



Specification language changes: FAQs (updated Nov 2023)

- **Why are you making these changes?**

In 2021, we commissioned a review of our GCSE History specification to identify opportunities for more inclusive histories. The review focused on content issues, but it also raised issues about language use in the specification.

In 2022, we commissioned a review by [Treated Spaces](#) of our American West period study; again the focus was on content selection but language issues were also raised.

Any content amendments will await next reform, but, on the back of the recommendations contained in these two reports, we have decided to proceed with making language changes to the current specification.

- **Who did you consult with?**

We drafted a list of proposed language changes, and consulted with a range of teachers and other voices in the History teaching community, including our History advisory panel.

A big thank you to everyone we spoke to for your help in developing and refining these proposals.

- **When do these changes take effect? When will we see updated Specification and Sample Assessment Materials?**

The changes appear in Issue 4 of the Specification and take effect for **first teaching September 2023** and **first assessment June 2025**.

Issue 4 of the Specification and Sample Assessment Materials were released in early September 2023.

Issue 3 of the specification will continue to apply for the June 2024 exam series.

- **Why didn't you wait till next specification reform?**

We thought carefully about holding off on the language changes until reform – when we will be making content changes to reflect the need for us to offer more diverse and inclusive histories – but concluded that they are important and didn't want to postpone making them until an unconfirmed later date.

We also think that teachers and students will be able to get to grips with these language changes, providing we approach their implementation with care.

Words matter, and important principles lie behind the changes we are making, even where the change itself is minor.

- **Are you making any changes to content?**

No. The focus of the changes has been on language only.

- **What were the criteria for making these changes? Why aren't you making more changes at this point?**

The focus of the changes has been on language only.

Content changes can be challenging for teachers and students mid-cycle, and the last few years have already been heavily disrupted. The aim therefore has been to set a high bar for language changes, to ensure they involve **no actual or perceived content changes**.

Any content amendments will be implemented at next reform, so that we have time to research, develop and test them properly.

The senior examiners are already reflecting these language changes in the indicative content in mark schemes.



- **What changes are you making? Which options are affected?**

The most significant changes concern the terms **slaves**, **Indians** and **Native Americans**. These terms appear in three Period studies: P1 Spain and the ‘New World’, P2 British America, and P3 The American West.

Other changes are being made to these options and to other options as well. The impact on these six other options is very minor, but important principles lie behind them. Eight options are unaffected. (In a few places we are also making very minor amendments to be consistent with our editorial ‘house style’.)

Options with changes:

- 10 Whitechapel, c1870–c1900: crime, policing and the city (Crime HE) (minor)
- 13 Migrants in Britain, c800–present (very minor)
- B2 The reigns of King Richard I and King John, 1189–1216 (very minor)
- B4 Early Elizabethan England, 1558–88 (very minor)
- P1 Spain and the ‘New World’, c1490–c1555
- P2 British America, 1713–83: empire and revolution
- P3 The American West, c1835–c1895
- 31 Weimar and Nazi Germany, 1918–39 (very minor)
- 33 The USA, 1954–75: conflict at home and abroad (very minor)

- **Why are you changing from Indians to Indigenous peoples? Why are you using a capital I?**

It’s now conventional for historians to use Indigenous to signal the international status of America’s original inhabitants and their continuing survivance.

“Names matter... For Indigenous peoples, who have been historically oppressed, marginalised and insulted, names matter even more. This is not just a question of respect, but also an intentional push against colonial attempts to erase Indigenous identities, and to obliterate their languages and beliefs, through deliberate cultural genocide. ... Indigenous beliefs and practices were prohibited, and Native communities uprooted and deliberately acculturated. ... For survivors and descendants, and their communities, the violence of colonisation remains very real...”

Caroline Dodds Pennock, ‘Why Words Matter’, in *On Savage Shores*, pp.xiii–xvi

Many people across North America still identify as Indian or Native American, but only Indigenous is seen as relatively neutral; it’s also the UN’s favoured term. Plains Indians is a largely non-Indigenous demarcation, a broad geographical designation that works to lump discrete populations together and homogenize the variety of historical experience and approach of differing groups.

We recognise also that it’s best to use the names of specific tribal groups or individuals, rather than present Indigenous peoples as an “undifferentiated mass” – this is something we intend to embed into our content at next reform.

The use of the capital I “reflects preferred practice in articulating a political identity for a diverse group of sovereign communities that face common challenges as a legacy of colonialism” (ibid.).

The Paper 3 USA option now capitalises Black for a similar reason.

- **Why are you changing from slaves to enslaved people?**

This is to reflect the person’s lack of freedom and personal rights, separating out the humanity of the person from what was done to them. The term ‘slaves’ fails to acknowledge the coercive condition, objectifies the people who were enslaved and disregards their perspectives.

Terms such as slavery and slave trade are not being changed at this point.



This change reflects contemporary practice, e.g.

- Liverpool Museum’s [transatlantic slave trade online exhibition](#)
- Museum of London Docklands’ [London, Sugar and Slavery online exhibition](#)
- National Trust’s [colonial and historic slavery report](#)
- Nottingham Museums’ [glossary on slavery and racial terminology](#) (this glossary goes further in its recommendations)

- **Why are you removing the hyphen from the word antisemitism?**

This reflects academic practice. The hyphen allows for the idea of ‘Semitism’, which was a pseudo-scientific racial classification. Removing the hyphen clarifies the meaning of antisemitism as ‘prejudice against or hatred of Jews’.

See, for example,

- Centre for Holocaust Education’s [etymology of antisemitism](#)
- US Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://www.ushmm.org/antisemitism/what-is-antisemitism>
- International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/antisemitism/spelling-antisemitism>

- **Why are you changing Jews to Jewish people in two places but not elsewhere?**

In two places (Paper 1 Whitechapel and Paper 3 Germany) we have changed ‘Jews’/‘the Jews’ to ‘Jewish people’ – this is to acknowledge in these two instances that attacks were experienced by individual people as well as their being directed against the community as a whole.

Outside of these two specific occasions, we have not changed the names of groups to “xxx people” – we think this quickly becomes unwieldy (e.g. in the lists of migrant groups in Migrants in Britain).

- **Why are you putting Kristallnacht in quote marks in the Germany option?**

In Germany, we have also put the term ‘Kristallnacht’ in quote marks. The term which is uncertain in origin is thought to have originated amongst ordinary Germans, describing the destruction and broken glass of Jewish properties, and was then appropriated by the regime. In its origins therefore it was adopted as the language of perpetration and is not felt to accurately reflect the violence, murders and antisemitic persecution that took place across Germany on these days in 1938. The quote marks are intended to reflect this.

It is increasingly being referred to as the November Pogrom ‘Kristallnacht’, following the approach taken by German educators, and the topic booklet exemplification is being updated to reflect this.

- **Why are you changing ‘gypsies’ to Roma and Sinti in the Weimar and Nazi Germany option? Does this affect the Migrants in Britain option too?**

Roma people trace their heritage back to north-west India.

Sinti are hereditary nomads who don’t claim that heritage.

Both groups live in mainland Europe and were persecuted by the Nazis.

There are no changes to Paper 1 Migrants in Britain – Romani Gypsies (mentioned in the topic booklet but not the specification) is the preferred term for this group living in England in the early modern period.



- **Apart from Indigenous peoples, what other changes are you making to P3 The American West? The option's content contains a dominant American settler perspective, why isn't this changing now?**

The following changes are also being made:

- Changing **way of life** to **ways of life** – to recognise the many ways of life that existed among Indigenous peoples on the Plains
- Adding quote marks to **'Permanent Indian Frontier'** – this was not an official term (cf. 1851 Indian Appropriations Act) but a contested concept
- Changing **Conflict with the Plains Indians** to **Conflict on the Plains** – to remove the implied settler/government perspective to how the content is approached
- Changing Key topic 3 heading from **Conflicts and conquest** to **Later developments in the West** – conquest is a contested term in this context.

We considered further changes but thought they would imply content changes.

There is no content change implied in pluralising ways of life. It is simply to recognise that there was no one way of life for Indigenous peoples. We do not expect teachers or students to approach this content any differently (beyond recognising this fact).

The dominant American settler perspective is something that can't be addressed effectively without making content changes, and we will address this at next reform. The same applies to the Spanish perspective in P1 Spain and the 'New World'.

- **What about terms like the Indian Appropriations Act (1851) in American West, and the French and Indian War (1754–63) in British America?**

The Indian Appropriations Act (1851), the 'Permanent Indian Frontier' (both American West), and the French and Indian War (1754–63) (British America) are the only instances where the term Indian is still used.

We have not changed the term Indian Appropriations Act as it was an Act of Congress; this was the name it was given at the time, and teachers should continue to use it. (It is outside the specification, but the Indian Removal Act of 1830 would be a similar example.)

Any relevant question in a future exam paper will use the term – for example, Q3 in 2020 would now read:

The importance of the Indian Appropriations Act (1851) for the ways of life of Indigenous peoples of the Plains (Plains Indians).

'Permanent Indian Frontier' has been put in quote marks because it is a contested concept rather than an official term.

The French and Indian War is the standard name given to this war in the United States, as it was the name originally given to it by British colonists; in Europe it is often wrapped up in the Seven Years' War. Arguably it should be renamed, but that is a wider discussion and we have not renamed it here.

The term 'Indian Wars' is not in the specification for either option, though it is used when studying American history from the sixteenth century onwards. Our suggestion is that you place the term in quotation marks.

- **Why are you changing the 'New World' to the Americas in P1 Spain and the 'New World'? And why isn't the title of the option changing?**

It is the geographically accurate term, and removes the Spanish perspective.

We aren't able to change the title of the option at this point for technical reasons.

We have also changed the New World to the Americas in B4 Early Elizabethan England, key topic 2.



- **What will exam questions look like?**

We recognise that some students will need a bit of time to get up-to-speed with one or two of the language changes. We do not want any student to encounter a term they do not know in the exam hall.

To support students, we will provide a transition period, and will **gloss** the term Indigenous peoples – and any other term where glossing will be helpful – in live series from June 2025, for the remainder of the current specification.

Below is an example from the Sample Assessment Materials of what this will look like:

- 2 Write a narrative account analysing the destruction of the traditional ways of life of Indigenous peoples of the Plains (Plains Indians) in the years 1876–c1895.

You may use the following in your answer:

- Battle of Little Big Horn (1876)
- Dawes Act (1887)

You **must** also use information of your own.

- **What about Raleigh’s colony in Virginia in B4 Early Elizabethan England?**

There is no reference to Indigenous peoples in the specification content and we would not use the term in an exam question. However, contact with Indigenous peoples is a key part of the story of the colony in Virginia, and you may wish to update your lesson plans accordingly. It is possible that a stimulus point could refer to Indigenous peoples – if this happens, we will gloss the term in the stimulus point.

- **Can students use the new language, e.g. Indigenous, in the 2024 series? And can they continue to use terms such as Plains Indians in 2025 and beyond?**

In any exam series, **students are credited for any relevant and appropriate ‘terms’ that they use.**

Students are therefore welcome to use, for example, Indigenous, enslaved person or the Americas in the summer 2024 series; students can also continue to use Plains Indians, slave or the New World in the summer 2025 series and beyond.

Over time, our expectation is that teachers and students will move over to the language we are adding to the specification. But we will not penalise any students for using relevant and appropriate ‘terms’ that do not appear in the specification.

- **What about textbooks?**

We have kept **endorsed publishers** (Hodder, OUP, Pearson) notified of the changes that we are making. They will be updating textbooks in due course – most likely at next reprint for each relevant title.

Some published resources already use the term Indigenous, e.g., new KS3 textbooks.

- **What support are you offering?**

As well as this set of FAQs, a document providing the rationale for the changes and a version of the relevant sections of the specification with track changes on to show the amendments are available on the website [here](#) and [here](#).

We ran a live online event on **Tuesday 5 September 2023**, to run through the changes in a bit more detail and for you to ask questions and give us your feedback. Slides from the event can be accessed [here](#).



- **When will your free support materials be updated?**

These are being reviewed and updated, and we will notify you when the changes are complete. Materials affected will include items like the topic booklets.

We have a useful general guide to finding things on the website [here](#).

- **How will these language changes affect my teaching?**

You may wish to consider updating your teaching resources for any options you teach that are affected by these language amendments. You may in particular wish to consider how best to introduce the term Indigenous to your students. For example,

- can you add the term where relevant in your Key Stage 3 teaching?
- do they use the term Indigenous elsewhere, e.g. Key Stage 3 Geography?
- are your students already familiar with the importance of language as part of respecting diversity?
- include it as part of the tier 3 vocabulary instruction?
- discuss the origins and use of the term in an introductory lesson?

- **Are there teachers already using these new language terms? How are students responding?**

Yes, and students have responded well to the change. At the live online event in September we shared the experiences of a couple of teachers who already use the term Indigenous – see slides 25–27 [here](#).

If you have any questions, please contact Mark Battye, our History subject advisor:

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