

Philosophy Statement

Any educational tool is obviously affected by the philosophies of the author. In order to help you fit this tool to your own unique goals, let us tell you at the outset "where we're coming from."

As Christians, we are personally convinced that history is "His story"—an unfolding of God's plan for man. We treat this as a natural and self-evident aspect of history. We sometimes highlight points of spiritual or moral significance, usually in the "Thinking More" discussion questions. These are presented in an open-ended way meant to facilitate conversation between you and your students. We will not try to dictate any one "right" answer, but trust you to fill in what you desire. If you do not desire to address such issues, there are many other options from which to choose.

Suggestions for Using This Curriculum

Discover Texas is designed to cover history, geography, and government and is adaptable for multi-level groups of students, especially in 4th through 9th grade students. Younger students may need help with the reading. (A vocabulary list is provided for each volume.) Older students will want to concentrate on some of the more challenging activities detailed in each module. *Discover Texas* is also ideally suited for use with a larger group such as a co-op class. Click [here](#) for details.

Discover Texas divides Texas history into ten chronological eras in its ten volumes. We suggest that you plan to cover one volume each month if you teach a traditional school year, August through May. Each volume is further divided into weekly chapters--thirty-one in all. The volumes that would be most likely to fall during short months are somewhat less extensive. Feel free, though, to customize the material. If you find that your students get really involved in one particular unit, by all means, tarry there and catch up later! It is also possible to cover the material in a shorter period such as a single semester or 10-week enrichment class. Simply divide your time using the ten eras and thirty-one chapters as a guide. Because each volume is self-contained, it is also possible to use them independently over a longer period or as you cover those eras in other history programs.

Each of the ten volumes presents an illustrated narrative overview on CD and provides links to high-quality related websites. At the end of each volume you will find opportunities for in-depth study of related topics and biographies (**Learning More**), suggested unit study activities (**Doing More**), and critical thinking questions to develop understanding and character (**Thinking More**). The weekly chapters in each volume provide articles that can easily be read in one or two sittings to introduce the material. Remaining class time can be used to read, explore the websites, complete projects, write essays, make maps...anything that will make the material real and memorable for your students.

We suggest that you preview each volume to familiarize yourself with the supplemental materials, especially in the **Teacher Tips** section. Some of the activities require advance planning, as would any field trips you might wish to schedule using the **Field Trip** guide. In addition, your local library may be able to reserve copies of related reading selections or locate them through the inter-library loan program if you will call them 1-3 weeks in advance. Though we have taken great care to preview materials for appropriateness, tastes vary and websites change!

Here are some of the many ways you might adapt this curriculum to fit your students' needs:

Discovering Texas All Year at Home-

Discover Texas was designed to be flexible for many situations, but it's an excellent fit for the family with students in several grades who would like to study Texas history together for an entire year—families like the Yarboroughs.

Mom, Alice Yarborough, bought *Discover Texas* because she liked how the curriculum makes lesson planning easy. Ten volumes let her family dive into a different chronological era each month, August through May, while weekly chapters in each volume keep them on schedule, allowing natural breaks for holidays. All Alice has to do is skim the Teacher Tips section a week or two before she introduces a new volume. Last month, she noticed that one of the suggested field trips is not too far away. The web link told her all she needed to plan a trip. Alice reviewed the reading list and found books that were sure hits with Adam (7th grade), Amy (5th grade), and Amanda (2nd grade). A quick call to the library put them on reserve. They didn't have a copy of the book she wanted for Amy, but through interlibrary loan it arrived in time.

The first Monday of the month, Alice groups her clan around the computer so everyone can see the illustrations as she reads the articles in Chapter 1. The reading is interesting and easy enough that Adam could handle it in an hour or less, but Amanda isn't "quite there yet" for independent reading. Alice found a vocabulary list in the Teacher Tips section to help with some of the new or foreign terms. She also found maps to print so the children could label them as she read.

Adam goes back through the disk on Tuesday to explore the links embedded in the text. He finds several websites that look interesting and shares what he learned over supper. He also finds a *Doing More* activity that looks like fun. He'll be working on a model this month. Amy finds a website that includes a matching game. She plays with it for quite some time, to her mother's amusement. Amy doesn't think of the game as a quiz, but she's learning just the same.

Wednesday is library day. Adam loves his biography. The actress in the family, Amy plans to make a costume and give a book report as if she were the title character of her story.

On Thursday, Amy and Amanda help Mom make a recipe they found in the Doing More section. The dish isn't bad, but they decide they're thankful for modern appliances and the wide variety of foods we enjoy now from the grocery store.

By the end of the month, everyone's had a great time discovering Texas history in their own way. Adam really enjoyed being outdoors on the field trip, scouring every inch of the grounds. Amy wandered through the exhibits and peppered the curator with questions. Amanda enjoyed being along for the adventure, and she understood more than Alice imagined. Everyone learned from each other's projects and book reports. Amanda says she wants to *Discover Texas* again.

...and she can. Alice signed up to receive the *Discover Texas* newsletter to keep up with new ideas and improvements to the program. She's glad that *Discover Texas* comes with a guaranteed replacement policy. When it's time to study Texas history again with Amanda, she can get the latest release of the curriculum, no questions asked.

Discovering Texas In a Single Semester-

Discover Texas is adaptable to a wide range of students. If used properly, it can even provide high school credit—for students like Samantha Stevens.

Sam's family moved to Texas after 8th grade. Her parents would like Samantha to study the same courses her peers have, and they're all eager to learn more about their new home. High school courses will go into full swing this year, though, so the Stephens family decides to discover Texas in a single semester. That won't be a problem if they plan to cover two volumes each month, August-December or January-May.

The colorfully illustrated articles in the chapters on disk are easy reading for a computer whiz like Samantha. She usually prefers to do all her reading in the first week so she can "see the big picture." To help her learn to read for the main points, Mrs. Stephens adapts the suggested test questions from the Teacher Tips section as a reading guide. Sam fills in the information as she comes to it in her reading then, after a quick review, she runs off a second copy to test her memory. Since she's seen the material before, she is gaining confidence to overcome her test anxiety. The vocabulary matching sheets are fun, too, building word skills painlessly.

As time permits, Sam enjoys exploring the embedded web links. So many great sites! Discovery learning adds depth to her understanding, and she picks up lots of the details and interesting trivia that make history fun and memorable.

Since Samantha will be earning a half high school credit, Mrs. Stephens encourages her to select from the upper level outside reading suggestions. She was afraid they might not have time to spare for the unit study activities, but some were just too good to pass up. By choosing carefully, they've been able to make time for one in each volume.

The Stephens's favorite part of the program is the Thinking More section. Like most teenagers, Samantha loves to debate, and since she tends to be an audio learner conversations springing from these questions give her an opportunity to shine—and they help her parents gauge how well she understands why these events were important, how they impact us today, and how they fit with the family's Christian worldview.

Sam signed up to receive new posts to the *News Around Texas* blog from the *Discover Texas* website. That's how they learned about a great exhibit in their area, and the family is making plans to go during the holiday break so they can discover Texas firsthand!

Discovering Texas Over Several Summers-

Because each volume of *Discover Texas* is self-contained, it is possible to study the eras of Texas history independently—and that's a good thing for families like the Smiths. They use a packaged curriculum program (like Sonlight or ABeka) that does not specifically address state history. The Smiths would like to include Texas history, but where would they add it?

The individual volumes of *Discover Texas* allow Mrs. Smith to access each era of Texas history as they come to it in their study of World or American history. When her children studied European explorers, they spent a day or two reading about the exploration of Texas by some of those same men. When they studied the industrial revolution, they also studied how ranches, cotton, and oil tamed the western plains of Texas.

She noticed that some of the books on the *Discover Texas* reading lists were on her curriculum program's list, too. And the Thinking More questions that delved

into the significance of a certain period of Texas history often pertained to their larger study as well.

The thing she most regretted was that the pace of their packaged program did not allow time during the year for the wonderful unit studies and field trips described in the *Discover Texas* curriculum. She could see that they really are the meat of the program. It wasn't long before she was planning ways to use holidays and breaks to work a few of those in.

By summer, her children were ready for a change of pace. They opened the volumes of *Discover Texas* they'd skimmed during the year, and after a brief review they dove in to the arts and crafts in the unit studies. Slower days gave them plenty of time for fieldtrips, and the Smiths were glad that the close proximity of so many sites was easy on the budget. We really do live in the middle of a fieldtrip waiting to happen!

It took three or four summers to make it through all ten volumes of *Discover Texas*, but Mrs. Smith would say that their study of Texas history enhanced their other studies because it brought history to where her family lives.

Discovering Texas In a Co-op Class-

Discovering Texas is lots of fun in a group setting, whether you get a few families together for unit study days or teach in a co-op like Carla Cooper. Bulk discounts let her place an order for each student in her class at a big savings.

Carla's co-op group meets each Friday, September through May, so she plans to double up on the last two volumes.

Before the first class of the month, each student receives a reading guide. Carla uses the suggested test questions in the Teacher Tips section, saves the teacher's master copy to her desktop with the new heading, and removes the answers from the key. At the top she creates a header to remind students to write their names on their papers, and a footer reads "My project for this month will be _____." When the students come to class, they have read the material at home and are ready to discuss the new volume. It's a big class, so Carla decides they will need two class days at the end of the month to show and tell about their projects.

In class the first Friday, they talk about the major events of that period of history. Carla uses the Thinking More questions to help the students see why history matters. A few visual aids keep the discussions varied and lively. For example, when they studied Indian cultures, Carla made pemmican for the children to taste while they talked. A costumed docent from one of their town's historic homes came to talk to the students for the Civil War volume, and one of the students had a grandfather who worked cattle. Carla plans to see if he'll be their guest speaker for the industrialization unit on Ranches, Cotton, and Oil.

The second Friday of the month is reserved for group activities. Sometimes Carla reads aloud from one of the suggested books, or she might choose one of the Doing More activities that no student selected. When they studied the Civil War, she had the students put their shoes on the wrong feet and march around the campus to see how it might have felt to march across several states in the days when left and right shoes were exactly the same. For the Statehood and Constitution volume, she divided the class into a House and a Senate. They held a mock Congress so the students could see how a bill becomes law. (That week things got a little loud!)

Everyone loves the show-and-tell days on the last two Fridays, and the children learn so much from each other's projects and book reports. Occasionally someone will ask to do a project that's not listed in the curriculum, and that's okay too. Carla's glad they're making the study their own.

This year the Texas Congress is in session, and the Texas Home School Coalition is hosting Capitol Days. Carla's students, with their parents and siblings, will caravan to Austin. The students held a fund-raiser and earned enough to cover their entry to the Bob Bullock Story of Texas Museum while they're there. It will be a grand finale to their year of discovery!

More About Discovering Texas with a Co-op Class

Because it was designed to be used with several students of varying ages and interests, Discover Texas is a wonderful resource to use with a co-op class! We give generous group discounts (up to 60%) for large orders!

If your co-op meets weekly throughout the school year:

Consider using the suggested test questions as a reading guide to be given to students at the beginning of each volume. Simply copy and paste the material onto a new document and make any adjustments you wish. Students will come ready to learn and discuss the basic information. You might also ask them to indicate on their reading guide what project they would like to work on individually to present to the class.

The first week can be used for a guided discussion. The **Thinking More** section will give you ideas to get students thinking about how each period related to the people at the time and affects us today.

In following weeks, you might choose one project to do as a class project OR you might select a short book from the reading list to use as oral reading OR you might choose to arrange a field trip to an area attraction or invite a guest speaker.

By this time, your students have had two or three weeks to work on their individual projects. Allow time for each to share with the class!

If your co-op meets for shorter periods:

You can still use the same ideas. Adapt the test suggestions and have the students use them to pre-read the material. On class days, highlight the human interest stories and choose from the wide selection of projects and field trips to make the most of each class.

You might want to have students work on an individual project to be presented at the end of your co-op session or at a special show-and-tell for parents OR you might combine your projects into a scrapbook and make copies for each student.

Testing—Memorization vs. Mastery

Personally, we teach using a tutorial method and generally do not "test" our students. We prefer to gauge their mastery of the subject by observing their interest level (see *Activities--Learning More*), their performance on activities (see *Activities--Doing More*), and their ability to reason and discourse (see *Activities--Thinking More*).

If you are in a large group situation or desire a traditional record of daily work and tests, we have included many features that can be adapted to your needs. Your CD contains a section of *Teacher's Masters*—vocabulary lists, suggested test questions, map print-outs, etc.—which you may reproduce as needed.

I have used the *Test Suggestions* as an opportunity to teach students an efficient method of study. Copy and paste the *Test Suggestions* teacher's key onto a new document. Erase the key answers and re-title the page "*Reading Guide*". Create a header and footer so that students can put their names on their papers and contract individual projects to work on. By handing these out at the BEGINNING of each volume, I assure that students read the material before the first class so that they can participate in class discussion. This also lets them know the points that I considered most important in the reading so that they read with focus and purpose. At the end of the unit, I might give them the same questions again, this time titled "*Review*". I explain that it is identical to the *Reading Guide* and give them an opportunity to see how much they remember.

Whichever testing method you choose, please remember that learning is more than just memorizing correct answers. It is our desire that each student appreciate and understand history and its significance in our world today.