

How to Study for AP World History

The first thing that is crucial to note about this class is that AP World History is not like a traditional history course. It is not focused on the details of World History, something that would make the course content impossible. Rather, students learn the “big picture,” or as we say in AP World History, they learn broad historical themes. Students also study important concepts, known as Key Concepts. The course is organized around these themes and concepts and any specific historical information they learn is supportive of them. Here are the 5 major themes of AP World History:

Theme 1: Interactions Between Humans and the Environment

- Demography and disease
- Migration
- Patterns of settlement
- Technology

Theme 2: Development and Interaction of Cultures

- Religions
- Belief systems, philosophies and ideologies
- Science and technology
- The arts and architecture

Theme 3: State-Building, Expansion and Conflict

- Political structures and forms of governance
- Empires
- Nations and nationalism
- Revolts and revolutions
- Regional, transregional, and global structures and organizations

Theme 4: Creation, Expansion and Interaction of Economic Systems

- Agricultural and pastoral production
- Trade and commerce
- Labor systems
- Industrialization
- Capitalism and socialism

Theme 5: Development and Transformation of Social Structures

- Gender roles and relations
- Family and kinship
- Racial and ethnic constructions
- Social and economic classes

As we move through the year, every fact we learn can be located in one of the above themes. This means that the themes are extremely important in how one studies for AP World History.

So what is the best strategy for studying for this class? I recommend students spend two to three times each week reviewing content from class, even if there is no assigned written work. With the historical themes before them, students should review their class notes and attempt to understand how the information from class fits into one or more of these historical themes. For example, when we study Islam students will learn about Islamic laws called Sharia. Students should review the meaning of the term Sharia, then look at the themes to see which ones are relevant to it. For example, Sharia is part of a religion (theme 2), it brought uniformity to Islamic civilization as it expanded (theme 3), and increases trade by giving legal protection to merchants (theme 4).

In a traditional history class a question based on Sharia law might look like this:

What is the name of Islamic laws?
A. Haj
B. Koran
C. Sharia
D. burka

Note that this is a simple recall question, the type which takes no mental skill other than memorization. AP questions go beyond this elementary level of cognition.

Here is how the same fact might look on an AP World History test:

As the Islamic Empire spread, which of the following was a direct result of the implementation of Sharia law into new areas?
A. there was a decrease in lawsuits and civil disputes
B. life became less secure and predictable
C. trade and commerce greatly increased
D. Jews and Christians were forbidden to practice their religions

Note several things about this question. First of all, it **assumes** that a student knows the meaning of Sharia as a basic starting point. More importantly, this question draws from several of the themes listed on the previous page. If a student studied this fact in the context of the themes they would have no problem answering the question.

The same strategy should be used to link content to the Key Concepts they illustrate. For example, students learn about Columbus in the context of Key Concept 4.1, *Globalizing Networks of Communication and Exchange*.

Here is a typical World History question about Columbus:

In what year did Columbus discover America?
A. 1453
B. 1421
C. 1492
D. 1571

Here is what a question about Columbus might look like in AP World History:

What is the most significant result of Columbus' voyages to the Americas in the late 15th century?
A. Native Americans adopted Spanish military and agricultural technologies.
B. Patterns of economic and cultural exchanges became truly global.
C. The planting of European crops drove American crops into extinction.
D. New World diseases spread to Eurasia and decimated the populations there.

Do you see why it pays to study names and facts in the context of the Key Concepts of AP World History? A complete list of class themes and Key Concepts can be found on the class website at www.historyhaven.com