

# Teaching History Without Identity Politics

“Our children need to learn more history and civics!” is a regular rallying cry for those who want to see America returned to its moral and common sense roots.

That a greater emphasis on history and civics is needed is evident from [The Nation's Report Card](#), which finds only 24 percent of American high school seniors proficient in civics, while only 12 percent of them are proficient in American history.

These earnest requests and dire statistics have been met by recent bipartisan efforts to beef up the curriculum in these areas in the form of “The Civics Secures Democracy Act,” a bill sponsored by Sens. John Cornyn (R-TX) and Chris Coons (D-DE) among others.

“The bill is part of an extraordinary push by academics, politicians, foundations, and research centers to re-emphasize civics in elementary and secondary education,” Mark Bauerlein writes in a piece for [City Journal](#).

Only things might not be as rosy as they seem. “Organizers present the Roadmap as bipartisan and balanced, but if you scan the details, you’ll find it relentlessly focuses on group identity, access and exclusion, agency and dissent, and diversity,” Bauerlein explains. While such reforms may be well-meaning, the fact is that “progressives will outnumber conservatives 50 to 1” when the new curriculum is implemented.

In other words, while one may start out with the goal of teaching about George Washington, John Adams, and other figures in Western civilization, such efforts will soon be replaced by seeing everything from the supposedly repressed perspectives of minorities, women, or sexually divergent

individuals.

Indeed, efforts at such politically correct changes are evident even at the state level, an example of which is seen in the state of Minnesota, where [updated social studies standards](#) emphasize “[identity politics](#)” more than key historical events.

But are these popular, politically correct, or “woke” ways of teaching history true to history? What exactly is the goal of history education?

Ben Franklin offered some insights on this goal in his 1749 pamphlet “[Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania](#).” History, Franklin wrote should “be made a constant Part of [students’] Reading” because it provides a platform for all kinds of subjects. Franklin lists geography, ancient customs, and government as some of these subjects. But he also believes that history is a good platform on which to present the all-important issues of religion and morality.

History shows “the Advantages of Temperance, Order, Frugality, Industry, Perseverance, &c. &c.,” writes Franklin. “Indeed the general natural Tendency of Reading good History, must be, to fix in the Minds of Youth deep Impressions of the Beauty and Usefulness of Virtue of all Kinds, Publick Spirit, Fortitude, &c.”

Clearly these aren’t the types of virtues taught in the present and future “woke” history courses. So how do parents circumvent this progressive teaching of history?

Some parents may choose to homeschool, selecting their own history curriculum. A recent report from the U.S. Census Bureau finds that the share of households engaged in homeschooling has increased to over [11 percent in the last year](#). But such a path isn’t an option for every family. Thus, be it in traditional institutional schooling or education at home, I encourage parents to instill a love of history in

their children by reading fiction books. The [G. A. Henty books](#) are an excellent place to start, as are the following selections from *Intellectual Takeout's* Great Books List.

## Kindergarten to Third Grade

[The Courage of Sarah Noble](#), Alice Dalgliesh  
[Little House in the Big Woods](#), Laura Ingalls Wilder  
[Little House on the Prairie](#), Laura Ingalls Wilder  
[D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths](#), Edgar and Ingri D'Aulaire  
[Black Ships Before Troy](#), Rosemary Sutcliff

## Fourth to Sixth Grade

[The Witch of Blackbird Pond](#), Elizabeth George Speare  
[Carry on Mr. Bowditch](#), Jean Lee Latham  
[Across Five Aprils](#), Irene Hunt  
[Amos Fortune](#), Elizabeth Yates  
[Caddie Woodlawn](#), Carol Ryrie Brink

## Seventh to Eighth Grade

[The Adventures of Tom Sawyer](#), Mark Twain  
[Little Women](#), Louisa May Alcott  
[Johnny Tremain](#), Esther Forbes  
[A Tale of Two Cities](#), Charles Dickens  
[The Hiding Place](#), Corrie ten Boom

## Ninth Grade

[Julius Caesar](#), William Shakespeare  
[The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn](#), Mark Twain  
[The Red Badge of Courage](#), Stephen Crane  
[Uncle Tom's Cabin](#), Harriet Beecher Stowe  
[To Kill a Mockingbird](#), Harper Lee

Reading classical historic fiction like the above not only

introduces children to a more traditional view of history, but it also makes the past come alive and seem less like an endless march of monotonous dates and names. The children who learn history as an intriguing story will come to love the past and mine it for the lessons it holds for us today. The child who approaches history in such a way will also all the more quickly recognize the dangerous paths we are heading down with our fixation on diversity and identity.

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