



Leveled Texts for Social Studies

American Biographies



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What Is Differentiation?

Over the past few years, classrooms have evolved into diverse pools of learners. Gifted students, English language learners, special needs students, high achievers, underachievers, and average students all come together to learn from one teacher. The teacher is expected to meet their diverse needs in one classroom. It brings back memories of the one-room schoolhouse during early American history. Not too long ago, lessons were designed to be one size fits all. It was thought that students in the same grade level learned in similar ways. Today, we know that viewpoint to be faulty. Students have differing learning styles, come from different cultures, experience a variety of emotions, and have varied interests. For each subject, they also differ in academic readiness. At times, the challenges teachers face can be overwhelming as they struggle to figure out how to create learning environments that address the differences they find in their students.

What is differentiation? Simply put, differentiation is “a teacher attending to the learning needs of a particular student or small group of students, rather than teaching a class as though all individuals in it were basically alike” (Tomlinson and Allan 2000).

Differentiation can be carried out by any teacher who keeps the learners at the forefront of his or her instruction. The effective teacher asks, “What am I going to do to shape instruction to meet the needs of all my learners?” One method or methodology will not reach all students.

Differentiation encompasses what is taught, how it is taught, and the products students create to show what they have learned. When differentiating curriculum, teachers become the organizers of learning opportunities within the classroom environment. These categories are often referred to as content, process, and product.

- **Content:** Differentiating the content means to put more depth into the curriculum through organizing the curriculum concepts and structure of knowledge.
- **Process:** Differentiating the process requires the use of varied instructional techniques and materials to enhance the learning of students.
- **Product:** When products are differentiated, cognitive development and students’ abilities to express themselves improve.

Teachers should differentiate content, process, and product according to students’ characteristics. These characteristics include students’ readiness, learning styles, and interests.

- **Readiness:** If a learning experience aligns closely with students’ previous skills and understanding of a topic, they will learn better.
- **Learning styles:** Teachers should create assignments that allow students to complete work according to their personal preferences and styles.
- **Interests:** If a topic sparks excitement in the learners, then students will become involved in learning and better remember what is taught.

How to Differentiate Using This Product

The leveled texts in this series help teachers differentiate social studies content for their students. Each book has 15 topics, and each topic has a text written at four different reading levels. (See page 18 for more information.) These texts are written at a variety of reading levels, but all the levels remain strong in presenting the social studies content and vocabulary. Teachers can focus on the same content standard or objective for the whole class, but individual students can access the content at their *instructional* levels rather than at their *frustration* levels.

Determining your students' instructional reading levels is the first step in the process. It is important to assess their reading abilities often so they do not get tracked into one level. Below are suggested ways to use this resource, as well as other resources in your classroom, to determine students' reading levels.

- **Running records:** While your class is doing independent work, pull your below-grade-level students aside, one at a time. Individually have them read aloud the lowest level of a text (the star level) as you record any errors they make on your own copy of the text. If students read accurately, fluently, and comprehend the material, move them up to the next level and repeat the process. Following the reading, ask comprehension questions to assess their understanding of the material. Assess their accuracy and fluency, mark the words they say incorrectly, and listen for fluent reading. Use your judgment to determine whether students seem frustrated as they read. As a general guideline, students reading below 90% accuracy are likely to feel frustrated as they read. There are also a variety of published reading assessment tools that can be used to assess students' reading levels with the running record format.
- **Refer to other resources:** Another way to determine instructional reading levels is to check your students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), ask the school's resource teachers, or review test scores. All of these resources should be able to give you the additional information you need to determine at which reading level to begin your students.

Teachers can also use the texts in this series to scaffold the content for their students. At the beginning of the year, students at the lowest reading levels may need focused teacher guidance. As the year progresses, teachers can begin giving students multiple levels of the same text to allow them to work independently to improve their comprehension. This means each student would have a copy of the text at his or her independent reading level and instructional reading level. As students read the instructional-level texts, they can use the lower texts to better understand the difficult vocabulary. By scaffolding the content in this way, teachers can support students as they move up through the reading levels. This will encourage students to work with texts that are closer to the grade level at which they will be tested.

General Information About the Student Populations

Below-Grade-Level Students

By Dennis Benjamin

Gone are the days of a separate special education curriculum. Federal government regulations require that special needs students have access to the general education curriculum. For the vast majority of special needs students today, their IEPs contain current- and targeted-performance levels but few short-term content objectives. In other words, the special needs students are required to learn the same content objectives as their on-grade-level peers.

Be well aware of the accommodations and modifications written in students' IEPs. Use them in your teaching and assessment so they become routine. If you hold high expectations of success for all of your students, their efforts and performances will rise as well. Remember the root word of *disability* is *ability*. Go to the root of the special needs learner and apply good teaching. The results will astound and please both of you.

English Language Learners

By Marcela von Vacano

Many school districts have chosen the inclusion model to integrate English language learners into mainstream classrooms. This model has its benefits as well as its drawbacks. One benefit is that English language learners may be able to learn from their peers by hearing and using English more frequently. One drawback is that these second-language learners cannot understand academic language and concepts without special instruction. They need sheltered instruction to take the first steps toward mastering English. In an inclusion classroom, the teacher may not have the time or necessary training to provide specialized instruction for these learners.

Acquiring a second language is a lengthy process that integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students who are newcomers to the English language are not able to process information until they have mastered a certain number of structures and vocabulary words. Students may learn social language in one or two years. However, academic language takes up to eight years for most students.

Teaching academic language requires good planning and effective implementation. Pacing, or the rate at which information is presented, is another important component in this process. English language learners need to hear the same word in context several times, and they need to practice structures to internalize the words. Reviewing and summarizing what was taught are absolutely necessary for English language learners.

General Information About the Student Populations *(cont.)*

Oral language proficiency is the first step in the language learning process. Oral language is defined as speaking and listening skills. English language learners are able to attain word level skills (decoding, word recognition, and spelling) regardless of their oral language proficiency. However, an English language learner's ability to comprehend text and to develop writing skills is dependent on his or her oral language proficiency. Therefore, "vocabulary knowledge, listening comprehension, syntactic skills and the ability to handle meta-linguistic aspects of language, such as being able to provide the definitions of words, are linked to English reading and writing proficiency" (August and Shanahan 2006). First language oral proficiency has a positive impact on developmental patterns in second language speech discrimination and production, intra-word segmentation, and vocabulary.

On-Grade-Level Students

By Wendy Conklin

Often, on-grade-level students get overlooked when planning curriculum. More emphasis is usually placed on those who struggle and, at times, on those who excel. Teachers spend time teaching basic skills and even go below grade level to ensure that all students are up to speed. While this is a noble thing and is necessary at times, in the midst of it all, the on-grade-level students can get lost in the shuffle. We must not forget that differentiated strategies are good for the on-grade-level students, too. Providing activities that are too challenging can frustrate these students, and on the other hand, assignments that are too easy can be boring and a waste of their time. The key to reaching this population successfully is to find just the right level of activities and questions while keeping a keen eye on their diverse learning styles.

There are many ways to differentiate for this population. Strategies can include designing activities based on the Multiple Intelligence Theory. Current brain research points to the success of active learning strategies. These strategies provoke strong positive emotions and use movement during the learning process to help these students learn more effectively. On-grade-level students also benefit from direct teaching of higher-level thinking skills. Keep the activities open-ended so that these students can surprise you with all they know. The strategies described on pages 9–17 were specifically chosen because they are very effective for meeting the needs of on-grade-level students as well as special populations.

General Information About the Student Populations *(cont.)*

Above-Grade-Level Students

By Wendy Conklin

In recent years, many state and school district budgets have cut funding that has in the past provided resources for their gifted and talented programs. The push and focus of schools nationwide is proficiency. It is important that students have the basic skills to read fluently, solve math problems, and grasp science concepts. As a result, funding has been redistributed in hopes of improving test scores on state and national standardized tests. In many cases, the attention has focused only on improving low test scores to the detriment of the gifted students who need to be challenged.

Differentiating through the products you require from your students is a very effective and fairly easy way to meet the needs of gifted students. Actually, this simple change to your assignments will benefit all levels of students in your classroom. While some students are strong verbally, others express themselves better through nonlinguistic representation. After reading the texts in this book, students can express their comprehension through different means, such as drawings, plays, songs, skits, or videos. It is important to identify and address different learning styles. By assigning more open-ended assignments, you allow for more creativity and diversity in your classroom. These differentiated products can easily be aligned with content standards. To assess these standards, use differentiated rubrics.

All students should be learning, growing, and expanding their knowledge in school. This includes gifted students, too. But they will not grow and learn unless someone challenges them with appropriate curriculum. Doing this can be overwhelming at times, even for the experienced teacher. However, there are some strategies that teachers can use to challenge the gifted population. These strategies include open-ended questions, student-directed learning, and using tiered assignments. (See pages 16–17 for more information about each of these strategies.)

Strategies for Using the Leveled Texts

Below-Grade-Level Students

By Dennis Benjamin

KWL Chart

Too often, below-grade-level students fall prey to low expectations. In some classrooms, below-grade-level students even buy into this negative mentality. They begin to reply “I don’t know” when they are asked any question. The **KWL** strategy empowers students to take back ownership over their learning. This strategy can be used as a prereading strategy with the texts in this book. **K** stands for What I *Know*. This first part of the process allows students to access prior knowledge and begin to make connections to the new learning about to take place. For example, when asked what they **Know** about American historical figures, students will reply with responses about George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King Jr.

The astute teacher praises the special needs students for how much they know about American historical figures and challenges them with the What Do You *Want* to Know? column. Encourage students to create meaningful questions that cannot be answered with simply *yes* or *no*. Initially the teacher may model the questions, but ultimately students need to generate their own questions, such as *Why were they important?* and *What made them successful?* Now, students have set a purpose for reading nonfiction. The reading is no longer about what the teacher wants or expects. Inquisitive minds have been opened to discover what the texts have to offer.

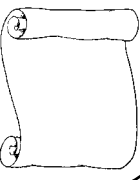
The **L** is for What I *Learned*. After reading, students should get back into groups to complete this third column. Students should then record the answers to the questions they wrote and any important concepts they learned from the text. Some students may benefit from identifying the source of information by writing such terms as text, classroom talk, or homework after each entry. That way, they can remember from where their answers came. Take the time to correct any misconceptions.

Once completed, it is important for the teacher to validate students’ responses as they review the KWL chart. Praise students for all the effort they put into the chart and highlight that they, as the learners, were responsible for its completeness and accuracy. This final step is important to help empower your below-grade-level students and encourage them to care more about their own learning.

Strategies for Using the Leveled Texts (cont.)

Vocabulary Scavenger Hunt

Another prereading strategy is a Vocabulary Scavenger Hunt. Students preview the text and highlight unknown words. Students then write the words on specially divided pages. The pages are divided into quarters with the following headings: *Definition*, *Sentence*, *Examples*, and *Nonexamples*, with a space for the unknown word at the top. A section called *Picture* is put over the middle of the chart.

document	
Definition a written or printed paper giving information about or proof of something	Sentence Thomas Jefferson wrote the document called the <i>Declaration of Independence</i> .
Picture 	
Examples Declaration of Independence; The Constitution; Bill of Rights	Nonexamples my diary; a letter to my friend; a grocery list

This encounter with new vocabulary enables students to use it properly. The definition identifies the word's meaning in student-friendly language. The sentence should be written so that the word is used in context. This helps students make connections with background knowledge. Illustrating the sentence gives a visual clue. Examples help students prepare for factual questions from the teacher or on standardized assessments. Nonexamples help students prepare for *not* and *except for* test questions, such as "All of these are documents *except for* . . ." and "Which of these is *not* a document?" Any information the student was unable to record before reading can be added after reading the text.

Strategies for Using the Leveled Texts (cont.)

Graphic Organizers to Find Similarities and Differences

Setting a purpose for reading content focuses the learner. One purpose for reading can be to identify similarities and differences. This is a skill that must be directly taught, modeled, and applied. The authors of *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* state that identifying similarities and differences “might be considered the core of all learning” (Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock 2001, 14). Higher-level tasks include comparing and classifying information and using metaphors and analogies. One way to scaffold these skills is through the use of graphic organizers, which help students focus on the essential information and organize their thoughts.

Example Classifying Graphic Organizer

Historical Figure	Year of Birth	Major Events	Obstacles	Successes
George Washington	1706	American Revolution	British army	leading America to victory
Harriet Tubman	about 1820	The Civil War	slave catchers	freeing over 300 slaves
Clara Barton	1821	The Civil War	getting the U.S. to sign the Geneva Convention	forming the American Red Cross

The Riddles Graphic Organizer allows students to compare and contrast the historical figures using riddles. Students first complete a chart you’ve designed. Then, using that chart, they can write summary sentences. They do this by using the riddle clues and reading across the chart. Students can also read down the chart and write summary sentences. With the chart below, students could write the following sentences: *George Washington Carver and César Chávez improved the lives of American farmers. Alexander Graham Bell and George Washington Carver are both inventors.*

Example Riddles Graphic Organizer

Who am I?	Thomas Jefferson	George Washington Carver	Alexander Graham Bell	César Chávez
I lived during the American Revolution.	x			
I improved the lives of American farmers.		x		x
I am an inventor.		x	x	

Strategies for Using the Leveled Texts *(cont.)*

Framed Outline

This is an underused technique that bears great results. Many below-grade-level students have problems with reading comprehension. They need a framework to help them attack the text and gain confidence in comprehending the material. Once students gain confidence and learn how to locate factual information, the teacher can phase out this technique.

There are two steps to successfully using this technique. First, the teacher writes cloze sentences. Second, the students complete the cloze activity and write summary sentences.

Example Framed Outline

Martin Luther King Jr. was a _____ in Montgomery, Alabama. When the police arrested Rosa Parks for refusing to give up her seat on a bus, Martin asked all African Americans to _____ the public buses. This worked, but more things needed to be changed. Martin wanted _____ for African Americans. So Martin led a march that helped to make _____ the law. After this, Martin gave his famous _____ speech. He wanted everyone to have the same _____.

Summary sentences: *Martin Luther King Jr. worked for freedom and equality. He led marches and boycotts, which led to the Civil Rights Act.*

Modeling Written Responses

A frequent criticism heard by educators is that below-grade-level students write poor responses to content-area questions. This problem can be remedied if resources and classroom teachers model what good answers look like. While this may seem like common sense, few teachers take the time to do this. They just assume all children know how to respond in writing.

So, this is a technique you may want to use before asking your students to respond to the comprehension questions associated with the leveled texts in this series. First, read the question aloud. Then, write the question on an overhead and talk aloud about how you would go about answering the question. Next, write the answer using a complete sentence that accurately answers the question. Repeat the procedure for several questions so that students make the connection that quality-written responses are your expectation.

As a warm-up activity, post a variety of responses to a single question. Ask students to identify the strongest responses and tell why they are strong. Have students identify the weakest answers and tell why they are weak. Ask for volunteers to come to the overhead and rewrite the weak responses so that they are strong. By doing this simple process, you are helping students evaluate and strengthen their own written responses.

Strategies for Using the Leveled Texts *(cont.)*

English Language Learners

By Marcela von Vacano

Effective teaching for English language learners requires effective planning. In order to achieve success, teachers need to understand and use a conceptual framework to help them plan lessons and units. There are six major components to any framework. Each is described in more detail below.

1. **Select and Define Concepts and Language Objectives**—Before having students read one of the texts in this book, the teacher must first choose a social studies concept and language objective (reading, writing, listening, or speaking) appropriate for the grade level. Then, the next step is to clearly define the concept to be taught. This requires knowledge of the subject matter, alignment with local and state objectives, and careful formulation of a statement that defines the concept. This concept represents the overarching idea. The social studies concept should be written on a piece of paper and posted in a visible place in the classroom.

By the definition of the concept, post a set of key language objectives. Based on the content and language objectives, select essential vocabulary from the text. The number of new words selected should be based on students' English language levels. Post these words on a word wall that may be arranged alphabetically or by themes.

2. **Build Background Knowledge**—Some English language learners may have a lot of knowledge in their native language, while others may have little or no knowledge. The teacher will want to build the background knowledge of the students using different strategies such as the following:

Visuals—Use posters, photographs, postcards, newspapers, magazines, drawings, and video clips of the topic you are presenting. The texts in this series include multiple primary sources for your use.

Realia—Bring real-life objects to the classroom. If you are teaching about colonial times, bring in items, such as a replica of a hornbook, a bonnet, or a tri-corner hat.

Vocabulary and Word Wall—Introduce key vocabulary in context. Create families of words. Have students draw pictures that illustrate the words and write sentences about the words. Also be sure you have posted the words on a word wall in your classroom.

Desk Dictionaries—Have students create their own desk dictionaries using index cards. On one side, they should draw a picture of the word. On the opposite side, they should write the word in their own language and in English.

Strategies for Using the Leveled Texts *(cont.)*

- 3. Teach Concepts and Language Objectives**—The teacher must present content and language objectives clearly. He or she must engage students using a hook and must pace the delivery of instruction, taking into consideration the students' English language levels. The concept or concepts to be taught must be stated clearly. Use the first languages of the students whenever possible or assign other students who speak the same languages to mentor and to work cooperatively with the English language learners.

Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1978), a Russian psychologist, wrote about the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This theory states that good instruction must fill the gap that exists between the present knowledge of a child and the child's potential. Scaffolding instruction is an important component when planning and teaching lessons. English language learners cannot jump stages of language and content development. You must determine where the students are in the learning process and teach to the next level, using several small steps to get to the desired outcome. With the leveled texts in this series and periodic assessment of students' language levels, teachers can support students as they climb the academic ladder.

- 4. Practice Concepts and Language Objectives**—English language learners need to practice what they learn with engaging activities. Most people retain knowledge best after applying what they learn to their own lives. This is definitely true for English language learners. Students can apply content and language knowledge by creating projects, stories, skits, poems, or artifacts that show what they learned. Some activities should be geared to the right side of the brain like those listed above. For students who are left-brain dominant, activities such as defining words and concepts, using graphic organizers, and explaining procedures should be developed. The following teaching strategies are effective in helping students practice both language and content:

Simulations—Students recreate history by becoming a part of it. They have to make decisions as if they lived in historical times. For example, students can pretend that they are writing the Bill of Rights. They have to figure out what they would include in the document. First, they need to brainstorm ideas, and then they can write down their ideas on index cards and place them in a bag. Lastly, draw ten index cards from the bag and create a class Bill of Rights using student ideas.

Strategies for Using the Leveled Texts *(cont.)*

4. Practice Concepts and Language Objectives *(cont.)*

Literature response—Read a text from this book. Have students choose two people described or introduced in the text. Ask students to create a conversation the people might have. Or, you can have students write journal entries about events in the daily lives of the historic people.

Have a short debate—Make a controversial statement, such as *Slavery was necessary in the South*. After reading a text in this book that addresses slavery, have students think about the question and take a position. As students present their ideas, one student can act as a moderator.

Interview—Students may interview a member of the family or a neighbor in order to obtain information regarding a topic from the texts in this book. For example: *How is your life similar to the lives of famous Americans like Eleanor Roosevelt?*

5. **Evaluation and Alternative Assessments**—We know that evaluation is used to inform instruction. Students must have the opportunity to show their understanding of concepts in different ways and not only through standard assessments. Use both formative and summative assessments to ensure that you are effectively meeting your content and language objectives. Formative assessment is used to plan effective lessons for a particular group of students. Summative assessment is used to find out how much the students have learned. Other authentic assessments that show day-to-day progress include text retelling, teacher rating scales, students' self-evaluations, cloze testing, holistic scoring of writing samples, performance assessments, and portfolios. Periodically assessing student learning will help you ensure that students continue to receive the correct levels of texts.

6. **School-Home Connection**—The school-home connection is an important component in the learning process for English language learners. Parents are the first teachers, and they establish expectations for their children. These expectations help shape the behavior of their children. By asking parents to be active participants in the education of their children, students get a double dose of support and encouragement. As a result, families become partners in the education of their children and chances for success in your classroom increase.

You can send home copies of the texts in this series for parents to read with their children. You can even send multiple levels to meet the needs of your second language parents as well as your students. In this way, you are sharing your social studies content standards with your whole second language community.