society, ideas, and the environment
 Period: Expansion and reform (1801 to 1861)
 Skill: Historical knowledge and perspective
 *Key (66 percent correct, standard error 1.3)

Sample Question 3 (Grade 12)

Average Farm Size and Total Number of Farms		
Year	Farm Size	Number of Farms
1900	150 Acres	6,250,000
1980	425 Acres	2,225,000

Summarize the changes shown in the table above.

Explain how one invention or development helped cause the changes you have described.

The question is an example of

Theme: Economic and technological changes and their relation to society, ideas, and the environment
 Period: The development of modern America (1865 to 1920)
 Skill: Historical analysis and interpretation

(29 percent correct, standard error 1.5)

The results of the assessment will be reported in the fall of 1995 in The 1995 NAEP U.S. History Assessment: A First Look report and The U.S. History Report Card. The results in these publications will be interpreted in the context of background variables such as television watching, number of history courses taken, teacher qualifications, time spent on teaching specified skills and topics, and computer availability.

Note

The FOCUS ON NAEP series briefly summarizes information about the ongoing development and implementation of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The series is a product of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Gary W. Phillips, Associate Commissioner for Education Assessment. This issue was written by Sheida White and Sabar Akhtar from NCES. Readers are invited to comment by contacting the first author at NCES, Education Assessment Division, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20208-5653. To receive a copy of the U.S. history assessment framework, contact the National Assessment Governing Board at 202-357-6938. To order other NAEP publications, call Bob Clemons at 202-219-1690.

United States
Department of Education
Washington, DC 20208-5653

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