Introduction

Synthesis

The AP U.S. History Course and Exam Description defines synthesis in the following way:

**Synthesis**

*Historical thinking involves the ability to develop understanding of the past by making meaningful and persuasive historical and/or cross-disciplinary connections between a given historical issue and other historical contexts, periods, themes, or disciplines.*

On the AP U.S. History Exam, synthesis is primarily assessed on the document-based question and the long essay. Students can get credit for synthesis when their response explains the connections between the argument and ONE of the following:

1. A development in a different historical period, situation, era, or geographical area;

   OR

2. A course theme and/or approach to history that is not the focus of the essay (such as political, economic, social, cultural, or intellectual history)

There is a variety of possible ways to address synthesis in your classroom. Too often students may approach synthesis as a hoop to jump through in a document-based question or long essay. These activities are intended to encourage students to see synthesis as it is intended; a habit of mind that helps them make meaningful connections outside of what they are currently studying, and to transfer their understandings to other circumstances, contexts and time periods.
The first activity scaffolds students through the first step of thinking synthetically: making analogical connections. Students conceptualize synthesis through group work, examine how historians establish synthesis, and finally have the opportunity to work independently on drawing parallels—the first step in achieving synthesis. It is important to note that to achieve synthesis, a student needs to connect any observations they make to an argument, which they are not asked to do in the first activity. This final step is practiced in the second activity in this module.

The second activity is intended to get students to consider multiple ways they can practice synthesis after they study the “New South” during Period 6. For this particular activity, students investigate a question focused on the “New South,” develop an argument answering that question, and then transfer their understanding of the New South to other contexts, areas, or themes. Finally, they choose one connection and write a sample synthesis paragraph for it. In this way, students are guided through a thought process that explicitly demonstrates how one can make a connection that leads to synthesis in an essay.
Activity: Making Connections Across Time

In order for this activity to work well, students need to have already learned the content. In this case, students should already know about the Freedman’s Bureau, Radical Reconstruction, how Radical Republicans interpreted the meaning of the Civil War, the Civil Rights Act of 1866, the Fourteenth Amendment, varying definitions of equality, the reconciliation between North and South following the Civil War, the continually changing role of the state/federal government, Jim Crow laws, and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). Over the course of this lesson, students will be taught how to conceptualize synthesis through group work, examine how historians establish synthesis, and work independently on drawing analogous parallels—the first step in achieving synthesis.

Part I: Activating Students’ Prior Knowledge

Part I is a close-read activity of the Fourteenth Amendment, intended to activate students’ prior knowledge of Period 5. The goal of this anticipatory set is to take students back in time to Period 5, particularly Reconstruction. Because students have just wrapped up Period 6, it is not essential to reconnect information from Period 6 to the close-read. The connections will come in Part II as they work on connecting the ideas of the Fourteenth Amendment across time.

The activity utilizes aspects of a five-part approach to understanding primary sources. In close-reads, students should first source the document, identifying the author’s point of view, purpose, audience, and the historical context. Then, students look for claims, evidence, language and perspective. In this activity, the students will then focus particularly on the historical context of the document.

For more information on how to conduct close-reads check out this lesson by Tracey Wilson on Advances in AP: https://advancesinap.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/essay/reading/ap-us-history-reading-strategies.html

Directions

1. Begin by providing sections 1 and 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment; although the Fourteenth Amendment has five sections, for the purpose of the activity, students only need to read the first and fifth sections. A separate handout with these amendments and the corresponding questions is provided in the resources section of this module.

Essential Question

How can we make analogical connections and comparisons about the interpretations and application of the Fourteenth Amendment from the nineteenth century through the twentieth century?

Purpose

In this activity, students begin to conceptualize how to make synthetic connections across time through an analysis of the Fourteenth Amendment and its interpretation over time.

Objective

After this activity, students will be able to:

- Find analogies between developments in different time periods.
- Write sentences that clearly articulate these analogies around a particular historical development.

Anticipatory Set

To activate students’ prior knowledge and deepen their understanding, start with a close-read of the Fourteenth Amendment.
2. Before reading the assigned sections of the amendment, ask students to brainstorm what they know about the period in which this amendment was ratified. Record these ideas on the board or have them share in a pair-share activity.

3. Next, have students read the assigned sections individually. To encourage deeper analysis and further activate their prior knowledge, give students questions that guide them toward deeper thinking about key ideas in the text.

For example, for section 1, ask:

- What does it mean to be a citizen?
- What are specific privileges citizens enjoy in the United States?
- Why would due process be an essential right for all citizens?
- What type of equality is being guaranteed in section 1—political, social, economic, civil?
- Why is there an emphasis on equal protection of the laws? Support your answer with specific reasons from your knowledge of the period of Reconstruction.

For section 5, ask:

- Why is Congress given the power to enforce this amendment and not the states?
- What are some implications of giving the federal government the power to enforce this amendment?

Make sure students are really probing the text. Each of the aforementioned questions demands thorough consideration.

4. Have students share out their answers, either in a full class discussion or in a pair-share activity.

Part II: Understanding how historians connect ideas across time

Before students work on independently connecting ideas across time, it is useful to illustrate how historians use this skill in their own writing. For this particular activity, students read an excerpt of Eric Foner’s “The Reconstruction Amendments: Official Documents as Social History” which can be obtained at the Gilder Lehrman Institute for American History here: https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/reconstruction/essays/reconstruction-amendments-official-documents-social-history
Directions

1. To prepare students to read the article, have them watch this four-minute clip from Professor Foner, also found at the Gilder Lehrman Institute website: http://ap.gilderlehrman.org/period/5. The video can be found near the bottom of the webpage and is titled, “Eric Foner: 1866: The Birth of Civil Rights.”

2. Individually, have students read the short article either in class or as homework. Give students the following questions to guide their reading:
   - What is Foner’s thesis? What are its implications?
   - In what ways does Foner develop his thesis with information about events up to 1877?
   - In what ways does Foner connect his thesis to the 20th century?

3. Students should then share their answers and refine them in groups of three to four, in order to ensure full engagement. As the groups work, circulate around the room and monitor their collective progress.

4. After they have completed their group work, have a full-class discussion centered on the following questions:
   - In what ways was the Fourteenth Amendment an example of Radical Reconstruction?
   - Equality, citizenship, right of Congress to enforce—which of these is the most significant part of the Fourteenth Amendment?

The goal of this activity is to have students think about the Fourteenth Amendment in other time periods, as well as Period 6. While they may be limited in their ability to stretch their arguments forward in time, Part III offers students an opportunity to take the ideas of citizenship and equality in the Fourteenth Amendment forward in time. Remember, students can achieve synthesis by making accurate connections between events moving forwards or backwards in time.
Part III: Comparing two cases and drawing analogies

Part III is intended to give students the opportunity to practice historical synthesis. They will be asked to draw valid connections between *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Korematsu v. United States*. This activity can be used during Period 6; students do not need any prior knowledge of the *Korematsu* case. The goal is to help students begin to conceptualize how to make connections between two seemingly different historical developments. Every category of synthesis requires students to write multiple sentences with concrete evidence that connects to their argument. This activity will work on students’ ability to write sentences about two time periods with a central historical issue, in this case, the Fourteenth Amendment. It is important to note that students are only practicing the first step of synthesis: identifying parallels. To be fully successful at synthesis in an essay, a student would need to connect these parallels to an argument.

Directions:

1. Give students an excerpt from the Supreme Court case *Korematsu v. United States* (1944), which is available as a separate handout in the resources section of this module. If your students need additional information on *Plessy v. Ferguson*, you can give them excerpts from *Plessy* as well, which are also available in a separate handout in the resources section of this module. However, students with a firm grounding in the facts and main ideas of the case should be able to compare the two cases without the use of these additional excerpts.

2. Before asking students to compare the two cases, you will want to review the facts in *Korematsu* briefly with students, or have them read the section of their textbook that deals with the case.

3. Next, working in groups of three to four, have students complete a chart that compares *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Korematsu v. United States* as both cases relate to the Fourteenth Amendment. A blank copy of the chart, as well as a completed one for your reference, are available in the resources section of this module.

4. For homework or individually in class, assign students to write at least two sentences using the information they wrote in the “both” category of the chart. They MUST use examples from BOTH cases to support their comparison.

When the activity is done, remind students that the next step would be to connect their comparison to a thesis or argument they are making. They can practice this skill in the 2nd activity provided with this module.
Activity: Different Ways of Approaching Synthesis

Procedure
In order for this activity to work well, students should be knowledgeable about economic, political, and social developments from Reconstruction through the start of the First World War. The first activity is intended to have students realize that synthesis can be a way of transferring their knowledge to other contexts, areas, or time. Synthesis is a higher-order thinking skill that, especially early in the year, necessitates giving students guided practice. It is equally important for students and teachers to understand that achieving synthesis on the long essay or DBQ requires multiple sentences that directly connect to their argument rather than merely a reference or phrase to another time period.

Part I: Conceptualizing Synthesis
In order for students to understand the variety of ways they can synthesize their understanding of the “New South,” have students use the graphic organizer provided in the resources section of this module. The graphic organizer is intended for students to brainstorm three ways they could achieve synthesis: other historical periods, other geographic areas, and other themes in history.

Procedure:
1. Because synthesis requires students to connect their ideas to an argument, have students individually write a thesis for the following long essay question:

   Following Reconstruction, many southern leaders promoted the idea of a “New South.” Evaluate the extent to which the “New South” became a reality between 1865 and 1917, and explain the reasons for what changed as well as what stayed the same during these years.

   For the purposes of this activity, give students two themes to focus their argument, such as race relations and economic systems. This will allow students to draw on the other thematic connections to the New South, such as political and cultural history, for their thematic synthesis connections.

2. After students write their thesis for the long essay individually, put them in groups of 3 to 4 to complete the graphic organizers. Each individual student should complete their own graphic organizer based on their thesis, but having them work in groups helps them brainstorm collectively about possible connections.

Essential Question
How can we transfer our understanding of continuities and changes in the South between 1877 and 1917 to other historical circumstances and themes in order to achieve synthesis?

Purpose
In this activity students achieve synthesis by making parallels to a thesis they develop for the question:

   Following Reconstruction, many southern leaders promoted the idea of a “New South.” Evaluate the extent to which the “New South” became a reality between 1865 and 1917, and explain the reasons for what changed as well as what stayed the same during these years.

Objective
After this activity, students will be able to:

- Conceive of multiple ways to achieve synthesis.
- Write a synthesis connection to an argument.

Anticipatory Set
Begin by having students develop a thesis that answers the long essay question in order to activate their prior knowledge about the New South and to provide an argument to which they tie their synthesis connection.
3. It is important for teachers to remind students that the answers to their graphic organizers need to connect to their argument. One example is provided in the graphic organizer to help students understand this idea.

Part II: Writing Synthesis Connections

The next part of the lesson involves giving students the opportunity to achieve synthesis through guided practice.

4. First, model an example of synthesis that relates to the question. A sample model, related to the example in the graphic organizer, is provided in the resources section of this module. Have students identify the following three aspects of the model:
   - The parallel that is being made;
   - Specific examples used for the New South AND the parallel context;
   - The explanation of how the parallel relates to the argument.

5. Once students have understood how the model demonstrates a strong example of synthesis, have them return to their graphic organizers and decide which of the connections their group came up with best connects to their argument. This will be the example they will use to write their synthesis sentences.

6. Each student then writes multiple sentences to explain the connection, which is one of the key requirements of synthesis. Students must use specific examples from both the New South and their example to support the connection. Students should use the three aspects of the model provided by the teacher to check their work.

Check for understanding

Before students turn in their sentences at the end of the activity, have them highlight the places in their sentences where they think they have done each of the following:
   - Clearly and compellingly explained the connection to their thesis.
   - Provided an accurate and relevant example to support the connection.

By having students mark where they believe they have achieved the requirement, it is easier for teachers to provide effective feedback.