

BIG HISTORY PROJECT

FAQ 2014-15

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What is Big History?

Big History is a social studies course that spans 13.8 billion years. It weaves insights from many disciplines to form a single story that helps us better understand people, civilizations, and how we are connected to everything around us. For an overview, see David Christian's TED Talk: http://www.ted.com/talks/david_christian_big_history.html.

What is the Big History Project?

The Big History Project LLC (BHP) is an organization created to build a Big History course for middle- and high-school students. The BHP team works closely with pilot schools to revise and refine the curriculum, and makes all assets available for free on www.bighistoryproject.com. BHP is sponsored by Bill Gates, separately from his work with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

What are the goals of the course?

Big History challenges students to think critically and broadly, and tries to ignite a passion for inquiry and exploration. In addition to helping students master the sequence and scope of 13.8 billion years, the course focuses on three essential skills: thinking across scale, integrating multiple disciplines, and making and testing claims. See the [BHP Course Teaching Guide](#) for details on these essential skills and core concepts.

Who is the target student?

Big History is designed as a social studies/history course targeting 9th and 10th grades. The course can also be offered as a capstone deployment for 11th and 12th grades (as a way for teachers and schools to synthesize previous work), or as a teacher-scaffolded middle-school course.

How is the course delivered?

All of the content is available online. A completely web-based model ensures the content is up-to-date, relieves schools of the need for costly textbooks, and helps teachers engage students by providing approachable, media-rich materials that can be used in different ways. Students and teachers are issued a personal login to gain access to the school version of the course. It is up to each teacher to determine optimal approach to using the site.

Is Big History offered on other platforms?

There is a version of [Big History on Khan Academy](#). The course can also be integrated into a variety of LMS platforms at the discretion of teachers and schools.

Who is involved in the Big History Project?

Our design partners include some of the best and brightest contributors, including:

Pilot schools: The entire course is co-developed with pilot-school teachers and administrators. All aspects of the course – from the core curriculum and content to the assessment strategy – are authored with our pilot school partners.

David Christian: Professor of History at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. David, who built a widely taught college-level course, is the “father” of Big History. David oversees the strategy for the course and leads the main lectures.

Bob Bain: Associate Professor of History and Education at the University of Michigan. Bob oversees all work related to course design and delivery with a specific emphasis on the assessment plan and alignment to standards.

Key academic partners: Guest lecturers bring the ideas of Big History to life and provide students unique glimpses into different fields:

- Walter Alvarez
- Cynthia Stokes Brown
- Sal Khan
- Janna Levin
- Craig Benjamin
- Skip Gates
- John Green
- Newsela
- History Channel H2

Bill Gates: Businessman and philanthropist. Bill is providing program support to jumpstart the Big History Project.

What planning and instructional resources are available to teachers?

BHP offers teachers a wide variety of resources and support for course planning, including:

- Over 40 lesson plans, ready for deployment
- Teaching guides and supplementary PowerPoint decks
- A robust, online community to share lessons, activities, and instructional strategies
- Project-based learning (PBL) activities such as “Unit 5: Invent a Species,” and “Unit 7: How Many People Could the Earth Support Now and 100 Years from Now?”
- Investigations, which are activities that help frame some of the big issues tackled in each unit, designed to cultivate critical ELA, research, and persuasive writing skills
- Videos, complex texts, animations, comic books, infographics, interactive classroom activities, and more, accommodating a variety of learning and instructional styles

What training and professional development (PD) opportunities are available?

Regional cluster meetings occur regularly to provide schools and educators face-to-face professional development, implementation guidance, and direct assistance. Monthly webinars are offered to facilitate PD and collaboration opportunities. These are all posted in the BHP teaching community and drive online conversations and Q&A with curriculum and industry experts.

Training documents and guides are available to get you up and running with the course on your own.

The best professional development comes from our teachers. Join the BHP Teacher Community to collaborate and connect with hundreds of teachers around the world.

Do I have to teach the entire curriculum?

The best way to deliver Big History is to teach the whole course, and it is a requirement for our design partner schools. However, we want anyone and everyone to use BHP in whatever way best serves them. If that means using bits and pieces to supplement your current curriculum, that's great too!

What does it cost?

Our goal is to ensure that Big History is taught effectively with no cost to schools. We provide, free of charge:

- All content and courseware
- PD/teacher training program
- Access to core project team for support, assistance, and feedback

How does the course align to existing standards?

There is strong alignment between the Big History course and the Common Core State Standards. We will continue to purposefully engineer our content and assessment strategy to support the following specific standards:

- Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies
- Reading Standards for Literacy in Science and Technical Subjects
- Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects
- Speaking and Listening Standards for Grades 9–10

BHP is also aligned with the National World History Standards, and we will be exploring opportunities to complement other local, state, and network-specific standards to deepen our relationship to partner schools.

How can Big History fit with my school's learning environment?

Big History can be tailored in a variety of ways to fit your school's identity and mission.

English Language Arts (ELA) focus: a diverse range of complex text and literature is built into the foundation of BHP, making it a valuable tool for teachers and schools focused on integrating English Language Arts with history, social studies, and the sciences.

Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) focus: Rigorous yet accessible content covering basic chemistry, physics, biology, and data literacy and analysis make BHP a great fit for schools with a STEM focus.

Project-based learning (PBL) focus: PBL embedded in BHP allows students to dive deeply and creatively for solutions to driving questions related to complex interdisciplinary issues. Combining PBL and BHP creates meaningful, student-driven learning experiences. We offer three ready-to-deploy PBL activities.

How long will the course be supported?

We aim to revise and refine the course over the next few years, at which time we expect to turn over all intellectual property and content to a not-for-profit institution or partner. The course will always be free and easily available to schools.

What about the other public BH course?

To increase the awareness and provide anybody around the world with the opportunity to learn about Big History, the Big History Project also created a shorter companion course that is suitable for lifelong learners.

How can I learn more?

- General info: <http://www.bighistoryproject.com>
- Questions: info@bighistoryproject.com
- Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/bighistoryproject>