



AMERICA: THE LAST BEST HOPE

Introductory Narrative to the Indiana Standards Alignment

Grade 8 U.S. History

1. Standard 1 – History

How well does LBH help students to be able to examine the relationship and significance of themes, concepts, and movements in the development of United States history, including review of key ideas related to the colonization of America and the revolution and Founding Era? Will it help them understand an emphasis on social reform, national development and westward expansion, and the Civil War and Reconstruction period?

William J. Bennett's *America: The Last Best Hope*, Volume I uses an engaging narrative style to capture the essence of American history during this very period. And in doing so, the book relates more than just the historical facts. It challenges students to see multiple historical points of view and in fact to think historically. Chapters 1 and 2 relate the stories of Spanish, Dutch, French and English attempts to colonize the New World. Throughout the story, European interactions with Native American Indian groups are highlighted. Bennett notes on pp. 31 and 47 that the French had more positive relations with Indians than did other Europeans, largely because the French sent fewer settlers and because the French used the Indians as partners in the fur trade. The English, on the other hand, sent thousands of settlers, all of whom wanted land. As he notes on p. 35, this "land hunger" led to inevitable conflict.

Chapter 2 contrasts the Virginia and Massachusetts experiences of English settlers. The growing colonial rivalry with France is also covered, with a young George Washington playing a central role in the conflict that ultimately became the French and Indian War (pp. 54-61). The chapter ends with the clear notion that winning the war led Americans to express pride in being a part of the British Empire, and yet clouds hung on the horizon of American-English relations. Chapter 3 tells the story of the series of crises that ultimately led to a revolution and to Americans coming to accept themselves as a distinct people. At the center of this chapter is the Declaration of Independence and its call for freedom and equality (pp. 83-86).

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 take the American story through the chaos of the Articles of Confederation period and toward a stronger republic under the new Constitution. Included is a detailed look at the formation of groups the original founders did not want to appear – political parties. First there were the Federalists and Anti-Federalists (pp. 126-131), then after the new republic was born, Federalists and Democratic-



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Republicans (165-175). Bennett refers to Jefferson's election as president in 1800 as a "revolution," in that power changed hands between competing parties peacefully.

Chapters 7 and 8 cover the Jacksonian period – a time of growing reform movements and also a period characterized by growing tension between the two very different societies developing in the North and South. The sections came into bitter conflict over Westward expansion, both wanting to spread their distinct culture to that new region. Chapters 9 and 10 cover the tragic Civil War period, a time that put on display incredible heroism from both sides amidst untold suffering.

Throughout these chapters in Volume 1, Bennett highlights the stories of individuals, men and women, known to generations of Americans. He also explains key documents, court cases, and events that established American traditions still critical to our way of life today. He also often relates and contrasts various historical views, helping students understand that history is not just the "story of what happened," but a lively dialogue between past and present (pp. 9, 86).

2. Standard 2 – Civics and Government

How well does LBH help students to be able to explain the major principles, values and institutions of constitutional government and citizenship, which are based on the founding documents of the United States and how three branches of government share and check power within our federal system of government?

In many ways *Last Best Hope*, Volume I takes a traditional political approach to the telling of our nation's history. The formation of America's republican institutions is at the very heart of its narrative. Readers see those institutions growing out of English documents such as the Magna Carta (p. 65), and the freedoms established in England in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 (p. 49). Students will see the seeds of religious freedom sown in the various colonies (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Maryland, Pennsylvania). Such seeds bore fruit in the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (110-111) and of course in the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

A major theme of *Last Best Hope* is the unique American foundation on the principles of freedom and equality. Bennett makes it clear that those principles were imperfectly instituted in the beginning, but also that their very presence made contradictions like slavery all the more glaring.

Chapter 3, "The Greatest Revolution," tells the story of Paine's electrifying *Common Sense* (p. 81), and of course how the Declaration of Independence came to be written (pp. 83-86). Chapter 4 makes clear why and how the U.S. Constitution was a necessary



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replacement for the Articles of Confederation and Chapter 5 shows the importance of the Bill of Rights.

Throughout the entire narrative, the growth of governmental institutions is covered thoroughly. Chapter 7 relates the growth of democracy and citizen participation during the era of Andrew Jackson. Chapters 7 and 8 familiarize students with how government works by highlighting the political actions of great leaders from the pre-Civil War era – Clay, Calhoun, and Webster. The chapters on the Civil War (9 and 10) show students how America’s political institutions were tested by the Civil War. Bennett includes examples such as Lincoln’s suspension of habeas corpus and the Supreme Court case *Ex Parte Merryman* (pp. 324-325) to show students that our delicate balance between the three branches of government is constantly open to interpretation. Chapter 11 shows how our system was made more perfect during the Reconstruction period with the addition of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution. Even though these amendments became mere words on paper by the late 19th century, *Last Best Hope* makes clear their importance as the foundation of the civil rights movement that would come a century later.

Bennett says in the Introduction of *Last Best Hope* that his goal is to instill within readers and students an “informed patriotism.” His narrative will make students aware of what an “experiment” in self-government America was and is, and how the participation of men and women in the past in the founding of this nation makes it imperative that we all participate in and contribute to our governmental institutions today.

3. Standard 3 – Geography

How well does LBH help students to be able to identify the major geographic characteristics of the United States and its regions? Will it help them name and locate the major physical features of the United States, as well as each of the states, capitals and major cities, and will use geographic skills and technology to examine the influence of geographic factors on national development?

Accompanying *Last Best Hope* is the *Roadmap*. Each chapter of *Last Best Hope* is reinforced by maps and map exercises in the *Roadmap*. Also included in the *Roadmap* are links to sites that students and teachers can use to reinforce knowledge of state locations and state capitals.

But more significantly, the historical narrative itself in *Last Best Hope* will reinforce for students how geography impacts history. Chapter 1 tells the story of European explorers who literally drew the map of the world as they ventured from Europe



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around Africa and then toward new lands to their west (all in a quest to reach Asia). Chapter 2 shows how the swampy geography of Jamestown, Virginia led to great sickness and many deaths, yet also provided the unique geographical setting for the growing of tobacco, ultimately the salvation of the colony.

Chapter 6 highlights President Jefferson's fascination with the unknown geography of the West and his decision to send Lewis and Clark forth to explore and map that region (pp. 186-189). His Louisiana Purchase dramatically expanded the map of the United States (pp. 184-186). Students will see clearly in Chapter 7 how that map expanded even further west with the American victory in a war with Mexico (pp. 263-268).

Chapter 8 also makes clear the how geography impacts history as students read about the growing division between sections. The geography of the South proved far more suitable to plantation agriculture and slavery than did the geography of the North. The battle that became "Bleeding Kansas" (pp. 286-292) shows the clash between these two geographical visions.

Last Best Hope, Volume 1 uses a historical narrative to tell the story of the growth of America across the geographical regions of the North American continent – from the eastern seaboard, across the Appalachians, on to the Great Plains, across the Rockies, and finally to the Pacific coast.

4. Standard 4 – Economics

How well does LBH help students to be able to identify, describe and evaluate the influence of economic factors on national development from the founding of the nation to the end of Reconstruction?

Economics is a primary motivator to humans throughout history and *Last Best Hope* shows this clearly. Throughout the historical narrative, readers see the historical impact of economic forces. Chapter 1 shows how the burning desire for gold motivated European exploration and sometimes led to tragic exploitation of native inhabitants of the New World (pp. 8-9, 22). In Chapter 2, competition in overseas trade and for participation in the fur trade is seen to have led to war between Britain and France (pp. 46-48). Chapter 3 relates how fundamental disagreements about tax policies and representation helped lead to the American Revolution (pp. 63-67).

In Chapter 7 students will learn that Americans have always debated the proper role of their government in the economy through Bennett's detailing of the war over the Second National Bank of the U.S. (pp. 247-250). This was an echo of an earlier debate



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over federal economic policy during the time of Washington and Hamilton (pp. 144-146).

And in Chapter 8, Bennett makes clear that the sectional differences that helped lead to the Civil War were at their foundation economic differences. The South remained economically agrarian, while the North was changing dynamically with new forms of manufacturing and transportation.

Grade 11 U.S. History

5. Standard 1 – Early National Development: 1775 to 1877

How well does LBH help students to be able to conduct a review and summarize key ideas, events, and developments from the Founding Era through the Civil War and Reconstruction, 1775 to 1877?

America: The Last Best Hope, by William J. Bennett (former U.S. Secretary of Education), is a best selling, two volume historical narrative that covers United States history from the voyages of Columbus to our own times. A team of award-winning educators (Team HOPE) joined with Dr. Bennett to adapt this historical work for classroom use. Schools have the option of splitting the volumes at 1877 (Volume I and Volume II Enhanced) or at 1914 (Volume I and Volume II). It is the strong belief of the team creating a curriculum and teacher and student resources for *Last Best Hope* (a curriculum entitled *The Roadmap*), that this product is unique and has the potential to revolutionize history education. Its primary strength is Bennett's ability to capture the dramatic *story* in history. He does so in a fair and balanced way that does not hide America's flaws, but points out clearly the unique nature of the American experiment in democracy in the history of the world. As he notes in his introduction, Bennett wants readers (and students) to "enjoy the story of their country" and in doing so develop a "new patriotism – a new reflective, reasoned form of patriotism."

This period of United States history is covered in depth and in an engaging, narrative style in *Last Best Hope*, Volume I. It begins with the period of exploration, then proceeds to offer detailed accounts of the American Revolution, the Articles and Constitutional periods, the early Republic, the Jacksonian period, growing sectionalism, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Throughout are accounts of key individuals, both well known and little known, and analysis of critical documents, court cases, and events that shaped America in its founding era. The *Roadmap* that accompanies *Last Best Hope* provides both teachers and students with summaries of each chapter of Volume 1, which should make a review of key events of America's first century easy to accomplish.



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6. Standard 2 – Development of the Industrial United States: 1870 to 1900

How well does LBH help students to be able to examine the political, economic, social and cultural development of the United States during the period from 1870 to 1900?

Chapter 1 of *Last Best Hope* (Volume II Enhanced) relates the triumphs and pitfalls of the transformation of the United States into an industrial nation. Bennett calls his chapter on this era “An Age More Golden than Gilded?” A theme throughout is that although there were no presidents in this period that might be deemed “great,” the nation was nonetheless led by honorable, capable men. And “Robber Barons” often led companies that in reality brought goods to people at progressively lower prices.

Politically, Bennett covers all of the closely contested presidential campaigns of this era, as well as the growth of civil service reform as a way to curb political corruption. Socially, the chapter covers well the impact of massive European immigration on American cities, industries, and culture.

The chapter also tells of the impact of industrialism on all sectors of American society. Farmers felt threatened by major corporations and railroads and formed the pivotal “populist” political movement. Reformers in cities who had to deal with masses of poor people impacted by industrialism (and its economic stresses as seen in the depression of the 1890s) responded with a new “social gospel” calling on people of faith to create a more just society here on earth, and not just prepare for a better life in the hereafter.

7. Standard 3 – Emergence of the Modern United States: 1897 to 1920

How well does LBH help students to be able to examine the political, economic, social and cultural development of the United States during the period from 1897 to 1920?

Bennett tells the story of the emergence of a modern America onto the world stage in Chapters 2 and 3 of *Last Best Hope*. Chapter 2 shows how the relatively minor Spanish American War marked America’s turn from a focus on settling its own continent to an interest in lands and resources around the globe. It also helped launch the career of Theodore Roosevelt, who plays a large role in Bennett’s narrative.

Also prominent in Chapter 2 is the rising Progressive Movement that addressed the social, political, and economic challenges brought forth by industrialism. Both political



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parties had strong progressive wings and progressivism opened the way for an expanded role for governments of all levels in the daily lives of Americans.

Chapter 3 focuses on World War I and its dramatic impact on America's role in the world. Bennett shows the impact of the war on all aspects of American culture, from music (George M. Cohan) to mass communication (George Creel and the Committee on Public Information).

Last Best Hope dramatically illustrates that the America of 1920 was a vastly different nation than the America of 1897.

8. Standard 4 – The Modern United States in Prosperity and Depression: 1920s and 1930s

How well does LBH help students be able to examine the political, economic, social and cultural development of the United States during the period from 1920 to 1939?

Bennett's *Last Best Hope* captures American life in the life in the 1920s and 1930s in Chapters 4 and 5. Economic developments are at the center of this story. The U.S. saw the economy boom during the 1920s. Bennett describes the growth of the stock market and the increased access to automobiles and other consumer goods. But this prosperity came to a sudden halt with the stock market crash of 1929.

Social and cultural life during the era is also detailed in *Last Best Hope*. Chapter 4 discusses the new roles for women, especially in cities, and the Harlem Renaissance, spurred by the Great Migration of blacks from southern farms to urban areas in the North. This included the uniquely American art form – jazz. He also shows the impact on culture of new forms of communication, such as radio and motion pictures. All of these developments led to a clash between proponents of modernism and proponents of tradition – as Bennett describes in his accounts of the 1924 Democratic convention and the Scopes “Monkey Trial.”

Politically, Bennett details the Republican dominance during the 1920s in Chapter 4, but with the coming of the Great Depression, Franklin Roosevelt and the Democrats swept to power (chapters 4 and 5). Chapter 5 shows clearly that Roosevelt's New Deal dramatically changed the role of the federal government forever.



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9. Standard 5 – The United States and World War II: 1939 to 1945

How well does LBH help students to be able to examine the causes and course of World War II, the effects of the war on United States society and culture, and the consequences of the war on United States involvement in world affairs?

World War II forms the heart of Bennett's narrative in *Last Best Hope*. In fact, parts of chapter 5 and all of chapters 6, 7, and 8 are dedicated to the war. Chapter 5 covers the rise of totalitarian dictators around the globe. Chapter 6 explains how the war in Europe impacted the American economy and helped pull the U.S. out of the Depression. The chapter also shows FDR's growing awareness of the totalitarian threat in Europe to U.S. security and how the president slowly brought public opinion from a staunch isolationism to a willingness to aid the Allies.

Chapter 7 describes the shock of Pearl Harbor and the dark days of 1942. By 1943 the miracle of American mobilization had begun to turn the tide and in 1944 and 1945, the Allies achieved total victory (Chapter 8). Bennett relates details of all major campaigns across the globe, the importance of Anglo-American cooperation, and the uneasy alliance with the USSR. This tense relationship is clearly seen by the reader as a precursor to the Cold War to follow World War II.

Bennett's description makes clear that World War II was a "total war" that impacted all aspects of American society and culture. He pays particular attention to the changing roles for women and African-Americans.

10. Standard 6 – Postwar United States: 1945 to 1960

How well does LBH help students to be able to examine the political, economic, social and cultural development of the United States during the period from 1945 to 1960?

Bennett covers 1945 to 1960 in chapters 9 and 10 of *Last Best Hope*. Politically, he details key policy initiatives of both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. Economically, he covers the difficult post war years, which were beset by countless strikes, and the rising prosperity of the 1950s (including the massive growth of the automobile industry, the growth of highways, and the rise of suburbs).

Also crucial during this period are the tense relations with the USSR that became the Cold War – a conflict that included one war, the Korean War. The Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NATO changed American foreign policy forever.



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Socially and culturally, in Chapters 9 and 10 Bennett covers the impact of the “Red Scare” on America. He also shows the courage of early civil rights protestors.

11. Standard 7 – The United States in Troubled Times: 1960 to 1980

How well does LBH help students to be able to examine the political, economic, social and cultural development of the United States during the period from 1960 to 1980?

Last Best Hope covers the period 1960-1980 in Chapters 11, 12, and 13. Politically, Bennett discusses Kennedy’s New Frontier, Johnson’s Great Society, the rise and fall of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford’s restoration of dignity to the Oval Office, and the surprising election of Jimmy Carter. Economically, Bennett compares the relative prosperity of the 1960s with the “stagflation” of the 1970s. Socially and culturally, Bennett details the rise of the counterculture and its challenge to traditional American values. In the midst of this tumultuous time, Bennett tells of the rise of a new conservative movement shown in the nomination of Barry Goldwater for president by the Republicans in 1964 and by the rising prominence of Ronald Reagan.

Bennett also engages students with the drama of the space program, the divisive Vietnam War, the challenge put forth by Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights protestors for America to live up to its ideals, and the fact that America nearly came apart at its seams during the riots and disturbances of the 1960s.

12. Standard 8 – The Contemporary United States: 1980 to the Present

How well does LBH help students to be able to examine the political, economic, social and cultural development of the United States during the period from 1980 to the present?

Chapter 14, the final chapter of *Last Best Hope*, details key events of the 1980s and the presidency of Ronald Reagan. At the heart of this story is Reagan’s focus on a few key issues – shrinking the size of the federal government by cutting taxes and federal spending, rebuilding a strong U.S. military, and winning the Cold War.

Bennett tells how Reagan’s rise to the presidency and his party’s growing power in Congress represented a dramatic political break after decades of Democratic dominance. He did indeed transform government and raise questions about the very nature of the welfare state. Students will recognize debates about Reagan in this chapter in the debates about public policy still being waged today.



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A key aspect of Bennett's narrative on the Reagan years is Reagan's ability to move beyond the status quo in the Cold war and actually put America in a position to win the decades long conflict, thus opening the door for the spread of freedom around the globe.

Last Best Hope ends in 1989, a conscious decision made by Bennett and the team of educators (Team HOPE) that is adapting the work for classroom use. They reached a consensus that accounts of events beyond the Reagan administration fall into the realm of current events and contemporary politics, rather than history. However, as an aid to teachers and students who want to survey these recent occurrences, the accompanying *Premium Roadmap* covers key political, economic, and social events from 1989 to the present.

13. Standard 9 – Historical Thinking

How well does LBH help students to be able to conduct historical research that incorporates information literacy skills such as forming appropriate research questions; evaluating information by determining its accuracy, relevance and comprehensiveness; interpreting a variety of primary and secondary sources; and presenting their findings with documentation?

One of the great strengths of *Last Best Hope* is Bennett's incorporation of multiple historical points of view. He presents history as not simply a dry recitation of the "facts," but rather as an engaging story *and* a debate between conflicting views of the past. This is seen throughout both volumes of *Last Best Hope*. The author works such divergent perspectives seamlessly into his narrative - examples include the debate over the legacy of Columbus, the founding fathers and slavery, the decision to drop atomic bombs to end World War II, and the challenges laid out by the 1960s counterculture. This approach will open the door for teachers and students together to form research questions and create working theses for historical papers. This aspect of *Last Best Hope* is, more than any other feature, what separates the work from a standard textbook.

The readability of the narrative is the book's strongest attribute, which will undoubtedly increase literacy skills. Students will also gain strength in evaluating primary sources. Bennett incorporates such sources throughout his narrative and even more primary sources are included in the accompanying *Roadmap and Premium Roadmap*. Students will learn to think in a more deeply historical manner and also increase their presentation skills by their participation in multiple classroom activities, such as historical plays and historical debates, included for each chapter in the *Roadmap*, and additionally in the *Premium Roadmap*.