

World History: Identity, Status, and Power (WHISP)
Brookline High School
FAQs

1. How will you meet the needs of all students in a heterogeneous classroom?

We'll start by asking questions that all students can relate to and learn to answer. Who should have power in society? Why should some people be authorized to tell other people what to do? Why do societies distribute status and wealth as they do, and how do they justify these distributions? How have other people in other times and places answered these questions? Second, we'll engage students in projects and activities that require them to practice and demonstrate a range of skills -- speaking, writing, contributing to a group -- and so provide them with a variety of ways to experience success. We'll teach the skills they need explicitly, so that all students will grow in their capacity to exercise them.

Historical literacy -- reading and writing about history, politics, and society -- will remain at the center of the course. We will assign readings that vary in length and complexity, and with a variety of scaffolds like glossaries, annotations, and reading questions. Teachers will direct students in their use of these supports, with the aim of fostering student independence. Likewise, we will provide extension readings for advanced students, and support those as well with appropriate annotations and guidance.

Finally, our 9th Team of Social Studies teachers will provide push-in support in our new class. Teachers who are trained in the content and curriculum will assist in the classroom with group activities and to provide clarification and extra challenge.

2. In a project-based classroom, how will you know how much and how well each student participates and contributes?

The goal of project-based instruction is to cultivate and demonstrate the power of collective intelligence. Project work is an authentic activity for exactly this reason -- collaborative projects are how people make things happen in our world. In the classroom, projects allow teachers to act as coaches, and so to identify individual students who need attention and to give it to them, in a way that traditional, front-of-the-room teaching does not.

Our projects are designed to be compatible with individual accountability, and teachers will insist on it. We are well aware that the power of collaborate comes with the risk of free-riding. And so students will get feedback and earn grades based on both traditional writing and examination performance and on their specific contributions to group projects.

3. How will students be graded?

We will assess student work using both content and skill rubrics. One of the advantages of project-based learning is that students collaborate on the process of learning, and provide each other feedback on their work. This allows for a focus on mastery rather than just completion,

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and gives students multiple opportunities for revision. For many projects, the end product will be individual, even if the process is deeply collaborative. In the end, students will earn their grades through performance on varied assessments designed to reflect to them and to us how well they have learned the content and skills essential to the course.

4. How will this course impact placement in sophomore year?

All sophomores will still take either the standard or honors version of Modern World History. Working together, our 9th-grade Team will evaluate each student's work over the course of the year in WHISP and make a recommendation for 10th-grade placement. The Team will consider both a student's performance on assessments and how frequently the student accesses supports or extensions. Our goal is to make recommendations that direct students to the course in which the level of challenge is both motivating and manageable.

5. How do you know this heterogeneous model can work?

The process of creating a new, heterogeneous Social Studies course for ninth graders began over two years ago, as a small team of teachers and coordinators met to examine data about our current course, did research about unleveling, and visited a host of other schools who have unlevelled ninth grade history classes. Over the course of two summer workshops and several in-year department meetings, the team reviewed longitudinal data on level placements in Brookline High Social Studies classes. The team read various books and articles on leveling and tracking in high schools, including [*Detracking for Excellence and Equity*](#) by Carol Burris and Delia Garrity, and [*Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*](#) by Jeannie Oakes. Additionally, teams of teachers visited the following schools, all of whom teach their 9th graders in heterogeneous groups, to see their models in action: Lexington High School, Sharon High School, Casco Bay High School (ME), Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, and Algonquin Regional High School.

We've seen the model work, and learned a lot about how to make it work at Brookline High. Just as we expect our students to continue to learn from feedback and reflection, we plan to do the same.

Have another question for us? Write to Gary Shiffman, Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator, at gary_shiffman@psbma.org.