

Social Studies Spectacular!



Believe it or not, Social Studies is the second most failed high school equivalency test. How can we help our students be successful with the primary sources, graphic literacy, and other challenges this test presents? Find out in this interactive session!

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Today's Objectives

At the end of today's workshop, I will be able to:

- Explain skill and knowledge gaps students have in preparing for high school equivalency social studies tests
- Describe teaching methods to improve students' inference and critical thinking skills
- Discuss methods for improving students' social studies background knowledge



Social Studies Skill and Knowledge Gaps

Gap 1

Cite or identify specific evidence to support inferences or analyses of primary and secondary sources, attending to the precise details of explanations or descriptions of a process, event or concept.

Gap 2

Compare treatments of the same social studies topic in various primary and secondary sources, noting discrepancies between and among the sources.

Gap 3

Test questions assume test-takers have a basic understanding of the social studies subject matter and terminology used in the content topics and indicators. Civics/government and economics are students' weakest areas.

Developing Inference Skills

Inference allows readers to draw a conclusion that an author may not have directly said in a text. Inference is making an educated guess based on:

- a person's own experience
- information (evidence) from a text

To make an inference, read like a detective. Look for clues the author leaves behind in their writing to see beyond what they say. Our students make inferences all the time. For example, they can tell what emotions someone is feeling by seeing their body language and facial expressions. If they find a chewed-up shoe and their dog running away from them acting guilty, they can guess that Fido the dog is responsible.

Help students learn inference skills by teaching from concrete to abstract. Start with pictures, move to comics/cartoons, and finish with readings. Use shorter, simpler readings at first and then continue to longer, more complex ones.

Adapted from GED® Testing Service

From Video to Picture to Cartoon to Sentence to GED® Social Studies Material

Video

[Chevy Happy Grad \(Full Ad\) - Super Bowl XLVI Commercial 2012](#)

Picture – “Burst of Joy”



Political Cartoon



1. What historical event is being shown in the cartoon?
2. What does the snake represent?
3. Why is the snake cut into pieces?
4. What does "Join, or Die" mean?
5. How can we relate this cartoon to present day events?

Sentence

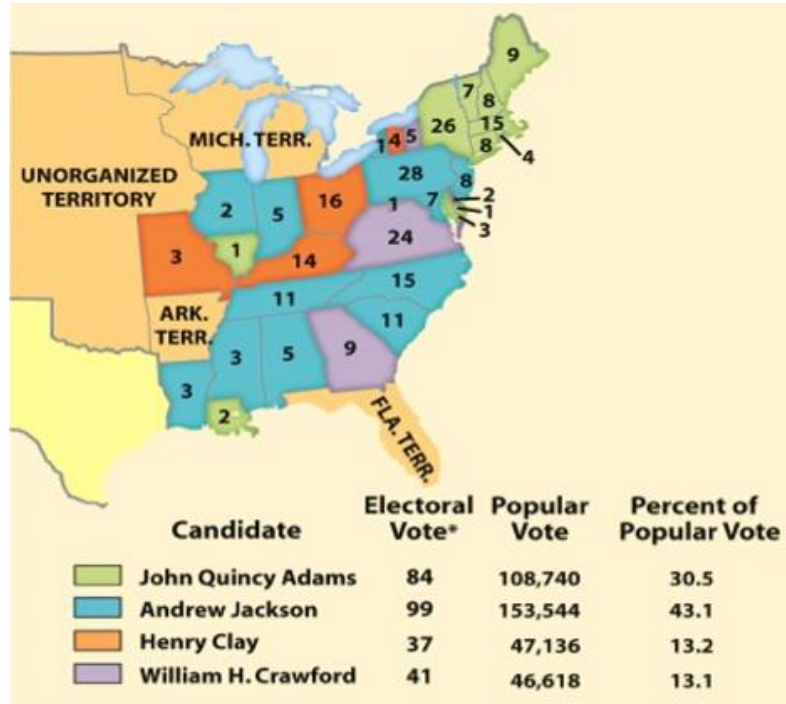
"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." - Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 4, 1933

1. What major event was happening to the US economy in 1933?
2. Why were the American people scared?
3. What was President Roosevelt doing to help improve people's attitudes about the economy?

GED® Social Studies Material

Questions 1 and 2 are based on the following information:

1824 Presidential Election Results



Note: In order to win election, a presidential candidate must have a majority of electoral votes. In the 1824 election, a majority was 131 electoral votes.

Twelfth Amendment to the United States Constitution

“The person having the greatest Number of votes for President, shall be the President, if such number be a majority of the whole number of Electors appointed; and if no person have such majority, then from the persons having the highest numbers not exceeding three on the list of those voted for as President, the House of Representatives shall choose immediately, by ballot, the President. But in choosing the President, the votes shall be taken by states, the representation from each state having one vote; a quorum for this purpose shall consist of a member or members from two-thirds of the states, and a majority of all the states shall be necessary to a choice.”

1. According to the Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution:
 - A. The Senate chooses the who the President will be in a tie election
 - B. The House of Representatives chooses the President if no candidate has an electoral vote majority
 - C. If no candidate receives a majority of electors, each state has 3 votes to choose the President
 - D. The candidate with the largest number of popular vote wins
2. Based on the data shown above, who should win the 1824 presidential election?
 - A. Andrew Jackson
 - B. John Quincy Adams
 - C. William H. Crawford
 - D. The House of Representatives will decide the winner

Was Edith Wilson the First Woman President?

On October 2, 1919 President Woodrow Wilson suffered a massive stroke. Those suffering from strokes of this type have symptoms described by doctors as: “Violent stomach upsets . . . insomnia, twitching of the face, difficulty in using a pen, headaches, great weakness, and paralysis of one side of the body . . . The victim often becomes unreasonable, apprehensive, irritable. He may become violently emotional – the most common characteristic is frequent crying spells.”

President Wilson showed all these symptoms over the next few months and needed at least 6 weeks of absolute rest. The President of the United States was now “a low functioning invalid.”

A question historians ask is whether Edith Wilson was the first Woman President of the United States from October 2, 1919 to the end of President Wilson’s term on March 4, 1921. To study this question, this lesson presents five documents. Some of the documents are diary entries and others are quoted from memoirs. There is also a picture and telegram.

First, consider how historians view diaries and memoirs. Most diaries were not intended to be published and were written the day of an event or soon after it happened. Memoirs are written years later and may use diaries or other sources to help the author remember events. A memoir writer’s opinion of events may be influenced by time passing and the desire to make themselves look good.

Talking about diaries and memoirs, the National Archives says, “First, the record of historical events reflects the personal, social, political, or economic points of view of the participants. Second, students bring to the sources their own biases, created by their own personal situations and the social environments in which they live. As students use these sources, they realize that history exists through interpretation--and tentative interpretation at that.”

First, read through each of these documents and look at the picture. Think about the question, Was Edith Wilson the first woman President of the United States? Show how the evidence in each document/picture backs this statement up or leads to another conclusion.

What are some other conclusions we could draw about Edith Wilson’s role in the White House from October 1919 to March 2021?

Document 1 – Edith Wilson (Wife of President Wilson) Memoirs

“Once my husband was out of immediate danger, the burning question was how Mr. Wilson might best serve the country, preserve his own life, and, if possible, recover. But recovery could not be hoped for [the doctors] said, unless the President were released from every disturbing problem during these days of Nature’s effort to repair the damage done.

“Then,” I said, “had he better not resign, let Mr. [Vice President] Marshall succeed to the Presidency, and he himself get that complete rest that is so vital to his life?” “No,” the Doctor said, “not if you feel equal to what I suggested. For Mr. Wilson to resign would have a bad effect on the country, and a serious effect on our patient. He has staked his life and made his promise to the world to do all in his power to get the Treaty ratified and make the League of Nations complete. If he resigns, the greatest incentive to recovery is gone; and as his mind is clear as crystal, he can still do more with even a maimed body than anyone else. He has the utmost confidence in you.

“So began my stewardship. I studied every paper, sent from the different Secretaries or Senators, and tried to digest and present in tabloid form the things that, despite my vigilance, had to go to the President. I, myself, never made a single decision regarding the disposition of public affairs. The only decision that was mine was what was important and what was not, and the very important decision of when to present matters to my husband.

“He asked thousands of questions, and insisted upon knowing everything, particularly about the Treaty. He would dictate notes to me to send to Senator Hitchcock, who was leading the fight for the Treaty in the Senate. Or he would tell me what Senators to send for, and what suggestions he had to make to them. This method of handling interviews was another suggestion of the doctors. . . .

“The physicians said that if I could convey the messages of Cabinet members and others to the President, he would escape the nervous drain audiences with these officials would entail. Even the necessary little courteous personal conversations that go with an official interview would consume the President’s strength. Upon all sides I was literally besieged by those who “must” see the President. But I carried out the directions of the doctors—and my heart was in it. Woodrow Wilson was first my beloved husband whose life I was trying to save, fighting with my back to the wall—after that he was the President of the United States.”

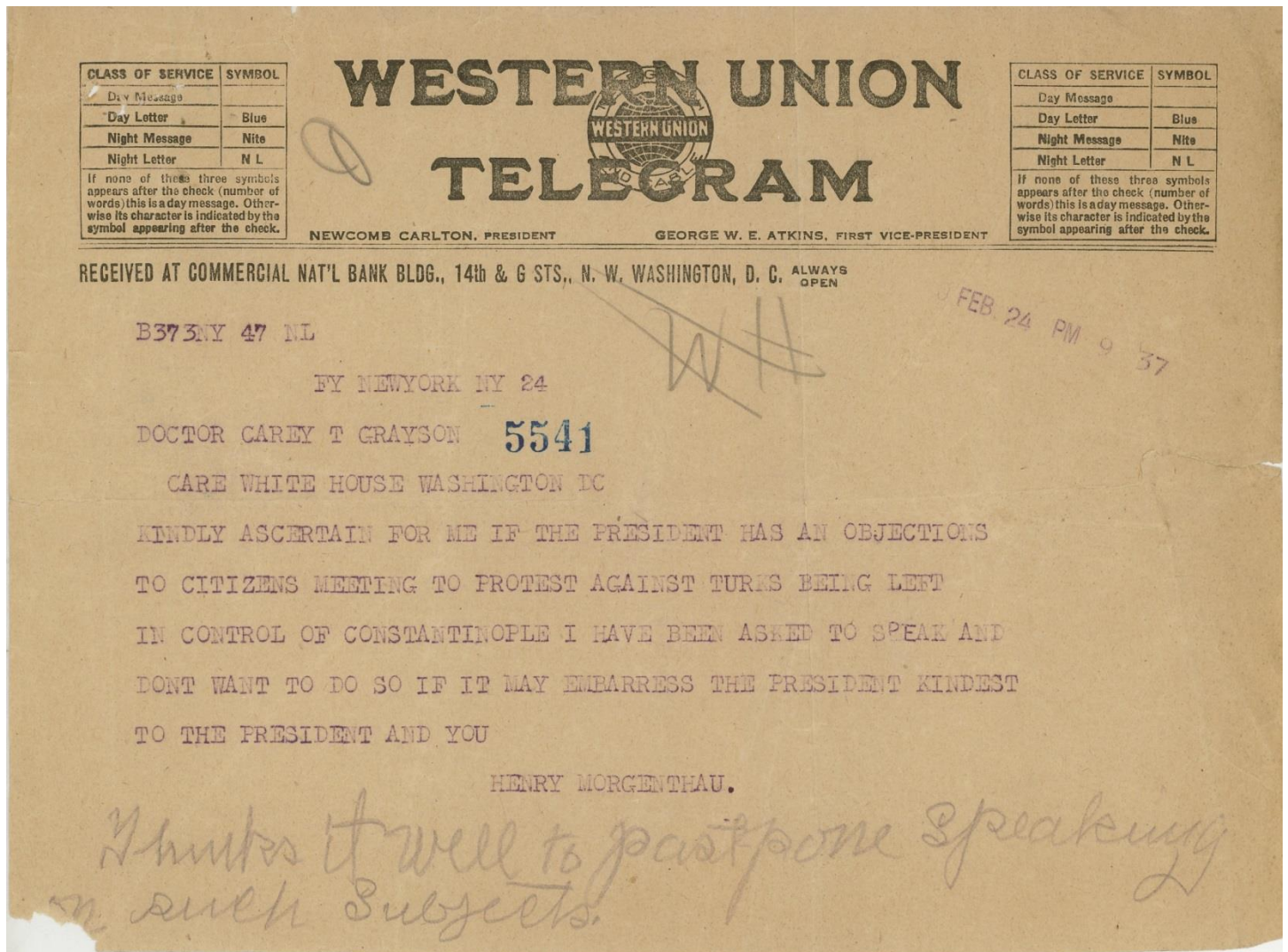
Source: *My Memoir*, Edith Wilson, 1939

Document 2 - Picture of President Wilson and his wife, June 1920



This picture was taken in June 1920 to show that the President was healthy and could still carry out the duties.

Document 3 – Telegram to White House Physician Dr. Cary Grayson, Feb 24, 1920



Source: Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library and Museum

This telegram is from Henry Morgenthau, the former U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire (present day Turkey). It is sent to Doctor Cary Grayson, the President’s personal doctor. It reads:

“Kindly ascertain for me if the President has an objection to citizens meeting to protest against Turks being left in control of Constantinople. I have been asked to speak and don’t want to do so if it may embarrass the President. Kindest to the President and you.”

The writing in pencil is from Edith Wilson, the President’s wife. It says, “Thinks it well to postpone speaking on such subjects.”

Dr. Grayson later telegraphed a reply that said:

“Have taken up matter referred to in your message. He [The President] believes it would be well to postpone speaking on subjects of this kind for the present.”

Document 4 - Diary Entry: Colonel Edward M. House, December 27, 1919

"[Secretary of State] Lansing believes the President is much sicker than the public is lead to believe. He does not think the President is writing any of the papers purporting to come from him. Lansing himself wrote the Thanksgiving Proclamation, and it came back unchanged with the President's signature, I understood him to say, on the top instead of at the end. The signature was almost illegible."

Colonel House had been a close advisor to President Wilson and was known as the best collector of Washington gossip.

Document 5 – Ike Hoover’s Statement from his Memoir

"If there were some papers requiring his attention, they would be read to him -- but only those that Mrs. Wilson thought should be read to him. Likewise, word of any decision the president had made would be passed back through the same channels."

Ike Hoover was the White House Chief Usher (head of household staff at White House). He had daily contact with the President and Mrs. Wilson during 1919 - 1921. This excerpt is from his memoir *Forty-Two (42) Years in The White House*, published in 1934.



Building Background Knowledge in Civics/Economics

Annenbergclassroom.org – This site has free classroom resources for teaching the Constitution including 65 videos on constitutional concepts and Supreme Court cases.

DocsTeach – This site from the National Archives has resources for teaching primary source documents.

Stanford History Education Group – This site has both history and civics content.

References

Faucette, D., Pittman, S., & Duran, P. (2022, April 12). *Addressing students' knowledge and skill gaps in science and social studies*. [Webinar]. COABE 2022.

About the Presenter

Steve Schmidt is an adult education consultant and moderates the LINCS Reading and Writing Community Group. He has worked in adult basic education for more than 30 years as an ABE, HSE, and AHS instructor, program director, instructional coach and professional developer. Steve is the author of *Writing for the GED® Test Book 4* and holds an Ed.S. in adult and developmental education. Steve served as a coach for the TSTM initiative, and he has delivered hundreds of workshops on a variety of topics at conferences across the country.

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