# Project X Course Guide

*You are a historian of the future, and data is your crystal ball. As our species confronts the challenges of the twenty-first century, we carry the knowledge and burdens of history. In Project X, you'll use that knowledge of the past to predict the future. Choose one significant issue and use data to predict how it will change during your lifetime.*

Project X is meant to help students understand and evaluate data that they encounter and to use data in their own arguments. Project X can be taught as a standalone four-week course or as a progression within the WHP Origins and 1750 courses. This guide is for the standalone version.

Students are constantly bombarded with representations of data. These charts and maps can be confusing and misleading. As data becomes a bigger part of our lives—just one result of the Information Revolution—students need to learn to be critical consumers of information. That's what Project X is all about. Project X culminates in a final presentation in which students use historical data to predict the future and offer solutions to some of humanity's biggest challenges.

Project X kicks off with the following prompt:

> *"You are a historian of the future, and data is your crystal ball. As our species confronts the challenges of the twenty-first century, we carry the knowledge and burdens of history. In Project X, you'll use that knowledge of the past to predict the future. Choose one significant issue and use data to predict how it will change during your lifetime."*

If that sounds like a daunting task, don't worry! We've designed materials to guide students step-by-step through how to read charts, evaluate data, and make predictions. Project X has three main components:

1. Data Explorations
2. Three Close Reads for Data, an approach to "reading" charts and other means of displaying data
3. Activities that lead to the final project

## Data Explorations

At the core of Project X are 10 exercises we call *Data Explorations*. These explorations are organized thematically around significant topics of world history. Each Data Exploration includes two elements:

- **Articles** – Every Data Exploration begins with an introductory article that introduces students to the charts included in that exploration and provides historical context. These articles are written by Max Roser and the team at Our World in Data (OWID). (Learn more about OWID here: https://ourworldindata.org/.)

- **Charts** – Each Data Exploration centers around a selection of thematic charts from the OWID website. Students should spend the bulk of their time during Data Explorations "reading" the charts.
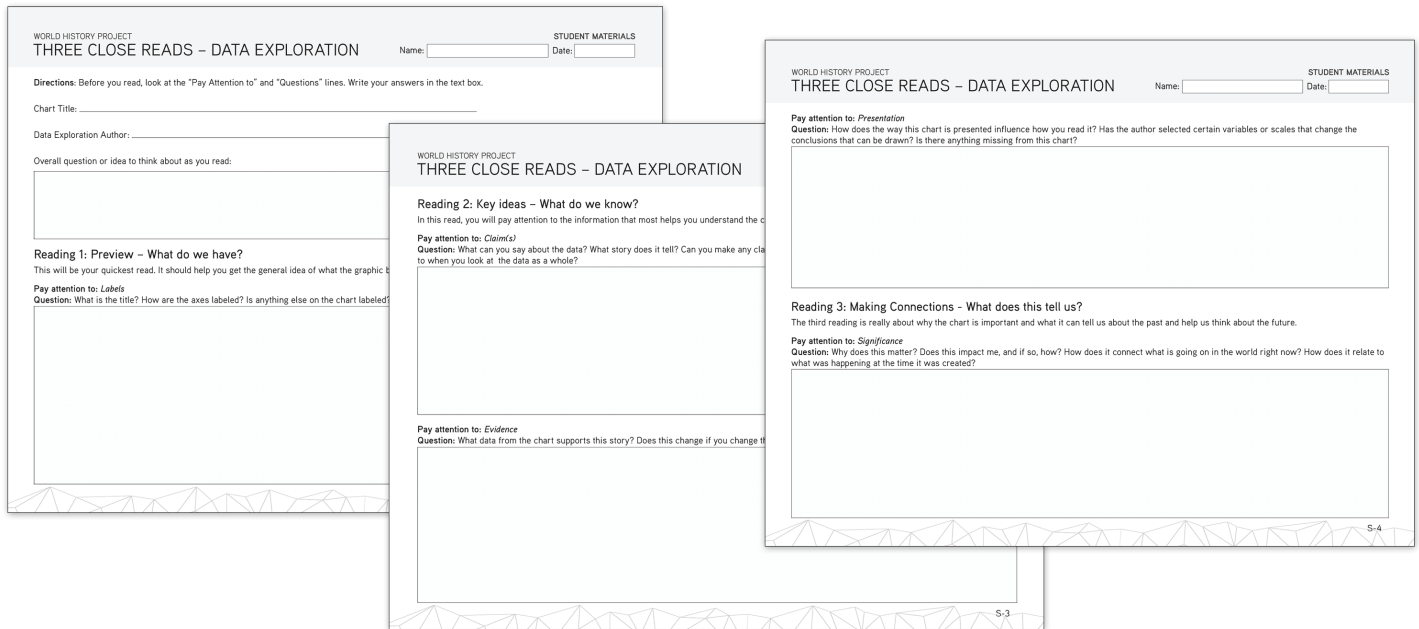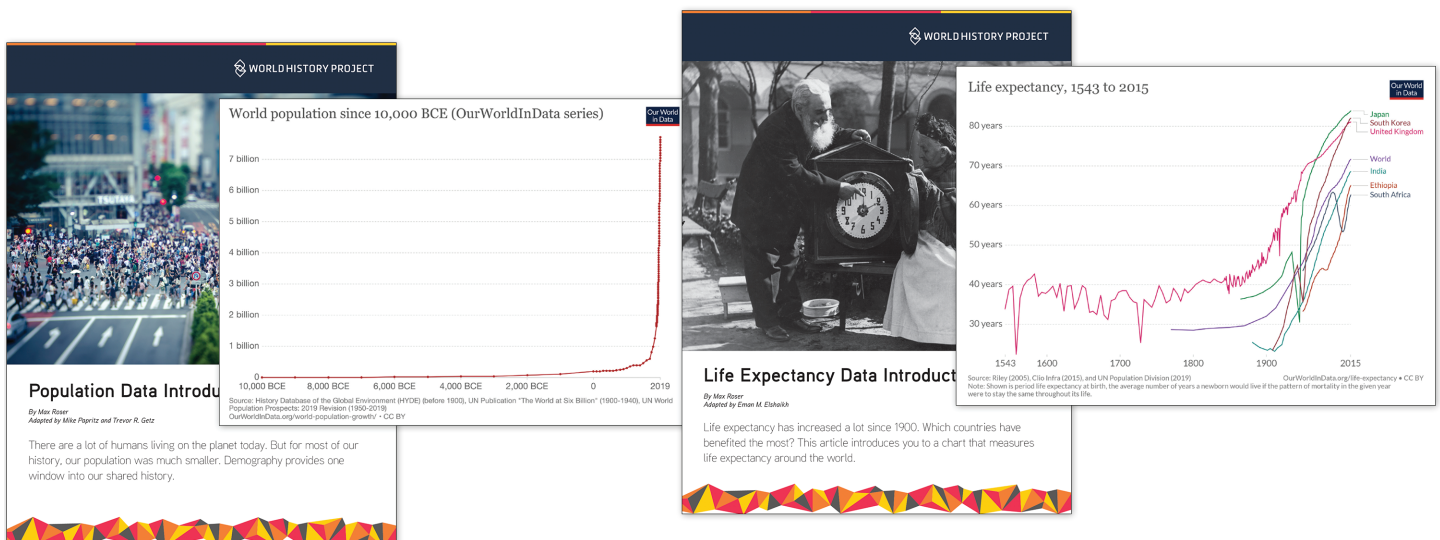
Each of Project X's 10 Data Explorations is organized around a theme. We recommend assigning the explorations in the order shown below, but you can assign them in the order that works for you and your class—with two exceptions: However you decide to assign the Data Explorations, Population and Future Population Growth should be the first and last you assign, respectively.

1. Population
2. Urbanization
3. War and Peace
4. Life Expectancy
5. Greenhouse Gas Emissions

6. Child Labor
7. Democracy
8. Global Inequality
9. Nuclear Weapons
10. Future Population Growth
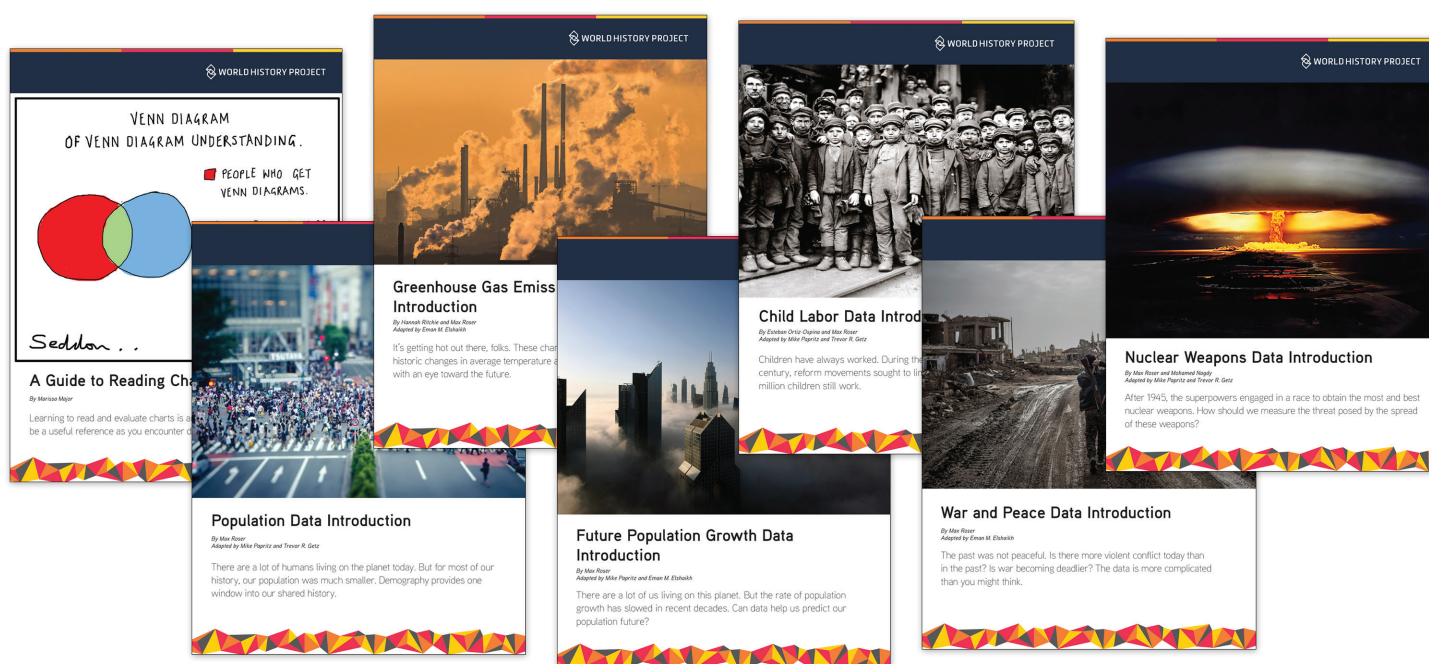
## Three Close Reads for Data

"Reading" data and charts requires different skills than reading text. To develop those skills, Project X introduces a new tool: Three Close Reads for Data. Like our Three Close Reads tool, this one guides students through the process of understanding and evaluating reading material—but with this new tool they're learning to read charts rather than normal text. Students should follow the Three Close Reads for Data process for each chart in the Data Exploration (though you may want to assign groups of students to different charts and have them report back to the class). A Three Close Reads for Data—Introduction activity introduces students to the thinking practice of three close reads. As you progress through Project X, keep an ear open for when your students start to grumble about the three reads. It might mean that they're ready for a less-scaffolded reading experience. Use your knowledge of your students and how their skills are developing to make a determination about when they need less guidance and structure.

## Final Project

There are a series of activities that scaffold up to the final project. These activities culminate in a presentation in which students make a prediction about the future supported by data and historical evidence.

1. **Project X Activity 1: Making a Prediction Part 1** – In this activity, students examine some common graph shapes and learn how these shapes can help them make predictions about the future. They conclude the activity by evaluating several sample predictions about the future of poverty.

2. **Project X Activity 2: Making a Prediction Part 2** – Students apply what they learned in Part 1, but this time, they make predictions about future population growth by synthesizing information from several different charts.

3. **Project X Activity 3: Topic Selection** – Students select their final project topic. Students identify a topic with world-historical significance that's meaningful to them. To do this, they explore the OWID website. By the end of the activity they will have settled on a topic for their final projects.

4. **Project X Activity 4: Research** – Students use this activity to begin collecting relevant evidence from the OWID and WHP websites to support a prediction about the future. This activity offers them an opportunity to reflect on how they will use each piece of evidence they identify.

5. P**roject X Final Project: Presentation** – Students make a short in-class presentation. Possible formats include a TED Talk-like presentation, video, poster, or live presentation. Each presentation should include three main elements:

   • A prediction about how the student's chosen topic will change over the course of their lifetime (25 years, 50 years, and 100 years in the future).

   • A historical narrative of how the topic has changed through three time periods:

     • Before the Industrial Revolution

- • After the Industrial Revolution
- • Twentieth century to present
- • A call-to-action for people who want to avoid or embrace this future. Students identify and plan a course of activism (for example: grassroots organization, public policies, protests, an infographic, PSA, influencer campaign).

## Recommended Pacing

**Note:** The following four-week schedule is based on five fifty-minute class periods per week.

**Week 1**

1. **Read:** "A Guide to Reading Charts"
2. **Activity:** Three Close Reads for Data – Introduction
3. **Read:** "Data Exploration: Population"
4. **Read:** "Data Exploration: Urbanization"
5. **Activity:** Project X – Making a Prediction Part 1

**Week 2**

1. **Read:** "Data Exploration: War and Peace"
2. **Read:** "Data Exploration Greenhouse Gas Emissions"
3. **Activity:** Project X – Making a Prediction Part 2
4. **Read:** "Data Exploration: Democracy"
5. **Activity:** Project X – Topic Selection

**Week 3**

1. **Read:** "Data Exploration: Global Inequality"
2. **Activity:** Project X – Research
3. **Read:** "Data Exploration: Future Population Growth"
4. **Activity:** Project X – Final Project
5. **Activity:** Project X – Final Project

**Week 4**

1-5. **Closing:** Project X – Final Presentations

**Other Materials**
- • **Read:** "Data Exploration: Life Expectancy"
- • **Read:** "Data Exploration: Child Labor"
- • **Read:** "Data Exploration: Nuclear Weapons"

## Image credit

**Cover image**: Crystal ball on graphs. © Eskay Lim / EyeEm / Getty Images