

Rochester Community Schools Big History Project Pilot Course

Introduction

In alignment with our district vision to create a 21st century classroom and to explore all options for RCS students, Rochester Community Schools is piloting an exciting new social studies program titled “**Big History Project**” that is co-sponsored by Bob Bain, Associate Professor of History and Education at the University of Michigan, and the Gates Foundation.

Course Overview

Big History is a year-long course about the significant questions and changes in the history of the world -- from the Big Bang theory (as taught in 8th grade Earth Science) to events in modern times. From the subatomic to the universal, from the local to the global, Big History teaches students to consider their world from many different perspectives and to look for patterns to make sense of how change occurred. For that reason we study historical change through the lenses of astronomy, chemistry, geology, philosophy, history, economics, literature and many other disciplines. Students learn to view what we know today not as absolute or finite, but as a stepping stone in a process of gaining knowledge and using it to understand our contemporary world. Instead of taking facts at face value, Big History teaches students to evaluate facts and claims by examining the evidence behind them. Big History encourages students to make connections between different academic disciplines in school, making them more meaningful as well as deepening their knowledge in each area. In Big History the aim is to inspire students to engage in their own learning at a higher level and to apply this knowledge base throughout their high school years. In addition, this course is aligned to the state adopted Literacy Common Core Standards.

Students are required to read and write critically, as the class is heavily focused on analyzing and interpreting primary and secondary sources, verbally and in writing. Students who are interested in taking the class should have:

- strong interest and academic performance in social studies and science
- strong written communication skills
- excellent study skills and conscientious with due dates
- mature, self-motivated attitude
- exemplary attendance
- consistent access to online resources

Assessment

To ensure students develop their understanding of the course content and themes, Big History has course-long learning outcomes. We are using these to design formative and summative assessments, as well as structure the instruction, activities, resources and technology. Each unit in Big History ends with an investigation problem, which is a project based assessment. Also, throughout the year three anonymous writing samples from the students will be submitted to the University of Michigan for them to analyze for data collection purposes on how to better the class and to ensure that the project is meeting the goals of creating better content area writers.

Schools in Southeast Michigan that have piloted Big History

- Northville High School
- Novi High School
- Ann Arbor Green Hills
- Walled Lake Central
- Walled Lake Northern
- Livonia Clarenceville

Will this course count as a World History credit that all freshmen receive?

Yes, this course will count as a World History credit. Essentially, this course takes the first unit of our traditional World History class and greatly expands on it. The pilot teams, along with the Big History team, have crafted the course to include case studies on the Michigan benchmarks that are not included in the Big History to seamlessly fit in with the curriculum and cover all of the benchmarks.

SEMESTER 1: PRE-HUMAN HISTORY

Narrative	Investigations
Unit 1. Intro to Big History	How do different scales affect your perspective on history?
Unit 2. The Big Bang	How has our view of the Universe changed over time?
Unit 3. Stars & Elements	How were the elements created and discovered?
Unit 4. Our solar system & earth	How does a new scientific theory like Plate Tectonics become accepted as fact?
Unit 5. Life	How do scientific concepts like evolution impact society?

SEMESTER 2: HUMAN HISTORY

Narrative	Investigations
Unit 6. Early Humans	How has language transformed humanity?
Unit 7. Agriculture and civilizations	Why did some agrarian civilizations prosper and others fail?
Unit 8. Expansions and Interconnection	What were the most significant consequences of oceanic travel and an interconnected world?
Unit 9. Acceleration	Does the Anthropocene qualify as a new era?
Unit 10. The future	What is the next major threshold?

More Information

For more information you can contact Bryan Lindstrom, Rochester Community Schools Social Studies Curriculum Consultant, at blindstrom@rochester.k12.mi.us or at (248) 726-3134. You can also view Big History online at:

Big History Website – www.bighistoryproject.com

Big History on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/bighistoryproject>

RCS Informational Video - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTsTyXTpUUM>

David Christian's TED Talk - http://www.ted.com/talks/david_christian_big_history.html