



Effective Teaching in
Today's Classroom



Teaching Social Studies Today

2nd Edition



Kathleen Kopp

Foreword by Alice L. Reilly

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Foreword

The world is changing. It is a very different place than it was twenty or even ten years ago. It is much more globally interdependent, both in business and our personal interactions. Multi-national companies are increasing. Products are made from raw materials in one country, assembled in another, and sold to a third. Technology allows us to hear about events taking place around the world instantaneously. Nobel prizes now are given to teams of people in many different countries working together on problems looking for solutions. Participating in this global culture requires collaboration and communication.

The world continues to change. A different set of skills is required to be an active citizen and employee in today's world. Yet, our schools today are largely the same model that has been in place since the turn of the century. They represent the factory model of the industrial age. As the United States moves into the information age a realization exists that in the quest for that one right answer on a test, critical and creative thinking skills needed for problem solving are not being fostered in our students. *Teaching Social Studies Today, 2nd Edition*, provides teachers with models of how to build these higher level thinking skills needed in today's environment.

As far back as 1916, John Dewey expressed concerns about the danger of creating a gap between what is learned in school and what is needed to be a productive citizen in the world. Dewey wrote about the need to prepare students for the world in which they will live. Given the rapidly changing world that we live in today, an urgency for education reform comes from many arenas. In this age of Google, the teacher no longer holds all knowledge. Many suggested reforms encourage an instructional shift to increase student engagement and promote the development of what are commonly known as "the 5Cs," critical and creative thinking, collaboration, communication, and citizenship. In this book, Kathleen Kopp offers numerous suggestions for classroom teachers to engage their students in these skills.



The National Council for the Social Studies describes social studies as “an interdisciplinary exploration of the social sciences and humanities, including civics, economics, geography, and history in order **to develop responsible, informed and engaged citizens** and to foster civic, economic, global, and historical literacy” (2011, para. 2). In this book, Kopp provides suggested activities that support this shift in instruction. The format of the book supports many of the reforms being encouraged, such as its connections to literacy, student engagement, and multiple forms of assessment. Readers are given practical examples to engage students in their learning and provide the skills needed in today’s changing world.

Students must be prepared for their futures, not our pasts. Dewey’s words are as applicable today as they were in 1916 when he wrote them. Dewey tells us to “Give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and when the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking; learning naturally results.”

—Alice L. Reilly, Ed.D.
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Introduction

What Is Social Studies, and Why Is It Important?



“I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the **diffusion of knowledge** among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised for the **preservation of freedom, and happiness.**”

—Thomas Jefferson to George Wythe, 13 Aug. 1786

This quotation from Thomas Jefferson encompasses the true value, honor, and importance of education and having an educated citizenry. Whether it is a kindergarten teacher providing the knowledge to follow rules, a fourth grade teacher providing knowledge about a home state, a middle school teacher providing knowledge of the world, or a high school teacher providing knowledge for how to be active participants of the world in which we live, all educators play a part in diffusing knowledge and creating that educated citizenry and, in turn, preserving freedom and happiness. This is no small task. Yet, the opportunity to provide this knowledge is made easier with the content area of social studies that stretches across grade levels and disciplines.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS 2013) defines social studies as “the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence.” Social science uses the scientific method to investigate facts and is categorized into many branches, including history, civics, geography, economics, anthropology, and political science.



According to the Ohio Humanities Council (2015), the humanities are defined as follows:

The humanities are the stories, the ideas, and the words that help us make sense of our lives and our world, and introducing us to people we have never met, places we have never visited, and ideas that may have never crossed our minds. By showing how others have lived and thought about life, the humanities help us decide what is important in our own lives and what we can do to make them better. By connecting us with other people, they point the way to answers about what is right or wrong, or what is true to our heritage and our history. The humanities help us address the challenges we face together in our families, our communities, and as a nation.

Understanding the definitions and examples of what social studies is as a content area, one clearly sees the extreme importance and relevance social studies education has for our students and society. While no one denies the importance of social studies education, it is often not made a priority by districts, administrators, and teachers due to the emphasis on mathematics and language arts. While the significance of mathematics education and language arts cannot be denied, teachers are missing opportunities to present information through the critical lens that only social studies can provide.

With this resource, K–12 educators will be able to refocus on social studies as a core content area; provide content and literacy in the same lessons; establish unified, grade level and school-wide visions for implementing social studies curriculum; and incorporate the most current social studies framework and standards, including the College, Career, and Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards and today's college and career readiness standards.

Purpose of This Book

The purpose of this book is to provide K–12 educators with the necessary tools to develop and implement standards-based social studies curriculum that will help raise the level of social studies education at each specific grade level and incorporate all dimensions of the C3 framework. Using the C3 framework grade ranges, K–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12, this book will provide teachers at all grade levels with the necessary components to create comprehensive social studies units.

This resource provides teachers with specific strategies for assessing and building background knowledge. A specific focus on reading and writing strategies incorporated into the four C3 dimensions allows teachers to incorporate both content and literacy within their lessons. Teachers also learn to effectively use and incorporate primary sources and other essential resources relevant to social studies into their lessons. A step-by-step guide to research, different research methods, and specific research projects for each grade range allows students to take ownership of their learning. Specific hands-on strategies and simulations are provided to engage all learners. Strategies to help teachers integrate science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) into the social studies curriculum create a pathway for students to achieve twenty-first century skills. A variety of assessment strategies provide both formative and summative assessments that in turn produce the data necessary to drive instruction.



Chapter 1

Creating the Social Studies Classroom

Social Studies in Today's Classrooms

Education has evolved throughout the history of the United States and continues to evolve in the ever-changing global world. In the earliest of American classrooms, history was typically taught within a reading lesson or a geography lesson. What a great idea! Cross-curricular teaching and using content to teach reading and literacy has been around since the beginning.

In 1785, Noah Webster was one of the first educators to include historical topics in readers. These readers were some of the first ways in which elementary school students were introduced and exposed to history topics. It would take another 100 years before history would be given a status as a consistent and relevant content area.

The state of Massachusetts has always been a progressive leader in education, from Horace Mann, who promoted universal public education and teacher training, to Harvard, the oldest university in America. In fact, in the 1800s, Massachusetts required some of its larger secondary schools to study United States and general history, which eventually led to the creation of history-focused textbooks. The founding of the American Historical Association (AHA) in 1884 allowed university-trained historians to influence the content that was included in school curriculum (Townsend 2013). Yet teaching history exclusively was not the only answer. To understand the multifaceted and rapidly evolving world of the twentieth century, more was required. This need led directly to the evolution from teaching history and the social sciences to a more encompassing social studies vision. Social studies supporters argued that to properly educate



American citizens about the country and the world in which they live, students would need to first study social sciences to understand their ever-changing societies.

What followed was the development of modern social studies curricula. This marked the time when civics replaced government as a more practical course and geography was infused into all courses with a special emphasis on physical geography. Economics had long had a solid foothold in the curriculum, and sociology was added by the early 1910s.

In the early twentieth century, advocates of social studies supported a vision set by James Harvey Robinson—that to properly understand the present, one must first study the past. These advocates urged that schools adopt social studies curriculum encouraging students to examine their surrounding world politically, economically, and socially. The belief behind this was that studying contemporary social issues would help students “contribute to the improvement of society” (Townsend 2013).

To further the cause of social studies and continue its growth and evolution in the classroom, the AHA helped establish the National Council for the Social Studies in 1921. The NCSS favored the term “*the social studies*” because it meant a broader and richer definition of the field, which would include greater attention to the social sciences” (Townsend 2013).

The NCSS is now the largest social-studies-devoted association, with members in all 50 states and representation in 69 countries around the world. In 2010, NCSS published *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment*. These standards are structured around the 10 themes of social studies (Figure 1.1). Compared to the 1994 standards, these are more focused on purposes; questions for exploration; knowledge (what learners need to understand); processes (what learners will be capable of doing); and products (how learners demonstrate understanding).

Figure 1.1—Ten Themes of Social Studies

The NCSS framework consists of 10 themes that incorporate fields of study that correspond with one or more relevant disciplines. These disciplines include the study of the following:

- Culture
- Time, Continuity, and Change
- People, Places, and Environments
- Individual Development and Identity
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Power, Authority, and Governance
- Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- Science, Technology, and Society
- Global Connections
- Civic Ideals and Practices

Source: National Council for the Social Studies

C3 Framework

In 2013, NCSS published the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K–12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History*. The C3 Framework was developed to serve two audiences. The first audience is the state education departments. The framework is designed to help states upgrade their state social studies standards while not standardizing the content, which should be based on specific locations. It was also designed with practitioners—local school districts, schools, teachers and curriculum writers—in mind. The intent is for the document to help teachers strengthen their own social studies programs. Its objectives are to enhance the rigor of the social studies disciplines; build students’ critical thinking, problem solving, and participatory skills to become engaged citizens; and align academic programs to today’s college and career readiness standards for English language arts and literacy in social studies.

What Are the Guiding Principles?

According to the NCSS website, there are five shared principles that are central to the C3 Framework.

1. Social studies prepares the nation's young people for college, careers, and civic life.
2. Inquiry is at the heart of social studies.
3. Social studies involves interdisciplinary applications and welcomes integration of the arts and humanities.
4. Social studies is composed of deep and enduring understandings, concepts, and skills from the disciplines. Social studies emphasizes skills and practices as preparation for democratic decision making.
5. Social studies education should have direct and explicit connections to today's college and career readiness standards in English language arts.

What Are the Instructional Shifts?

The C3 Framework focuses on not only gaining knowledge but in applying that knowledge in ways that will help to prepare students for college, career, and civic life. It intentionally envisions social studies instruction as an inquiry arc of interlocking and mutually reinforcing elements. The Four Dimensions highlighted in Figure 1.2 center on the use of questions to spark curiosity, guide instruction, deepen investigations, acquire rigorous content, and apply knowledge and ideas in real world settings to become active and engaged citizens in the twenty-first century (NCSS 2013).

Figure 1.2—C3 Framework Organization

Dimension 1: Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries	Dimension 2: Applying Disciplinary Tools and Concepts	Dimension 3: Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence	Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action
Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries	Civics	Gathering and Evaluating Sources	Communicating and Critiquing Conclusions
	Economics		
	Geography	Developing Claims and Using Evidence	Taking Informed Action
	History		

Source: National Council for the Social Studies

Connections to Today's Standards

The C3 Framework changes the conversation about literacy instruction in social studies by creating a context that is meaningful and purposeful. The goal of literacy in social studies is to develop students' curiosity about people and the world around them and to promote effective citizenry in a culturally diverse world. Studying relationships among people and the environment helps students make better sense of the world in which they live. Another important goal of literacy in social studies is to introduce students to the idea of looking at the world and current issues through specific lenses: historical, economic, civic, and geographical. These are necessary and vital skills needed for college, career, and civic life. With that in mind, each of the four dimensions is strategically aligned to today's college and career readiness standards.

Why Do Teachers Need the Framework?

There are a number of motivating factors that inspired this work:

- **Marginalization of the Social Studies**—Time, resources, and support for the social studies took a significant impact from the loss of and narrowing of instructional time in response to multiple-choice, high-stakes testing. With the introduction of the more rigorous college and career readiness standards, educators were now able to reframe instruction to promote disciplinary literacy in social studies to regain a more balanced and elevated role in the K–12 curriculum.

- **Motivation of Students**—Children and adolescents are naturally curious about the complex and multifaceted world they inhabit. But when instruction is limited to reading textbooks, answering end-of-chapter questions, and taking multiple-choice tests, students' interest fades and engagement quickly disappears. The C3 Framework addresses measuring knowledge in a way that is meaningful and applicable to the real world in fundamental ways.
- **The Future of Our Democracy**—The central role of social studies is to prepare and educate students on how to be responsible citizens. However, research has found a sad reality—fewer and fewer young people, particularly students of color and students in poverty, are receiving a high-quality social studies education despite the central role of social studies in preparing students for the responsibilities of citizenship. The C3 Framework aims to provide the education and preparation for students to become active and responsible citizens that vote, serve on juries when called, follow the news and current events, and participate in voluntary groups and efforts.

What Does This Mean for Today's Classrooms?

The C3 Framework is a great starting point. Too often, lessons, expectations, and even grades differ from classroom to classroom. Student experiences vary as well. Yet a student's experience and knowledge of a subject matter should not rely on the lottery of getting the right teachers. A framework and set of standards help make this lottery less the norm. Today's social studies classrooms vary as much as the students themselves—from K–5 classrooms, where research has shown approximately two hours per week are spent on social studies topics, to middle and high school grades, where entire classes are dedicated to specific social studies topics.

Spiral Curriculum

Jerome Bruner first described the concept of spiral education, or spiral curriculum, in the 1960s. The essence of a spiral curriculum is eliminating boundaries and obstacles between grade levels when it comes to teaching content. Ultimately, every teacher has the same goal—to provide the best education and support for students. In social studies curriculum, the themes and principles are too often similar, if not identical, from grade level to grade level. The difference between grade levels is based on content and

rigor. So if each educator teaching a social studies lesson is trying to teach the same concept as others, should teachers not build lessons and units to support students as they move from one grade level to the next? Imagine if a student begins learning concepts in kindergarten and those same concepts are reinforced year after year. Once that student reaches high school, he or she will be ready to tackle complex issues based on the learning provided throughout that student's K–8 education. This is the basic premise of spiral education.

The key features of a spiral curriculum are revisiting topics and increasing levels of difficulty. New learning is related to previous learning and competence of students increases. Students continuously revisit topics, themes, and subjects throughout their study of social studies. For example, the concept of democracy and good citizenship can be discussed beginning in kindergarten and continuing all the way through the 12th grade. The understanding that a kindergartner may have about citizenship and democracy will be simple but important. As the student moves from grade level to grade level, he or she should be adding complexity and nuances to his or her understanding of these topics.

Increasing the levels of difficulty is the second phase of spiraling education. As teachers build the students' learning on previous learning, new information can be related back. This allows students to draw upon their prior knowledge, and evidence shows that tapping into students' prior knowledge increases learning (Wessels 2012). Each time the topic or theme is revisited, students' competence on citizenship and democracy increases. In other words, teachers will provide more opportunities for growth and learning if they work together to build spiral curriculum in all subject matters. In particular, it is invaluable for teaching social studies because of the reoccurrence of topics and themes. The ever-increasing difficulty of those topics and themes make spiral curriculum a natural fit in social studies.

Compelling Questions and Supporting Questions

The C3 Framework is organized around inquiry as a means of engaging students in rigorous learning of the concepts, skills, and disciplinary tools they need to prepare for college, career, and civic life. The first step of the inquiry process is asking questions, and the C3 Framework identifies two types of questions: compelling questions and supporting questions.

While the standard(s) and learning target(s) specify what teachers want students to know and be able to do, the compelling questions provide the impetus for an inquiry into the topics at hand. For example, this standard (*Compare life in the past to life today*) could have the following compelling question: *How has family life changed since the time when your grandparents were children?* Supporting questions would then be, *What was life like when your grandparents were children? What was life like when your parents were children? How is your life different?* These questions engage students' interest, encouraging them to talk with family members and setting the stage for reading and research into family life over time.

Ensuring Student Engagement

After you've set your purpose and devised clear learning targets and compelling and supporting questions, the next step is to plan activities that guide students to explore and learn the content. The first consideration in this step is students' background knowledge. It's imperative to identify what students already know so you can make connections and grow their understandings. This topic is addressed extensively in chapter 2. In addition, think about how you can make connections to other parts of your curriculum. For example, if students have studied Earth science, they will have some background knowledge related to geographic concepts. Keep in mind that students may have learned a concept but may know it by a different name. The more connections you can make with a current topic, the more confident students will feel with it, leading to greater understanding of the content.

Next, design a series of lessons and activities that explore your questions. They may include the following:

- reading and writing activities (See chapters 3 and 4.)
- study of primary sources (See chapter 5.)
- research (See chapter 6.)
- hands-on activities (See chapter 7.)
- arts-related activities and explorations (See chapter 8.)

As you plan, be sure to include plenty of opportunities for students to talk, which helps them process and retain information. You can invite students to turn-and-talk with partners about a question before asking students to share with the whole class. This strategy engages every student in the lesson and allows for students to rehearse their thinking before speaking in front of the whole group. Collaborative activities, including research and hands-on projects, are also excellent ways to foster student talk. As students talk, encourage them to ask their own questions about the content, which helps them become independent, self-directed learners.

Most common instructional frameworks include student engagement portions of the lesson plans. These aspects of the lesson should include intellectual work, engagement strategies, and student talk. The main point is that students must be engaged with the work they do each day.

There are many effective strategies to increase student engagement. Consider this brief example outlining a series of activities surrounding the topic of colonial America, which illustrates how students can be at the center of learning in a social studies classroom:

- **Engagement:** Take an online quiz, such as *The Jamestown Online Adventure* from History Globe (<http://www.historyglobe.com/jamestown/jamestowngame.html>).
- **Student Talk:** Have students discuss the following compelling question with their seat partners: *How do activities and values of the seventeenth century differ from those of today?*
- **Intellectual Work:** Tell each student to complete a Venn diagram comparing life in colonial America to life where they live today.

Even with this simple example, students are reading, writing, thinking, and talking about important social studies content. As an introductory activity, students may begin to understand and appreciate life in colonial America, laying the groundwork for further study of that time period.

Finding Curricular Resources

The next part of the lesson plan involves identifying curricular resources that will support student learning and incorporate a variety of instructional strategies into lessons so you can reach all students. Now is the time to consider what materials you can draw upon for the lessons and activities you have planned. Note that this can be a recursive process—you may have built a lesson around a primary source in the previous step. As you review your curricular materials, you may discover a text that inspires a writing or hands-on activity, for example.

Some curriculum resources, such as textbooks or online programs, offer ready-to-go lessons. Oftentimes, however, these resources address content not required by your particular state standards, or they omit information your students are required to know. This is why setting a purpose for each lesson or series of lessons is imperative; it helps you focus on the essentials so you can use your curriculum resources to their greatest benefit. You can pass over pages or chapters that do not address your standards-based purposes. Additionally, you can identify the shortcomings of your curriculum program and begin to assemble meaningful lessons and supporting materials to address these gaps. You may find yourself deviating from the textbook somewhat, embedding information from other resources or modifying lessons to be more student focused.

In this digital age, finding and using meaningful, engaging, and relevant resources is just a click away. You can print online resources for students to read, use interactive activities or simulations to develop more complex concepts, or even chat online with experts related to particular units of study. Whatever the resource, be sure it is relevant to your purpose; that is, directly connected to the standard, learning target, and compelling question you have set.