Incorporating Turkey into World History and Civilization Courses:  
Meeting Indiana DoE Educational Standards

The Turkish Flagship Center at Indiana University encourages teachers to introduce Turkey and its rich history in their middle- and high-school classrooms. As demonstrated in the following resource, the history of the Anatolian peninsula, from ancient times through the present, enhances students’ understanding of wider historical periods and concepts and meets the State of Indiana’s Educational Standards for World History and Civilization courses. Teachers outside of Indiana may also find this resource useful.

WH Standard 1: Ancient Cultures and Civilizations

Agriculture, Early River Valley Civilizations, Early Empires (WH.1.1 – WH.1.4)

Modern-day Turkey was home to some of the world’s most ancient civilizations, including the Minoan (3650-1450 BCE along the Aegean coast), Hattian (2700-1650 BCE in central and Eastern Anatolia), Hittite (1600-1168 BCE, central and Eastern Anatolia), Phoenician (1500-539 BCE along the Mediterranean coast), and Mycenaean Greek (1600-1100 BCE, along the Aegean). These early agricultural peoples traded with nearby Mesopotamia, adopted cuneiform, and worshipped distinct deities. In the 1860’s, archaeologists Frank Calvert and Heinrich Schliemann began excavations near Çanakkale (at the Straits of the Dardanelles) on what would later be confirmed as the ancient city of Troy. The Greeks’ siege of the city during the Trojan War (1194–1184 BCE) was immortalized by Homer in his Iliad.

WH Standard 2: Classical Civilization

The Greeks, Alexander the Great, the Romans, and Early Christianity (WH.2.3 – WH.2.9)

When Alexander the Great defeated Darius III’s Achaemenid Empire (also known as First Persian Empire, 550-330 BCE), all of modern-day Turkey was subsumed by the Hellenic Empire. The Seleucids, one of Alexander the Great’s four successor empires, ruled Anatolia until 188 BCE, when Rome granted control of the region to two allies, the Kingdom of Pergamum and the Republic of Rhodes. Roman influence grew over the centuries, culminating in the establishment of the Eastern Roman Empire with its capital at Byzantium/Constantinople, now Istanbul.

Greek and Roman ruins are prominent along Turkey’s Aegean and Mediterranean coastlines and further eastward, near present-day Georgia (home of Jason’s Golden Fleece) and Armenia. Ephesus, in Western Anatolia, is one of the best-preserved classical cities in the region. It was home to the now-destroyed Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, and houses the Celsius Library, the third-richest library of the ancient world after those in Alexandria (in Egypt) and Pergamon (nearby, in Western Turkey). Ephesus was also a center of early Christianity, and is said to have been the home of Mary, mother of Jesus, at the end of her life.
WH Standard 3: Major Civilizations and Cultural Interactions

The Silk Road Trade Network (WH 3.1)

The term “Silk Road” refers to a network of transportation routes that stretched across Eurasia, including in modern-day China, Mongolia, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, the Central Asian Republics, and Turkey. This network facilitated the exchange of people, things, and ideas over the centuries. The Silk Road that Venetian merchant Marco Polo traveled was established during China’s Han Dynasty (1300’s CE), but important trade routes crossed Anatolia much earlier. The Acheamenid Empire’s Persian Royal Road led through Anatolia prior to 350 BCE, and centuries before Polo, monks had introduced silk cocoons to the Byzantine Empire. The crucial routes connecting Asia and Europe were located in what is now Turkey, and the Byzantines and later the Ottomans were enriched and empowered by their strategic location along the Road. Chinese technologies such as paper and gunpowder were arguably more influential than the silk and spices that characterize modern imaginings of the Silk Road trade.

The Byzantine Empire, Eastern and Western Christianity (WH.3.2- WH.3.3)

The Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire was established in 330 CE. The Empire’s official adoption of Orthodox Christianity and of Greek language distinguished it from the Western Romans. The Byzantines not only survived the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 CE, but expanded to encompass historically Roman territories in Italy, Spain, Egypt and Northern Africa, Greece, the Balkans, and the Levant in the following century. By the 1100’s, the Empire’s territory had shrunken considerably, but Constantinople was still the largest and wealthiest city in Europe. The Byzantine Empire declined after the traumatic sacking of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204 CE). However, the city remained the center of Orthodox Christianity, influential to Orthodox communities in Eastern and Southern Europe and the Middle East.

The Rise and Spread of Islam (WH.3.4 – WH.3.5)

After the death of Muhammad, Islam spread across the Middle East, North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula. By 900 CE, it had spread across Central Asia, where it was adopted by many Turkic peoples, who brought it with them as they slowly migrated westward into Anatolia. In 1299, Osman “Gazi” (“warrior for Islam”) was partly inspired by his faith to found the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans became a self-proclaimed Caliphate (Islamic state), and when they conquered Egypt and the Mamluk Empire in 1517, they gained control over Islam’s holiest cities, Mecca and Medina. This aided their acceptance as the de facto Caliphate representing Islam and Muslims around the world. For centuries, the Ottoman state conducted itself according to the principles of Islamic law, which guaranteed the protection of Christians, Jews, and other religious minorities within its borders.
WH Standard 4: The Rise of Western Civilization and Global Interaction

The Ottoman Empire as Gunpowder Empire and Absolute Monarchy (WH.4.7 – WH.4.8)
The Ottoman Empire (1299-1923 CE) was one of the most successful empires in Eurasia. At its peak, this multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-linguistic Empire subsumed most of Southeast Europe, Western Asia, the Caucasus, and North Africa. The Ottomans conquered Constantinople in 1453 CE and their military advances into southern and central Europe reached as far as modern-day Hungary. In its decline (especially after 1750 CE), the Ottoman Empire became known as the “Sick Man of Europe.” It succumbed to increasing influence by Europe’s great powers, and lost territory to European-backed nationalist movements in the Balkans and the Middle East.

WH Standard 6: Era of Global Conflicts, Challenges, Controversies, & Changes

Major Events and Consequences of World War I (WH.6.1)
The Ottoman Empire fought with the Central Powers in World War I. Between April 1915 and January 1916, the Ottomans fought off Allied advances at the Dardanelles Straits in the Battle of Gallipoli. They faced British and then newly-formed ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand) forces and succeeded in protecting Allied advances to Istanbul and, ultimately, the Black Sea, which would have opened a much-needed sea route to Russia. With the Central Powers’ defeat, what remained of the Ottoman Empire was divided among several victorious powers (Britain, France, Greece, and Armenia), prompting a rise in Turkish national consciousness and the Turkish War of Independence (1920-1923 CE).

Current Global Issues: Migration (WH.6.11)
Turkey is an excellent context in which to study human migration in the 20th and 21st centuries. The Turkish War of Independence resulted in the 1923 Greek-Turkish population exchange, which displaced 2 million people. In the period following World War II, Turkey welcomed more than 1 million more Muslim refugees from the Balkans, and today, between one fourth and one third of Turkish citizens claim Balkan heritage. In the 1960s and 1970s, large numbers of Turkish laborers migrated to Germany and Western Europe. In the 1980’s, Turkey welcomed half a million Kurdish refugees from Iraq, and hundreds of thousands of ethnic Turks from the former Soviet Union and eastern bloc countries arrived in the 1990’s. Today, the country is home to more Syrian refugees (3 million+) than any other country.