

Contemporary Issues Syllabus (2026–2027)

Instructor: Mr. Zachery Peppers

Course: Contemporary Issues

School: Cosby High School

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Preferred Contact Method: ParentSquare

Learning Platforms: Microsoft Canvas, ASPEN

Course Description

Contemporary Issues is an inquiry-based social studies course in which students examine local, state, national, and global events. Students analyze current events through multiple credible news sources, evaluate evidence, identify bias and perspective, conduct research, and communicate conclusions through writing, discussion, debates, and projects. The course emphasizes media literacy, civic engagement, and respectful civil discourse.

Course Outcomes

By the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

- Analyze current events using multiple credible news sources.
- Compare reporting from multiple news organizations.
- Differentiate fact, opinion, evidence, and bias.
- Summarize and paraphrase news articles accurately.
- Evaluate credibility of primary and secondary sources.
- Construct evidence-based arguments.
- Participate respectfully in discussions and debates.
- Connect current events to history, government, economics, geography, and civics.
- Research contemporary issues and propose informed solutions.

Curriculum Standards

Instruction follows the [Tennessee Academic Standards for Social Studies](#). Standards-based instruction and assessments are used throughout the school year to monitor student progress and ensure mastery of required course competencies.

Materials & Instructional Resources

Students should bring a charged Chromebook and daily writing utensils to class. Resources used may include CNN 10, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, Ground News, The Newport Plain Talk, Associated Press, Reuters, PBS News, NPR, local Tennessee news outlets, official government publications, Microsoft Canvas, and other reputable news sources compliant with state law on

adopted materials.

Platform	Purpose
Microsoft Canvas	Assignments, study guides, digital resources, project submissions, and classroom announcements.
ParentSquare	Parent and teacher communication.
ASPEN	Official district grade posting, attendance tracking, and academic reporting.

Daily Classroom Routine

- **Bell Ringer:** Entry activity and reflection prompt.
- **News of the Day:** Multimedia review of current local, national, or international stories.
- **Discussion & Analysis:** Evaluating primary/secondary news sources and perspectives.
- **Reflection, Project, or Research Activity:** Guided practice, group work, debate, or writing.
- **Closure / Exit Ticket:** Daily synthesis and formative check.

Assessment & Grading Policy

Student performance is evaluated using clear rubrics and structured assessment categories.

Category	Weight	Description
Daily Work	40%	Reflections, debates, article summaries, paraphrasing, classroom discussions, source analysis, and Canvas activities. Assignments include explicit expectations and due dates.
Weekly Project/Quiz	40%	Weekly current events projects or quizzes covering the week's major news stories, media literacy skills, and class discussions. Rubrics are provided in advance for all projects.
Nine Weeks Test	20%	Comprehensive assessment administered at the end of

Category	Weight	Description
		each grading period covering major events, concepts, and media literacy skills learned.

Current Events Reflection Rubric (20 Points Total)

Criteria	Points	Expectation
Summary	5	Accurately summarizes the central facts of the news event in original words.
Evidence	5	Supports key points using direct facts, quotes, or data from credible sources.
Analysis	5	Explains why the event matters and connects it to civics, economics, or history.
Writing Quality	5	Demonstrates clarity, proper grammar, appropriate mechanics, and original expression.

Grade Posting Policy

Student grades will be updated regularly in **ASPEN** (the official district grade reporting system) as well as Microsoft Canvas. Parents and students are encouraged to monitor ASPEN frequently.

Make-Up Work & Late Work Policy

Students who are absent have five (5) school days, or one week, from the date they return to school to complete and submit make-up work unless other arrangements have been approved by the instructor, following Cocke County School Board guidelines. Interactive activities such as debates or discussions may be replaced with an alternate written assignment.

General Expectations & Civil Discourse

Discussion & Debate Norms

- Respect everyone regardless of differing viewpoints.

- Critique ideas, not people.
- Support claims with evidence whenever possible.
- Listen actively before responding.
- Be open to new information and perspectives.
- Use school-appropriate language.
- Participate professionally and respectfully. Healthy disagreement is encouraged; disrespect is not.

Attendance Policy

Regular attendance is vital to student success in an interactive course. Students are expected to attend class daily and on time in accordance with Cocke County Schools Board Attendance Policy.

Honor Code, PBIS & Reward Trips

Students are expected to adhere to the school Honor Code and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) plan. Demonstrating integrity, respect, and positive behavior is required for student privileges, including eligibility for reward trips and extracurricular activities.

District & Board Policies

Academic Integrity, Plagiarism & Generative AI

Students are expected to complete their own work. AI tools may only be used when specifically authorized by the instructor. Work copied from another student, copied directly from a source without attribution, or generated entirely by AI when not permitted is strictly prohibited.

According to the *Harbrace Handbook, 15th edition*:

Plagiarism is defined as "presenting someone else's ideas, research, or opinions as your own without proper documentation, even if it has been rephrased." This includes but is not limited to:

- Copying verbatim all or part of another's written work;
- Using phrases, figures, or illustrations without citing the source;
- Paraphrasing ideas, conclusions, or research without citing the source;
- Using all or part of a literary plot, poem, or film without attributing the work to its creator.

Consequences of Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a form of stealing and academic fraud. Students who are found guilty of plagiarism have the option of either redoing the assignment within a specified time period and accepting a letter drop or taking a zero on the assignment. Parents are to be involved in making this decision.

Religion in the Classroom

The Board affirms that it is essential that the teaching about religion — and not of a religion — be conducted in a factual, objective, and respectful manner in accordance with the following guidelines:

Cocke County Board Policy 4.804:

Educational content which consists of religious themes shall be presented in a factual, objective,

and respectful manner in accordance with the following guidelines:

1. Religious themes may be a part of the curriculum for school-sponsored activities and programs provided it is essential to the learning experience in the various fields of study and is presented objectively.
2. The inclusion of religion shall be for educational purposes only.
3. The emphasis on religious themes should be only as extensive as necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study of the curriculum. Such studies shall never be used to proselytize, establish, foster, or demean any particular religion, religious tenets, or beliefs.
4. Student-initiated expressions to questions or assignments which reflect their beliefs or non-beliefs about a religious theme shall be accommodated.

Flagged Objectionable Content & Alternative Assignments

If a student or parent/guardian finds any assigned instructional content, current events article, or material objectionable, please contact the instructor. Procedures will be provided to request an equitable alternative assignment that fulfills the same academic standard without penalty.

Student Support & Intervention

Students needing additional academic support, writing help, or assignment assistance can access intervention opportunities before or after school by appointment, as well as during designated classroom intervention times.

Course Pacing Guide

- **1st Nine Weeks:** Media literacy, evaluating sources, fact vs. opinion, bias, current events analysis, civil discourse.
- **2nd Nine Weeks:** Government, elections, public policy, civic engagement, debates and civil arguments.
- **3rd Nine Weeks:** Economics, technology, AI, healthcare, education, energy, infrastructure.
- **4th Nine Weeks:** Global issues, international affairs, capstone research project and presentation.

Course Philosophy

This course is not designed to tell students what to think. It is designed to teach students how to think critically by evaluating evidence, comparing perspectives, asking questions, and communicating informed conclusions based on credible information.