As you read *The American Republic to 1877*, you will be given help in sorting out all the information you encounter. This textbook organizes the events of your nation’s past and present around 10 themes. A theme is a concept, or main idea that happens again and again throughout history. By recognizing these themes, you will better understand events of the past and how they affect you today.

**Culture and Traditions**
Being aware of cultural differences helps us understand ourselves and others. People from around the world for generations have sung of the “land of the Pilgrims’ pride, land where our fathers died” even though their ancestors arrived on these shores long after these events occurred.

**Continuity and Change**
Recognizing our historic roots helps us understand why things are the way they are today. This theme includes political, social, religious, and economic changes that have influenced the way Americans think and act.

**Geography and History**
Understanding geography helps us understand how humans interact with their environment. The United States succeeded in part because of its rich natural resources and its vast open spaces. In many regions, the people changed the natural landscape to fulfill their wants and needs.
Individual Action
Responsible individuals have often stepped forward to help lead the nation. America’s strong family values helped create such individuals. These values spring in part from earlier times when the home was the center of many activities, including work, education, and daily worship.

Groups and Institutions
Identifying how political and social groups and institutions work helps us work together. From the beginning, Americans formed groups and institutions to act in support of their economic, political, and religious beliefs.

Government and Democracy
Understanding the workings of government helps us become good citizens. Abraham Lincoln explained the meaning of democracy as “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” Democracy, at its best, is “among” the people.

Science and Technology
Americans have always been quick to adopt innovations. The nation was settled and built by people who gave up old ways in favor of new. Americans’ lives are deeply influenced by technology, the use of science and machines. Perhaps no machine has so shaped modern life as the automobile. Understanding the roles of science and technology helps us see their impact on our society and the roles they will play in the future.

Economic Factors
The free enterprise economy of the United States is consistent with the nation’s history of rights and freedoms. Freedom of choice in economic decisions supports other freedoms. Understanding the concept of free enterprise is basic to studying American history.

Global Connections
The world seems smaller than it did only 50 years ago. Modern transportation and communication have brought people around the globe closer together. As a result, countries today are more dependent on one another. As citizens of the United States and members of the global community, we have a responsibility to keep informed about developments in other nations and the world. Being aware of global interdependence helps us make decisions and deal with the difficult issues we will encounter.

Civic Rights and Responsibilities
For a democratic system to survive, its citizens must take an active role in government. The foundation of democracy is the right of every person to take part in government and to voice one’s views on issues. An appreciation for the struggle to preserve these freedoms is vital to the understanding of democracy.

Using the Themes
You will find Section Themes at the beginning of every section of your text. You are asked questions that help you put it all together to better understand how ideas and themes are connected across time—and to see why history is important to you today.