

Social Studies Key Themes: Grade 6

To be productive members of society, students must be critical consumers of information they read, hear, and observe and communicate effectively about their ideas. They need to gain knowledge from a wide array of sources and examine and evaluate that information to develop and express an informed opinion, using information gained from the sources and their background knowledge. Students must also make connections between what they learn about the past and the present to understand how and why events happen and people act in certain ways.

Thus, students must:

- Build an understanding of social studies content in the grade-level expectations (GLEs)
 - Examine authentic sources to build knowledge of social studies content
 - Explore meaningful questions about sources and content to build understanding
- Develop and express claims that demonstrate their understanding of content
 - Make connections among ideas, people, and events across time and place
 - Express understanding of content using evidence from authentic sources and outside knowledge

This document has two sections.

1. **Key Themes:** There are seven key themes across all grades. These describe the connections students must make to build and express their understanding of content. They progress from kindergarten to grade 12, as students build a more sophisticated understanding of content. The descriptions in this document are for grade 6.
2. **Sample Assessment Item:** This section compares an old end-of-year assessment item to a new item for grade 6. The new assessment items require students to make connections represented by the key themes to develop and express claims that demonstrate their understanding of GLE content.



Physical and Human Systems

Students in grade 6 use latitude and longitude to determine location, climate zones, and time zones. They compare and contrast physical and political boundaries on maps and globes to describe how physical features, climate, and accessibility to outsiders and resources affected the development of civilizations, empires, and kingdoms. They also explain how human achievements and systems (i.e., agriculture and irrigation, political boundaries, development of permanent settlements, and trade) impact the environment, including the depletion of resources.



Migration and Settlement

Students in grade 6 understand that physical features, climate, famine, war, trade, and slavery affected the movement and settlement of people throughout world history. Students use maps, charts, and graphs to determine world migrations patterns and population trends and then explain the historical and social impact of the cultural diffusion associated with these migration patterns.



Economics and Trade

Students in grade 6 understand how the progression from barter to monetary exchange, job specialization, and trade and taxation influenced economic growth in the ancient world and led to the development of advanced societies. They describe economic achievements of early humans and ancient river civilizations and identify how economic motivations (i.e., trade and taxation of salt, gold, spices, and silk and access to fertile land) influenced territorial conquests and also led to the success of West African kingdoms and Chinese dynasties. They also describe how feudalism, trade, and commerce led to the growth of towns and cities during the Middle Ages.



Politics and Governance

Students in grade 6 compare the different types of government in history (i.e., pharaoh, empire, dynasty, monarchy, democracy, republic, and feudalism) and their impact on the success of early civilizations, empires, and kingdoms. They also describe the essential elements of the Greek city-state and the Roman Republic and explain how each influenced the development of democracy.



Society and Culture

Students in grade 6 describe the origins of ideas and beliefs, including the major world religions, and explain how they spread to new areas and developed through trade in West African kingdoms and Chinese dynasties and Alexander the Great's conquests. They also describe the cultural characteristics and achievements of the ancient river civilizations, Athens and Sparta, and Roman civilization and their influence on later cultures. Lastly, students explain the significance and influences of feudalism and the Crusades on culture in the Middle Ages and then examine how people and ideas transformed European culture during the Renaissance.



Conflict and Compromise

Students in grade 6 understand that world conflict and territorial conquests played a crucial role in the development of nations and the spread of cultures, ideas, and religions. They examine the causes and effects of various world conflicts (i.e., Alexander the Great's conquests, the expansion of the Roman Empire, and the Crusades) and explain whether defeat or diplomacy provided the resolution to each.

Continuity and Change

Students in grade 6 understand how social, cultural, political, and economic changes led to the development and advancement of various civilizations, empires, and kingdoms throughout world history. They explain the impact of innovations (i.e., the development of permanent settlements, irrigation, agricultural improvements and tool development, job specialization, transportation, leisure time, luxury items/art/books, education, machines, and infrastructure) on the development of ancient river civilizations, West African kingdoms, Chinese dynasties, and Greek and Roman civilizations. Students also examine the evolution of world religions as they encountered new cultures and ideas.

Old Assessment Item

Which feature was a necessity for early settlements?

- A. a warm climate
- B. nearby water sources**
- C. access to metals such as iron
- D. large, flat areas for constructing houses

This item assesses GLE 24: Explain how geographical features influenced development of early civilizations (e.g., domestication, cultivation, specialization).

Key Concept

Natural resources important to the development of agriculture in early civilizations—*e.g., availability of fresh water supply, rich soil, temperate climate*

This item asks students to identify that water is an important feature for civilizations. To prepare for this assessment in the classroom, teachers would need to cover the characteristics of civilizations and help students recall details about the needs of early settlements.

New Assessment Item

Grade 6 Task Set: [Catalhoyuk](#)

This set assesses GLE 6.2.2: Examine how the achievements of early humans led to the development of civilization; **GLE 6.4.3:** Explain the connection between physical geography and its influence on the development of civilization.

Key Themes

- **Physical and Human Systems:** Students describe how physical features and accessibility to resources affected the development of ancient civilizations.
- **Migration and Settlement:** Students understand that physical features and climate affected the settlement of people throughout world history.
- **Continuity and Change:** Students understand how social, cultural, political, and economic changes led to the development and advancement of various civilizations. They explain the impact of innovations on the development of ancient civilizations.

This task set asks students to examine a map, a book excerpt, and a series of photographs about Catalhoyuk to demonstrate understanding of early civilizations. To prepare for this assessment in the classroom, students would need to examine sources about early civilizations to build their understanding of how civilizations developed through human achievements and the impact of physical geography on their development.