BHP FAQ

What is the Big History Project (BHP)?

Big History Project is a free, online social studies course for middle- and high-school students that spans 13.8 billion years. It weaves insights from many disciplines to form a single story that helps students develop a framework to organize and connect what they're learning both in and out of school. For an overview, see Big History founder David Christian's TED Talk: https://www.ted.com/talks/david_christian_the_history_of_our_world_in_18_minutes

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 develops essential skills and intellectual tools such as: thinking critically across scales and disciplines, building informed arguments, making and testing claims, and writing. See the BHP Full Course 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 sixth- through tenth-grade students. With a variety of content formats, scaffolds, and structured routine-based approaches to fundamental historical thinking and writing skills, Big History Project accommodates a wide range of student skill levels. If you're teaching middle-school or general high-school social studies, Big History Project is right for your students.

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. Class materials are available in PDF and Google Docs formats to facilitate viewing and printing in a variety of environments. At the discretion of teachers and schools, the course can also be downloaded and integrated into a variety of LMS platforms and Google Classroom (see guide). You can also sign in to OER Project using Clever! Find out more here.

How is the course structured?

It might seem like 13.8 billion years is a lot to cover in a semester- or year-long course but we've structured it in a way that makes it possible…and worth the trip! Big History is made up of eight thresholds. Each represents a moment when the Universe got more complex. We start with the Big Bang, where all of the matter and energy in the Universe originated. The story of these eight thresholds is told over ten units. Within each unit is a series of four to ten lessons broken down into articles, videos, infographics, and activities that reinforce key concepts and develop critical skills. All this is tied together with classroom rituals and routines that facilitate engagement and learning throughout the journey. Every unit includes a guide that walks through the key ideas, vocabulary, possible student misconceptions, lesson plans, and assessments. For a more detailed look at course structure and contents, download the course guide.

What planning and instructional resources are available to teachers?

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

- More than 40 ready-to-teach lesson plans.
- Example course plans from a variety of grade levels, school types, disciplinary approaches, and classroom profiles.
- Teaching guides and supplementary PowerPoint decks.
- A robust online community of educators and experts available to answer questions and share lessons, activities, and instructional strategies.
- Project-based learning (PBL) activities such as Unit 5's Invent a Species, and Unit 7's How Many People Could the Earth Support Now and 100 Years from Now?
- Investigations, which are writing activities that help frame some of the big issues tackled in each unit, designed to cultivate critical ELA, research, and persuasive writing skills.
- Score, a free essay-scoring service that empowers students with real-time writing feedback, and provides teachers with classroom- and student-level reports on Investigation writing activities. This frees up teachers' time for more personalized student instruction.
- Videos with captions and transcripts, complex texts, animations, comic books, infographics, interactive classroom activities, leveled readings, audio readings, and more, thus accommodating a variety of learning and instructional styles.

What assessments are included in the course?

The course gives teachers many opportunities to review student work both formally and informally. All assessments are optional and to be used at the teacher's discretion. Assessment tools include:

- Rubrics to guide student writing, presentations, and PBL projects.
- Lesson-closing activities such as exit cards, group discussions, peer reviews, and essays,
- Practice-question sets available at the end of each lesson and in end-of-term exams.
- Formal writing activities such as Investigation essays and research papers, which research shows help improve student writing proficiency over the duration of the course. Download our research report to see the results.

What is Score?

For students to really understand how to write well, they need lots of quality feedback on their work. This takes a lot of time that teachers often don't have. That's why we developed Score, a free service that provides immediate feedback on student writing for the course's nine Investigation writing assignments. Score is not a replacement for teachers, but a formative tool that helps students improve as they write, and which provides teachers with the information and time they need to help individual students. Score uses the Revision Assistant machine scoring engine from Turnitin. It's been "trained" against the OER Project Writing Rubric. So, rather than waiting days or weeks for results, students get immediate feedback that helps them understand and implement the expectations of the rubric as they write. To learn more, check out the Score Guide.

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

At BHP, we like to say we're investing in teachers, not textbooks. That's why we offer so many ways to support and connect teachers through the BHP journey. Teacher supports include:

Teaching Big History online PD

Teaching Big History online professional development is created and moderated by master BHP teachers. Access online any time and move at your own pace through sessions that build course knowledge and skills and get you up and running quickly.

Check out Teaching Big History.

OER Project Teacher Community

The OER Project Teacher Community is the online meeting place of veteran Big History Project teachers, new teachers, and content and technical specialists. In this vibrant community, teachers from around the world connect to ask and answer questions, share lessons and success stories, and start or join conversations about teaching and learning.

Ongoing PD

Regional professional learning consortiums (PLCs) occur throughout the year to provide schools and educators face-to-face professional development, implementation guidance, and direct assistance. Schedules are emailed to registered teachers and posted in the Teacher Community.

We also conduct frequent live PD virtual sessions. These hour-long seminars are designed to help on-board new teachers and help familiarize you with a specific topic in the course.

Check out our professional development schedule here.

Do I have to teach the entire curriculum?

Because the essential thinking and reading and writing skills build on each other throughout the course, the best way to teach Big History is to teach the whole course. 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
- Score essay scoring and reporting
- Access to core project team for support, assistance, and feedback

How does the course align to existing standards?

The Big History Project course is designed to align with the CCSS ELA, C3, and NGSS standards. Check out our Planning Resources hub to find out how BHP aligns to your state's social studies and ELA standards. If you don't see your state listed, choose a state that you know shares similar standards with your own. We're rapidly adding new states so check back soon.

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, mission, and infrastructure. Example course plans are available representing a wide variety of teaching environments and school types:

- 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 activities in BHP allow 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 ready-to-deploy PBL activities in Unit 5, Unit 7, and Unit 10.
- IB Program compatibility: BHP works well in an IB context, and we've even developed an IB course plan to get you started.
- If you're looking for a high-school world history curriculum, check out one of our free, online World History Project course offerings: Origins to the Present, 1200 to the Present, and 1750 to the Present

OER Project Teacher Community: The OER Project Online Teacher Community is active, open, and brings together the collective wisdom and support of thousands of helpful people. Here you will find groups dedicated to specific OER Project courses, grade levels, and interests.

Live and virtual professional development: Several opportunities for live, virtual professional development are also available throughout the school year. The OER Conference for the Social Studies brings together thousands of educators, historians, experts, influencers, authors, and more to discuss education challenges and ideas for K–12. OER Project also offers several live, virtual professional development sessions aligned to the courses and curricula. These sessions help teachers get familiar with our tools and courses and get ready to use them in the classroom. All these professional-development options are freely available and accessible online and are approved for clock hours in most US states.

Coming soon—Teaching Climate Project: in 2023, additional immediate support will be available in our online professional development course for teachers *and administrators*. It is aligned with the Climate Project curriculum and includes easy-to-follow training videos, examples, and advice *from fellow educators* to get up and running quickly and continue your development on your terms.