Teaching Periodization in Period 7

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Introduction

The AP U.S. History Curriculum Framework defines periodization in the following way:

Periodization

Historical thinking involves the ability to describe, analyze, evaluate, and construct models that historians use to organize history into discrete periods. To accomplish this periodization of history, historians identify turning points and recognize that the choice of specific dates gives a higher value to one narrative, region, or group than to other narratives, regions, or groups. How a historian defines historical periods depends on what the historian considers most significant – political, economic, social, cultural, or environmental factors. Changing periodization can change an historical narrative. Moreover, historical thinking involves being aware of how the circumstances and contexts of an historian’s work might shape his or her choices about periodization.

The following activities are designed to help students deepen their understanding of how framing the story of history into different time periods alters their understanding of that story. By questioning certain schemes of periodization common among historians, like the “Progressive Era,” and in popular culture, like the “Roaring Twenties,” students solidify their understanding of this important skill.

As students begin exploring period 7 in the 1890s, the first activity encourages them to analyze the continuity between period 6 and period 7 regarding one topic in common to both – the reform efforts that will ultimately be grouped together as the “Progressives.” Students will recognize how reforms from earlier movements were continued during this time, but also how the Progressives came to dominate the years 1890-1915 to the extent that many historians refer to them as the “Progressive Era.”

Another reason that Period 7 appears to be several periods wrapped into one is because many Americans tend to divide time in the 20th century by decades. In the second activity, students consider issues of periodization for one decade in particular: the 1920s. Students will consider whether this decade should be seen as distinct from the decades before and after, and if so, why.

In the last activity, students analyze foreign policy and conflicts from 1890 to 1945 to see both the continuities and key turning points during the period. In the process, they deepen their understanding of the difference between turning points and simply significant historical events.
Periodization and the Progressives: Gilded Age and Progressive Reformer Speed Dating

Procedure

1. Assign a reformer to each student in class.
   - Depending on the size of the class, students may complete the activity individually or in pairs.
   - The number of reformers will depend on the class size. Some examples of possible reformers to include are on the chart available at the end of this packet. This is not an exhaustive list and is only for illustrative purposes. You can add to or delete reformers depending on your class size.
   - Be sure that your final list includes reformers from before 1890 and after 1890 and includes a variety of kinds of reform, such as municipal reform, prohibition, labor, African American rights, women’s rights, etc.

2. Students will read about their assigned reformer in their textbook and, if available, primary documents.
   - They should note when the reformer was active, the reformer’s main philosophy or outlook and accomplishments achieved.
   - Noting when the reformer was active is an important part of the activity. Some reformers were active in both the Gilded Age and Progressive Eras. It makes the discussion of periodization richer if you include some of these people in the chart.
   - Students should be prepared to share what they have learned about the reformer in class and assume the role of their assigned reformers.

3. After students have learned about their reformer, hand out “The Reformers” blank chart to each student.
   - Using the reading from their textbook as a reference, each student should complete the portion of the chart for their assigned reformer.
   - Now they are ready to “meet” other reformers.
   - As students “meet” other reformers in a speed dating type fashion, they will complete the chart for the other reformers listed.

Guided Practice

In guided practice, the teacher closely monitors and directs the students as they practice a task for the first time independently.

Purpose

This activity serves as a way for students to compare and contrast Progressive reformers to their Gilded Age counterparts, in order to determine to what extent Progressive’s mark a significant change from previous reformers. It is a variation on a simple “jigsaw” activity.

Essential Question

To what extent did the Progressive reformers represent a new era in American history?

Objective

After this activity, students will be able to:

- Compare and contrast various Progressive Era and Gilded Age reformers.

- Analyze to what extent reformers should be categorized as either Gilded Age or Progressive.

- Evaluate whether the Progressive reformers marked a change in historical time periods.
4. To begin the “speed dating,” place chairs in the classroom in pairs or groups of four.

5. Have students sit and “meet” a reformer from the Progressive Era. The focus of this meeting is to determine if the reformers “match”—have a similar philosophy, goal, world view, etc. Students should take notes about what they learned in their chart. It is important to encourage students to interact as their reformers, rather than to merely give information to each other.

6. Allow approximately 4 minutes for each round of speed dating. Ring a bell or notify students after 4 minutes that they must move on to the next round. Continue with “speed dating” rounds until each student/reformer has met all of the reformers in the room.

7. Once all students have “met” the reformers, they should choose the three reformers that are their best match and the three they are least compatible with. They should also note the period in which those people were active.

8. Have a full class discussion on the following questions. The goal of this discussion is to help students see how these questions help to answer the essential question.

   - Who spans both periods? Do those people who span both periods complicate the ideas that the Progressive Era is distinct? Why or why not?
   - Who was most compatible with your reformer? What period was this person from? Have students compare compatibility. Do they agree? Be sure to root the discussion in evidence from their readings.
   - Did the Progressive reformers mark a change from the reformers of the Gilded Age? If so, how?
   - What problems did the Progressive reformers attempt to solve? Were any of these issues addressed during the Gilded Age? Which issues? Did any issues of the Progressive Era continue in the upcoming years?
   - How did the Progressive reformers meet their individual goals for change? How did their methods/beliefs differ than those of reformers from the Gilded Age? How were they the same?
Check for understanding:
Create stations around the room that say “Strongly Agree”, “Agree”, “Disagree”, “Strongly Disagree”. Have students take a position on the essential question by standing in each corner. Call on students standing in the “Strongly Agree” or “Strongly Disagree” corners to use evidence from their reformer chart to support their position and explain why. Call on those students in the “Agree” and “Disagree” corners to move to the strong area if they are persuaded by a student’s argument to do so and explain why using evidence. In order to check for understanding, it is important to call on students randomly, rather than taking volunteers. The goal is to ensure that all students can take a position on the essential question and support it with evidence.

Short answer question:
Should historians continue to treat the Progressive Era as its own period in American history? Provide and explain one piece of evidence that would support your position, and one piece of evidence that would refute it.
What’s in a name? Periodization and labels for the 1920s

Procedure:

Part I: Nicknames for the 1920s

Check in on students’ prior understandings about the 1920s. Have students share with the class or write on the board the answers to the following questions:

- What nicknames have you heard for the 1920s?
- What images do you think of when you think of the 1920s?

Wordle: The 1920s

In this part of the lesson, students will examine events, trends, ideas and significant historical figures from the 1920s. By completing this activity, students will be able to assess the 1920s as a distinct historical time period while addressing generalizations about the decade.

1. Assign students to read excerpts from different chapters of the book Only Yesterday by Frederick Lewis Allen. This book is readily available online here. There are 13 chapters that may be used to complete this exercise.

2. Before students read, point out the date of publication of the book (1931) and ask them to consider its value as a source.
   - Students should consider that it was written only a few years after the 1920s ended.
   - Ask students to consider the title: what might Allen mean when he calls the 1920s “Only Yesterday”?
   - Give students some background on Frederick Lewis Allen, and have them predict, based on this background information, what position he might take on the 1920s.
   - What are the drawbacks to reading a history of the 1920s written in 1931? What are the benefits?

3. To give students a purpose for their reading, ask them to read for the following:
   - What is Frederick Lewis Allen’s main point in the chapter?
   - What events, trends, ideas, and historical figures associated with the 1920s does Allen use to support his claim. Write down a list which you will use in the next activity.
Based on your prior knowledge of previous periods, to what extent are these events, trends, ideas, and historical figures distinct from earlier periods?

4. After reading their assigned chapter, have students work in chapter-alike groups to generate one comprehensive list of terms and ideas of the 1920s from their excerpt. This list will serve as evidence they will use to generate a word cloud.

5. Using a word cloud generator, like Wordle.net, have students create their own word cloud using the terms and ideas they shared in their groups from Frederick Lewis Allen’s book, *Only Yesterday*.

   Students should decide which words are most significant to Allen’s claim and make those words bigger in their Wordle. They do this by entering the word more times. Those words that appear the most will be largest, those which appear the least will be the smallest. For an explanation of how to create Wordless, go to the FAQ page of Wordle.net here. A sample Wordle is attached at the end of this packet.

   Their Wordle should visually demonstrate the generalization they will make in the activity below.

6. Students then organize and categorize the terms and ideas from their Wordles into 3 – 6 categories. A graphic organizer is provided as a resource in this module.

   They must use every word on their Wordle. Words and ideas from their Wordles may be used in more than one category.

   Students must give each of their categories a label. For example, categories may include “fads and trends”, or “the new woman”, or “technology.” This process helps students organize their thoughts and later is helpful in essay construction by providing a start to organizing their essay.

7. In order to fully understand the era of the 1920s and how the decade may or may not constitute a distinct historical time period, students will formulate their own generalizations about the era. The template for the generalizations is provided as a resource in this module.

   Students use information from their Wordle and categories to create 3-4 generalizations about the 1920s.

   For example, they may write “the 1920s was only new and modern for the middle and upper class,” “The 1920s was devoid of culture”, or “The 1920s was the era of the modern woman.”
To test their generalization, students must generate a list of evidence both for and against their generalization. This activity forces them to address why their generalization is still correct despite the evidence against it. This also helps them prepare to address counter-argument in their essays.

After developing the generalization, the group sends a delegate to the board to write their generalization.

8. Students must then use the words and ideas from the Wordle to support and refute the generalizations in a full-class discussion. The visualization of the terms they found most important for their generalization in their Wordle must also be defended. In this way, students are building historical evidence that can be used to support or refute an argument.

9. Ask students to share their generalizations with the whole class. By sharing the generalizations about the 1920s, misconceptions about the era may be addressed and corrected.

Questions for discussion:

- To what extent do the 1920s represent a distinct historical time period?
- What sets the 1920s apart from previous eras?

**Check for understanding:**

Have students write an “exit ticket” from class in response to the following question: Is the decade of the 1920s deserving of its own historical time period? Provide at least two pieces of evidence to support your claim and explain why.

**Extend the lesson:**

This activity can be further explored throughout the period by checking in with students as they learn about more specific perspectives on the 1920s.

For example, after learning more about the Harlem Renaissance, ask students: “Would you label the 1920s differently if you were an African American writer living in Harlem?”

After learning about the limits of the prosperity of the 1920s, ask students:

“Would you label the 1920s differently if you were a farmer in the South?”
Periodization and U.S. Foreign Policy: Human Timeline

Procedure:
Assign each student a foreign policy event that occurred between 1890 and 1945. Students should refer to their textbook or any other readings they received during the unit to review their event including its date, short summary of the event, and its significance. This part of the activity should be assigned as homework and can be checked during the Counterfactual activity below for accuracy.

Counterfactual / What if statements
Once students have reviewed about their assigned event, they are ready to use the event to build their understanding of what it means for something to be a turning point. Using a counterfactual activity, in which students consider how American foreign policy might have been different had the event not taken place, allows students to understand what makes an event a turning point. They will then use the evidence they developed in these group discussions during the human timeline activity below.

1. Begin by modeling the “what if” activity with two events (one arguably a turning point, another clearly not) with the entire class in order to help students understand the activity.

   It is important to emphasize that a turning point is more than merely an event that changes something. All of these events certainly led to something new. The question students need to explore in their “what if…” statement is “What would have happened to American foreign policy if this event hadn’t happened?”

   For example, the sinking of the Maine in Havana harbor led to U.S. entry into the Spanish American War and ultimately to U.S. annexation and intervention in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. If the Maine had not sunk, would the U.S. have entered the war? If the U.S. had not entered the war, would this expansion have occurred? These are key points to discuss in addressing the question of a turning point.

   In contrast, encourage students to consider the state of Hawaii at the time of the overthrow of the Queen in 1892. Was this a significant change in U.S. foreign policy in the region? What resulted from the overthrow? If this overthrow had not happened, would American foreign policy have significantly changed?

Summative Assessment
Long Essay Prompt:
To what extent did the U.S. entry into World War II in 1941 represent a turning point in U.S. foreign policy from previous years?
2. Once you have finished modeling the question for students, put them into groups of 3 to 4 events that happened near each other in time. For each of these events, the group develops a “what if…” scenario.

For example, for period 7, one group might include the building of the Panama Canal, the Roosevelt Corollary, Wilson’s landing of troops at Vera Cruz, and Pershing’s expedition to hunt down Pancho Villa.

3. Students then use these “what ifs…” to check in on whether their event was a turning point or not. They must present at least two pieces of evidence about the results of their event to support their argument. This will prepare them for the discussion that follows.

Encourage students to recognize, as they discuss their “what ifs,” that every event cannot be a major turning point. What is their criterion for a significant change in U.S. foreign policy? Be prepared to defend this with evidence.

Creating the timeline
1. Have students line up around the classroom to form a “human timeline.” Students should place themselves in chronological order from the first event in 1890 to the last event in 1945.

2. To begin the human timeline discussion, ask each student, beginning with the first event, to explain their assigned event and its significance. All students should be directed to listen to each student present and consider how the student’s argument relates to their own argument for their event.

3. Once each student has presented their event, ask students to step forward from the timeline if they believe their event marked a turning point in American foreign policy.

4. Call on each student who steps forward to explain why their event marks a turning point.

Some questions to help students making the claim may include:

- What significant change occurred as the result of your event?
- How did your event alter the course of American history?
- Why was your event important for causing that change?
- What evidence do you have to support that claim?

5. Class members should challenge or refute these claims by using historical evidence.

Some questions to help students challenging claims may include:
Consider the student’s claim. What evidence do you have that American foreign policy stayed the same after this event?

Do you agree that (what student said about the event) has ended? Do you have evidence that it continued?

Do you agree that (what student said about the event) began? Do you have evidence that it began later?

If this event is a turning point, what does that do to the argument that (fill in an event that someone else already discussed) was a turning point? Can they both be turning points?

Once all of the turning points are discussed, have students return to their seats for a whole class discussion.

6. Lead a class discussion about American foreign policy and how the time period of 1890 to 1945 can be viewed as a cohesive historical time period with significant turning points. Some points to address might include:

- How did American foreign policy in the era 1890 to 1945 represent a continuity?
- What significant turning points marked a change in American foreign policy in 1890 to 1945?

**Check for understanding:**

Using examples from the timeline list of events, have students vote if they believe it is a turning point or merely a significant event. Call on students to justify their answer. In order to effectively check for understanding, do not take volunteers but instead call on students randomly.