

Growing a Nation: The Story of American Agriculture

Debra Spielmaker
Utah State University

Growing a Nation: The Story of American Agriculture is an interactive multimedia program that utilizes innovative technology that links to online teacher resources and complements existing American history textbooks and high school history curricula. Educators can use *Growing a Nation* to teach about agricultural inventions that have positively changed and influenced the lives of all Americans—their culture, economy and quality of life.

Growing a Nation was developed to assist with agricultural literacy efforts as an innovation for teaching using technology and research-based teaching strategies and processes. The program investigates why and how agriculture has shaped America and Americans our high standard of living, and quality of life. The program further explores indicators that contribute to American history and America's emergence as a superpower including agricultural innovations, America's geography, policies, and free market economy.

American History, or U.S. Studies as it is called in some states, is a required course for high school graduation. In United States History I (a required course, usually taught in 8th grade) nearly one-third of the objectives are agricultural in nature. In United States History II (11th grade) 35% of the objectives include agricultural concepts and competency indicators. For the most part, teachers have had very little training in the area of agriculture as it relates to the identified National Standards. This program provides teachers with resources to increase content knowledge about agriculture as it relates to U.S. History National Standards.

Growing a Nation's chronological presentation of significant historical events focuses on the important role agriculture has played in America's development. Students gain an appreciation of our agricultural history and how agricultural events have affected our lives in America today. Statistical data are supplied to analyze trends or allow students a look into the future. The program's resources can be further enhanced by using the *Growing a Nation Instructional Unit* (online, free download). The website provides educators with classroom resources and activities including: primary sources, assessment options, an easily navigated timeline, photo gallery, and the national standards met by this program.

Growing a Nation has been designed as a flexible resource for secondary United States history courses. The "Story of American Agriculture" has been broken into four lessons, and the poster will showcase these lessons:

- Lesson 1: 1600—1929, Seeds of Change
- Lesson 2: 1930—1949, From Defeat to Victory
- Lesson 3: 1950—1969, Prosperity & Challenges
- Lesson 4: 1970—Present, Into a New Millennium

The CD is not designed to be used as a student tutorial or to be viewed as a full-featured movie. It is recommended that screens from particular historical time periods be used throughout the year. *Growing a Nation* works seamlessly with textbooks as screens have been designed to "stand alone" and mesh with historical content. The multimedia program is intended as a

teaching tool to aid teacher-led discussions or to facilitate learning in small cooperative learning groups.

Each lesson includes several screens that, with the use of multimedia, engage students in the story. The program runs in Flash® and can be viewed or downloaded from the website. *Growing a Nation* features a total of 44 screens of historical content, told as the story of American agriculture, and 257 embedded resources. Each slide contains embedded resources that add content and meaningful questions that foster group dialogue and interaction. The program can be employed in a variety of ways to suit specific educational goals: by turning the audio off, isolating screens for a particular time period, or selecting only the embedded resources. The audio narration can be turned off to access embedded resources more quickly. Screen narration can be accessed by clicking on the dropdown arrow in the upper left hand corner of each screen. The “Menu” button will navigate the user through the lessons while the “Index” button will display the screen titles in each lesson. Screens can be launched in any order from the Index menu. The screen icons are used in the program as navigation tools. The poster will highlight these features.

The Instructional Unit contains all of the *Growing a Nation* narratives and Embedded Resource texts, images, and questions. The Embedded Resource Cards also identify U.S. History Standards content. Like the *Growing a Nation* CD, the Instructional Unit has been divided into four lessons. Each lesson uses the Embedded Resources with a variety of suggested teaching strategies to enhance historical understanding. Embedded Resource activities and other activities included in the lessons can be used independently from the *Growing a Nation* program.

Growing a Nation: The Story of American Agriculture was honored with an Association of Educational Publishers 2006 Distinguished Achievement Award. *Growing a Nation* received its award in the technology category by being named the best young adult social studies program of the year. Other Distinguished Achievement Award winners in 2006 for technology products included software produced by such renowned electronic publishers as PLATO Learning Inc., Scholastic Inc., Discovery Education, and the National Geographic Society.

The *Growing a Nation* project is dynamic. Several classroom resources such as a photo gallery, historical timeline, and audio and video media can currently be streamed from the site. Teacher resources are continually added and updated. A Utah State University online course, using *Growing a Nation: The Story of American Agriculture* is currently under development.

References

National Center for History in the Schools, National Standards (Online: <http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/us-standards5-12.html>, 2005)

Growing a Nation: The Story of American Agriculture (Online: www.agclassroom.org/gan, 2006).

United States Department of Agriculture (Online: www.agclassroom.org, 2006)

All statistics and primary sources are sourced within the “Growing a Nation” program; over 200 sources are used, too many to list here. To check the sources, go to this website http://www.agclassroom.org/gan/classroom/index_embed.htm and open each lesson to see the resources cited.