

History – GCSE Curriculum Overview (Years 10–11)

Curriculum Intent

At GCSE, students build on the disciplinary skills and historical understanding developed at Key Stage 3 to explore how power, authority, society and identity have changed over time. Through the study of Elizabethan England, twentieth-century Germany, migration to Britain and the American West, students deepen their understanding of cause and consequence, change and continuity, significance and interpretation. The course is carefully sequenced across two years to support the development of increasingly sophisticated historical thinking, moving students from narrative understanding towards confident analysis, evaluation and judgement. By the end of the course, students are well prepared for linear GCSE examinations and for further study in History and related subjects.

What Students Will Study Across the Course

Autumn Term, Year 10 – Elizabethan England

Students begin the GCSE course by returning to themes first developed at Key Stage 3, particularly power, authority, religion and exploration, through a depth study of Elizabethan England. They examine the challenges Elizabeth I faced on her accession, including succession, government, finance and religion, and assess how effectively she responded to threats to her rule. The unit also explores challenges at home and abroad, including Catholic plots and relations with Spain, before examining Elizabethan society in the context of exploration and expansion. This unit establishes key GCSE themes of stability and instability, change and continuity, and interpretation within an early modern context.

Spring–Summer, Year 10 – Weimar and Nazi Germany

Students then apply these themes to a very different context by studying Germany between 1918 and 1939. Building on their understanding of power and authority, they explore how democracy can fail and dictatorship can emerge. Students examine the impact of the First World War, the strengths and weaknesses of the Weimar Republic, and the political, economic and social pressures it faced. This leads into a detailed study of Hitler's rise to power, the establishment of a Nazi dictatorship, and everyday life under Nazi rule. The unit deepens students' understanding of causation, propaganda, control, resistance and conformity, while developing their ability to analyse interpretations and reach supported judgements.

Autumn Term, Year 11 – Migration to Britain, c800–present

Building on earlier thematic work at Key Stage 3 and ideas explored in Year 10, students broaden their understanding by studying migration to Britain over time. They explore why people migrated, how migrants were received, and how experiences changed and remained the same across different periods. Case studies from the medieval period, the early modern era, the Industrial Revolution and modern Britain allow students to examine the long-term impact of migration on British society, economy and culture. This unit strengthens students' ability to identify patterns across time, make comparisons and evaluate continuity and change.

Spring Term, Year 11 – The American West, 1835–95

Building on their study of migration to Britain, students then apply their understanding of migration, power and conflict to a new geographical setting through a study of the American West. They explore why people migrated west and how this movement of people reshaped lives, land and power forever. Students examine the push and pull factors behind westward expansion and consider how it transformed the lives of Indigenous peoples and permanently altered the landscape. The unit is a powerful story of ambition and loss, opportunity and injustice, innovation and destruction, showing how cultures collided and how progress often came with profound consequences. Through this study, students deepen their understanding of migration, conflict and change, and reflect on how the consequences of expansion continue to resonate today.

Summer Term, Year 11 – Consolidation and Preparation for GCSE Examinations

In the Summer term of Year 11, curriculum time is deliberately structured to consolidate learning from across

the course. Students revisit core themes including power, authority, migration, conflict and change, and practise applying their knowledge across different historical contexts and question types. Teaching during this phase focuses on refining exam technique, strengthening recall and deepening understanding through targeted practice, ensuring students are confident, secure and fully prepared for their GCSE examinations.

Assessment and Progression

GCSE students are assessed throughout the course through regular exam-style questions, knowledge checks and teacher-assessed practice papers. Assessment is designed to support progress over time and to prepare students for linear GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11. By the completion of the course, students will have developed strong analytical and evaluative skills, a secure understanding of key historical periods and themes, and the ability to construct well-supported historical arguments, preparing them for post-16 study and informed citizenship.