



# ESSENTIALS OF ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES

William B. Russell III and Stewart Waters

6th EDITION

# Essentials of Elementary Social Studies

*Essentials of Elementary Social Studies* is a teacher friendly text that provides comprehensive treatment of classroom planning, instruction, and strategies. Praised for its dynamic approach and its writing style that is conversational, personal, and professional, this text enables and encourages teachers to effectively teach elementary social studies using creative and active learning strategies.

This sixth edition has been refined with new and relevant topics and strategies needed for effectively teaching elementary social studies. A few of the new features include:

- An expanded chapter on the decision-making process in elementary social studies. This chapter provides additional discussion about the importance of helping young learners better understand the decision-making process and offers strategies for helping teachers make connections between choices, values, character development, and social justice.
- An updated chapter on technology designed to better prepare elementary teachers to effectively incorporate technology into social studies instruction. Attention is given to virtual teaching and learning, media literacy, teaching with film, and numerous other ways to improve teaching and learning in the digital age.
- Updated further readings and helpful resources for all chapters to include supplemental digital and video sources related to various topics throughout the chapter.
- New “Checking for Understanding” section at the end of each chapter that focuses on comprehension, application, and reflection on key concepts throughout the chapters.
- An updated chapter on lesson plans, in keeping with the book’s emphasis on planning and teaching. This chapter is designed to provide elementary social studies teachers with new classroom-tested lesson plans and includes two classroom-tested lessons for each grade level (K–6).

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# Essentials of Elementary Social Studies

6th Edition

**William B. Russell III  
and Stewart Waters**

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# Preface to the Sixth Edition

Welcome to the sixth edition of *Essentials of Elementary Social Studies*. This book is intended for pre-service and in-service social studies teachers and for social studies teacher educators. The book is designed to accomplish one primary goal. We seek to help elementary teachers develop the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively teach elementary students to become effective problem-solving citizens. This text offers a problem-solving approach to elementary social studies. Included in the text are various examples of lesson plans and effective teaching methodologies.

The text includes 12 chapters, and each chapter includes a focus activity to prepare readers for the chapter content; questions for checking understanding, which can be used to assess the reader's understanding of the chapter content; an extension activity for extending the learning experience beyond the reading of the text; and "helpful resources" and "further readings" at the end of each chapter to provide readers with additional readings and information for individuals interested in furthering their knowledge base.

This sixth edition has been refined with new and relevant topics and strategies needed for effectively teaching elementary social studies. A few of the new features include:

- An expanded chapter on the decision-making process in elementary social studies. This chapter provides additional discussion about the importance of helping young learners better understand the decision-making process and offers strategies for helping teachers make connections between choices, values, character development, and social justice.
- An updated chapter on technology designed to better prepare elementary teachers to effectively incorporate technology into social studies instruction. Attention is given to virtual teaching and learning, media literacy, teaching with film, and numerous other ways to improve teaching and learning in the digital age.
- Updated further readings and helpful resources for all chapters to include supplemental digital and video sources related to various topics throughout the chapter.
- Added a "Checking for Understanding" section at the end of each chapter that focuses on comprehension, application, and reflection on key concepts throughout the chapters.
- An updated chapter on lesson plans, in keeping with the book's emphasis on planning and teaching. This chapter is designed to provide elementary social studies teachers with new classroom-tested lesson plans and includes two classroom-tested lessons for each grade level (K–6).

Many thanks to the countless students, teachers, and professors who have used the previous editions and who have provided valuable feedback, which has allowed us to improve the text. Additionally, the authors would like to thank our respective families and friends for support and encouragement.

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## Chapter

# 1

# Contemporary Elementary Social Studies

## ► LOOKING AHEAD

The aim of this chapter is twofold: (1) to help you see why social studies is needed in the elementary school and (2) to suggest an overall approach to elementary social studies curriculum and teaching of the curriculum. To achieve these goals, you need to understand what social studies is and how it springs out of a need in society.

To understand social studies, you must first understand the purpose that it serves in the total school curriculum. That purpose, stated in simple form, is to develop good citizens for the democratic society in which we live. Becoming a good citizen is sometimes referred to as developing civic virtue, and there is, of course, a wide interpretation of exactly what either term really means. Even so, we can say that we want students to feel positive about themselves and have a desire to be positively contributing members of the various communities of which they are a part. It also means that students will develop the desire and the ability to be economically independent, to be informed about and involved in the decision making that goes on in their communities, and to be aware of and knowledgeable about the world around them. We want students to be free from prejudice and to be fair minded in dealing with others, to believe in a system of justice and law, to take leadership roles, and to give reasoned and fair support for legitimately appointed or elected leaders.

Because society is changing rapidly, teaching social studies is even more of a challenge today than it was in the past. Teachers really need to think about different approaches to teaching social studies. They need to work more effectively with students who have different cultural backgrounds. They need to teach in ways that involve active learning and to find approaches that focus on solving problems. The final section of this chapter addresses the goals of social studies as perceived by different groups. Social studies itself is a product of the changing society, prevailing approaches to its teaching, and the varying conceptions that social studies teachers have of its goals.

### **CAN YOU? DO YOU?**

Can you . . .

- Describe how the field of social studies has changed since you were in elementary school?
- Explain how social studies has remained the same?
- Explain the goals of social studies?

Do you . . .

- Have an understanding of a problems approach to teaching social studies?
- Have an idea of what a teacher needs to know about social studies?
- Think of social studies simply as history and/or geography?

### **FOCUS ACTIVITY**

Before reading this chapter, try the following focus activity.

Take a scrap piece of paper and draw a picture of social studies. Be sure to use images and not words. Share your drawings with others. Discuss the details of the drawings. Compare drawings for substance with others. Does your drawing share common themes/elements with others? If so, what are the themes/elements?

## **► THE GOALS OF SOCIAL STUDIES**

What do you need to know about social studies? The answer probably seems to be more than you do know or can learn. It is certainly more than you will be able to get from any textbook. As a teacher, you owe it to the generations of students that you teach to become mindfully, curiously, purposefully alive to them, to their world, to social studies as a thick endless blanket of stories about people and events, and to the values and rules needed for people to live together.

Social studies in the elementary school has most often been regarded as a subject that should be taught – but only if time allows. Priority time in the school day, of course, is given to the basic skill areas of reading, mathematics, and language. It has not been that social studies is considered unimportant, but that the basic skill areas are seen by society, by administrators, and by elementary teachers as “fundamentals” that have to be learned first. Important as language and mathematics skills may be, they are taught only because the students will need them to live in the social world.

The “back to basics” years of the 1970s and early 1980s had a strong adverse influence on elementary social studies. Separate studies by Gross (1977) and Hahn (1977) affirmed that social studies was disappearing in the early grades. According to research, this trend continues in today’s twenty-first-century classrooms (Barton, 2011; Bisland, 2011; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Russell, 2009). Some researchers suggest that social studies is embedded in curriculum and is taught as frequently now as in the past (Anderson, 2009; Holloway & Chiodo, 2009). This curriculum involves an emphasis

on reading stories, poems, and plays, all of which have extensive social studies content. Then, too, the school day itself consists of a rich and complex series of social situations and problems, ranging from recess to lunch to the school bus.

Educators and politicians may soon have to wake up to the fact that effective social studies curriculum is basic and fundamental in the earliest schooling. Educational reform has not had any real impact on achievement in the basic skills areas, and schools have about run out of time to take from other content areas or activities during the school day. There simply should be more attention given to help students learn about themselves and their place in and responsibility to society. The National Council for the Social Studies Task Force on Early Childhood/Elementary Social Studies (2009) stated:

The purpose of elementary school social studies is to enable students to understand, participate in, and make informed decisions about their world. Social studies content allows young learners to explain relationships with other people, to institutions, and to the environment, and equips them with knowledge and understanding of the past. It provides them with skills for productive problem solving and decision making as well as for assessing issues and making thoughtful value judgments. Above all, it integrates these skills and understandings into a framework for responsible citizen participation locally, nationally, and globally. The teaching and learning processes within social studies are uniquely organized to develop these capacities, beginning with the youngest learners in our schools.

The Task Force goes on to say that the teaching and learning of social studies “in the elementary classroom should be meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active. These qualities of powerful social studies learning are foundational to the development of students’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions as participating citizens.”

**FYI:** “Decision making is the heart of social studies instruction” (Shirley Engle, 1960).

Barth (1993) has said that one of our most basic beliefs is that “Social Studies is citizenship education.” Hartoonan (1993) adds that “our work should be to illuminate the essential connection between social studies learning and democratic values” and thus be a “liberating force in the lives of citizens” (p. 59). Put another way, the two primary jobs of schools are to help society by producing effective, contributing citizens and to help the students lead happy lives in which they are enabled to achieve their potential. That is what social studies is all about and why social studies is so needed in the elementary school.

Though social studies educators disagree as to priorities, the following list identifies those aims that are most often associated with social studies programs:

- Preparing responsible citizens for the nation, the state, and the local area.
- Preparing students who have the knowledge and skills in social studies needed for college.
- Developing awareness and understanding of contemporary social issues.
- Developing healthy self-concepts.
- Teaching the methods of social scientists.
- Motivating students to want to learn about the social studies.

**FYI:** Democratic decision making is considered a foundation of the C3 framework.



#### 4 Contemporary Elementary Social Studies

- Developing the ability to solve problems and make decisions.
- Developing culturally responsive “global” citizens.

Whatever we do as teachers is certainly done for the present, but it has to be done with an eye to the future.

In trying to help you become good elementary social studies teachers, or good teachers of anything for that matter, it is important to get you to look at what happens if you succeed as teachers. The students you teach will, in due course, become adults themselves. They will obviously be living in a different kind of society, one that teachers must try to anticipate and prepare them for. However, beyond that, the kind of impact that teachers will have on students and the kind of people they become are critical outcomes of education. The following are just a few of the areas in which teachers of elementary social studies will have had an impact when their students become adults:

- The jobs they have and the way they do their jobs.
- The way they feel about themselves.
- The way they handle responsibility.
- The way they treat other people.
- How they meet and resolve problems and difficulties.
- Their motivation and overall attitudes.
- What they value and how they treat the things they value.
- How they relate to their heritage.
- How they relate to their environment.
- How they relate to and deal with people of other cultures, nationalities, and ethnic groups.

In each of these and in other areas in which teachers influence students, it is safe to say that most of us would happily accept a broad variety of outcomes and still feel that we had made a positive impact in a student's life. The question is, “Just how much in each area can we expect of ourselves?”

That is not a question that can be left unanswered. A good analogy is putting together a jigsaw puzzle. It is always easier to do a puzzle with a picture of what it is going to look like when complete. The same holds true for teaching. From an attitudinal standpoint, it is useful to envision students ten or fifteen years into the future and imagine them in the most positive light.

Goals and objectives should be the first and most important concerns of any teacher, especially any elementary social studies teacher. They complement one another. Goals are distant, immeasurable, and even unattainable. They give direction to our efforts, and, if we are goal oriented and goal driven, we constantly work toward them yet never reach a point when they are achieved. How can one reach the goal of becoming an effective problem solver, for example, or the even broader goal of being a good citizen? The essence of goals is that they describe the person we are constantly in the process of becoming (Moore et al., 1989).

Objectives, on the other hand, are short term, attainable, often measurable, and very specific. We can know when we achieve them, so they become for us milestones and markers of our progress. Goals determine the directions we want to go, but the accomplishment of objectives lets us know that we are getting there.

In education, we generally begin planning by defining our goals. Once goals are set, we try to describe the specific teaching and learning outcomes (objectives) for short

periods of instruction that will move students toward the goals. Goals without objectives remain as only dreams. Objectives without relationship to goals are purposeless. Objectives for social studies tend to be decided based on the specific content being taught and the group to which it is being taught. The broadest goals for the field have been centrally determined and defined in the United States by various groups, given authority by still-larger organizations. Regardless of the group, throughout this century and the next, social studies has and will be invariably linked to goals of citizenship education. The frameworks developed in the reports of the various commissions, task forces, and committees have served as models for textbook curricula and for those developed for state and local school districts. Reports impacting elementary school social studies in the twenty-first century include the NCSS Task Force on Creating Effective Citizens (2001), the National Council for the Social Studies Task Force on Early Childhood/Elementary Social Studies (2009), and the NCSS Task Force on Early Childhood/Elementary Social Studies (2001).

The introductory statement of the goals section of the report of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Task Force on Creating Effective Citizens (2001) set a problem-solving focus for the social studies and emphasized thinking skills. The Task Force stated the students should have the skills necessary to “solve real problems in their school, the community, our nation, and the world.” Additionally, effective citizens should use “effective decision-making and problem-solving skills in public and private life.” The responsibility of social studies is to prepare young people to identify, understand, and work to solve the problems of an interdependent world.

The NCSS Task Force on Early Childhood/Elementary Social Studies (2009) echoed that teaching and learning elementary social studies should be “meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active.” Additionally, critical thinking, problem solving, and the development of learning skills and positive attitudes toward self and others were given priority.

The Task Force of the National Commission on the Social Studies was funded by the Carnegie Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and the National Geographic Society. It enjoyed the sponsorship of the National Council for the Social Studies and the American Historical Association. Over two years in preparation, the Task Force’s report, titled *Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century* (1989), formulated the following goals that the social studies curriculum should enable students to develop:

1. Civic responsibility and active civic participation.
2. Perspectives on their own life experiences so they see themselves as part of the larger human adventure in time and place.
3. A critical understanding of the history, geography, economic, political, social institutions, traditions, and values of the United States, as expressed in both their unity and diversity.
4. An understanding of other peoples and of the unity and diversity of world history, geography, traditions, and values.
5. Critical attitudes and analytical perspectives appropriate to the analysis of the human condition.

## ► A PROBLEMS APPROACH TO SOCIAL STUDIES

There is no doubt about it: elementary social studies must be different in today’s society from what it was before. Society has changed. Schools have changed. Students’ lives keep

changing. Even the problems that students face are different. For example, there has been a constant increase in the number of students involved in child abuse, divorce, domestic violence, cyberbullying, gangs, substance abuse, single-parent homes, and crime. Schools are preparing students for an ever and rapidly changing world with new and unique demands for citizens. There have also been changes that influence students' present and future lives in other ways. There has been a dynamic, complex revolution in technology, information, and communication. There have been major shifts in society, including sweeping changes related to gender roles and ethnic and cultural relationships. There have also been major changes in the governmental and economic make-up of the United States and the world.

In a world in which change has become the norm and we have to constantly face dilemmas for which there are no precedents, social studies is needed more than ever to help students learn to deal with problems. Teachers need to take a problems approach. Though the word "problem" may be defined in many ways, we are going to define it as "any task or situation for which a solution is required or desired and for which a method of solution is not provided or immediately apparent." Problem solving is more than the situation itself. Often, problems involve moral dilemmas; persisting issues; and/or difficulties, dangers, or curiosities for which there are no verifiable solutions. Problems require that existing knowledge be retrieved and used to resolve new or different difficulties. Most importantly, intrinsic to problem solving is the ability to deal with failure and with the inability to identify easy or quick solutions in constructive ways.

Problem solving is the most pervasive of skills from a curricular standpoint. It is the one skill that is most needed throughout life. Almost all the situations we face as a society and nearly all the personal events demanding decisions may be best described as problems. If students (and teachers) can develop the requisite mindset, attitudes, and skills of problem solvers, they will be equipped to meet the needs of the future. If they do not, their education becomes obsolete almost before it is complete. Problem solving is the essential skill for each of the disciplines. That is, a person with a problem-solving mindset will be a more successful student. This is an ability that teachers need to emphasize if every student is to become an independent learner. Problem solving is also the essential survival skill for school. Each teacher, each class, each student, each school day, each assignment presents a unique intricacy of circumstances and demands. It would not be an overstatement to say that the essential life role is problem solving.

## ► PROBLEMS APPROACH: K-THIRD GRADE CLASSROOM

A teacher who uses the problems approach is going to be constantly asking questions, trying to arouse curiosity, and having the students make decisions. The teacher will be encouraging students' questions and helping them find ways of seeking answers. The entire environment of the classroom becomes fixed on learning how to learn. Students' awareness of problems and their ability to generate alternative solutions are heightened in this kind of environment. Perhaps the best way to look at how the problems approach works is to look at how one teacher used this approach as she entered a study of community.

## ► CLASSROOM EPISODE #1

The teacher started her first graders on their study of the community by reading Dr. Seuss's *Horton Hears a Who* (Geisel, 1954). She soon had them thinking and talking about the perils and dangers faced by the people of the tiny world in the story. The point of the story, of

course, is that everybody in a community needs to work together to solve the problems, and these students thought themselves very clever when they figured it out.

The teacher would not let them rest on that, though. Soon she had them talking about how to recognize problems and different ways that the “Whos” could have solved their problem. One of the questions that she asked was how different television characters might have solved the problem. (Both cartoon characters and prime-time heroes were suggested.) She also got them thinking about how important they were in their own community and how they could not help unless they knew more about their community and its own particular dangers and problems.

The next day, the teacher took the students on a walking field trip of their community. They went only a few blocks, but as they went, they began looking for different problems in their own community. Sometimes the teacher had to make suggestions and probe with questions, but always, she let the students decide if something was a problem. When they got back to the classroom, they began making a list of the problems they had seen. The list included some things that were dangers and some others that just seemed to give people difficulties. Different types of garbage and litter were among the most common things that the students noticed, but the teacher tried to shift their attention to other kinds of problems. This all started to sound somewhat negative, so they also started making a list of the good things they knew about or had seen in their community.

That day the students went home with the assignment of asking their parents and others about problems in their community as well as what the adults liked about the community. The next day, in school, the students added to their lists, taking a little time to talk about the ideas that had been brought in. The teacher put all the ideas on large pieces of paper, but she left lots of room. When the list was finished, she passed out scissors and old magazines and newspapers. The students worked in pairs, each pair trying to find a picture that showed one of the ideas. If they could not find a magazine picture that they thought was appropriate, the teacher encouraged the students to draw a picture. The pictures later helped serve as reminders to these mostly non-reading students of what each sentence said.

Later, the students built a box community on a large table. They got to decide what went into a community and to design their own buildings. The teacher and a parent volunteer helped them label buildings. One of the questions they had been asking was, “Why is there so much litter in the community?” To help them understand, the teacher covered the completed scene with a tablecloth. Each day for a week, every child put a single small piece of scrap paper under the tablecloth. When they removed the cover, everyone was surprised at how much trash had accumulated on the streets of their community.

The box community was used to study other community problems as well. The students had tried to follow the layout of their own community in designing it. Therefore, they were able to look at such problems as traffic congestion and sidewalk hazards through their own model.

Soon the students decided that they needed a map of the community, and they began making one. The teacher started them thinking about the problems of making a map: for example, things like accuracy, relative size, symbols, and orientation.

There was a natural flow in every transition. Each situation led to a new set of questions and curiosities. Though there were some places where some students seemed to be lost for a few minutes, most often due to a lack of verbal memory, the presence of the problems was so pervasive that attention was never lost for long.

## ► PROBLEMS APPROACH: FOURTH-SIXTH GRADE CLASSROOM

In grades four through six, the focus is shifting toward independence. Students can deal with problems and content that are much more distant and removed from their own experience. These students need to be more involved in the systematic development of questions and problems. Since fourth-through-sixth-grade students have more skills,

knowledge, and experience, they can be involved in a greater variety of research activities. They are more peer oriented and less teacher oriented, so group problem solving can be structured into the activities. The emphasis remains on an environment where curiosity is encouraged and stimulated. The teacher in such an environment is going to be constantly leading students to events and ideas that will set them thinking. The students in this setting are going to be “on the learn.”

## ► CLASSROOM EPISODE #2

Looking again at a particular classroom, this time we will focus on a fifth-grade teacher who has launched into a study of the medieval period in European history. The teacher began by trying to get the students to systematically examine their existing concepts of the period. They talked about movies and television programs that they had seen as well as some things that had been picked up from cartoons, comic books, and games. Some of the students also had some knowledge that came from children's literature. There was as much, if not more, fantasy as reality in what they thought they knew about the period.

At about this time, the class was surprised by a visit from two people in medieval clothing. One of these men told the students that he was an architect and that he was involved in designing and building castles. The other man said that he was a knight. The men described a situation they were involved in on the coast of England near the Welsh border. King Edward had sent them there to build a castle. Now they had to decide exactly where to build it, but it was not very easy. While the men were in the classroom, they talked with the students about the reasons for castle building, about all the problems that might be involved, and about the rudiments of castle defense.

By the time the men left, an idea had evolved. Soon the students had developed a hypothetical map of what the region would be like. At the teacher's insistence, the map was quite large. In addition, the students were urged to orient their map to some real area on the English coast. The map itself was not altogether fiction because the students did some reading about the geography of the area. The completed map showed a seacoast, the Welsh border, three villages for which the students made up names, and a monastery. It also showed a river, some fens or swampy land, a forest area, and a few roads. Other features were added as the students continued to read and discuss. They learned something about feudal land division and tried to reflect it in the map. Other landmarks, including a ruined castle and some churches, were added. The villages themselves began to take on detail and show differences in size and complexity. As the students researched, they decided that there had to be a feudal manor or two in the area with fortifications; these were added.

The people came last. The students' research began to reveal the different roles and social statuses that the various people at the monastery and in the villages would have had in all likelihood. The class developed a set of characters, each of whom they tried to describe in some detail. They gave them names and described where they lived, what they did and how they did it, how they dressed, and what their lives were like. They were particularly fascinated by the diet of the common people during this period. The study of daily life, clothing, and customs evolved through group work over about a week.

The students then drew names so that each could “become” one of the characters. Once more in groups, this time according to where they “lived,” they continued researching their characters. The groups also began talking about where they wanted the king's castle to be built. They considered the dangers and fears that faced the lives of the people of this period.

Nearly three weeks after their first visit, the two medieval men returned. For this visit, the students had planned and worn costumes of their own, and the questions were almost unstop-pable. The students eagerly told the visitors what they had been doing. Then each group made a presentation in which they introduced themselves in their medieval roles. The groups each

made a case for one site for the king's castle. Some of the groups, especially the one representing the monastery, did not want the castle built right in their area. Others had noticed not only the protection that the castle offered, but also the commercial possibilities that a garrison of soldiers would have for the nearest town. When the groups were finished, the architect and the knight explained where they thought the king's castle should be built. Most importantly, they showed that they had listened to the students' reasoning as they presented their case.

This was the beginning rather than the end. The study went on into the actual building of the castle and to several follow-up activities. However, this beginning had laid a foundation of interest and reason for research, on which the teacher could continue to build. The students were exploring nearly every major theme and concept of medieval life as they created scenarios and solved problems as they arose.

## ► LOOKING BACK

Social studies throughout the last half of the twentieth century was reformist in nature and will continue to be throughout the twenty-first century; that is, the curriculum has been and will be in flux. This is due, in part, to the constant changes in the social world.

The one educational need that remains constant in a world of change is that students need to learn how to solve problems. When teachers take a problems approach in social studies, they work at enabling students to deal with situations in which their experience and knowledge offer no ready answers. Problem solving is, perhaps, the most pervasive of all skills.

Despite growing concern that social studies may be disappearing from elementary classrooms, two main jobs of the school continue. Those jobs are producing effective, contributing citizens and helping students lead fulfilling lives. Social studies has a variety of purposes that relate to these two jobs, which include preparing students to be responsible, to be aware of contemporary issues, and to have a world vision. In some cases, elementary social studies teachers should be concerned about preparing students for college and even for careers in the social sciences. If students are to be successful, teachers must help them develop both the love of learning and the ability to solve problems.

Goals and objectives should be major concerns of teachers of social studies. Goals are distant and unattainable, but they give direction to teaching. Objectives, on the other hand, are short term and obtainable. Objectives are the building blocks toward goals.

The National Council for the Social Studies, as the organization of teachers most concerned with social education, has constantly examined and reexamined the goals of the social studies. Recent task forces of that organization have particularly emphasized problem solving and thinking skills.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

### SCENARIO

You are searching for an elementary teaching position in your hometown school district, which is a very difficult district to "get your foot in the door." Just as you are losing hope, you receive a phone call from Dr. Russell, the principal of Yourtown Elementary School (YES). Dr. Russell invites you for an interview. During your interview, an enthusiastic committee member asks you, "What do you

believe to be the goals and purpose of social studies?" Your response could be the difference between being offered the elementary teaching position and not being offered it.

### TASK

For this activity, write down how you would answer the enthusiastic committee member. Be sure to clearly discuss the goals and purpose of social studies.

### CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. How would you characterize the problems approach to social studies?
2. Why was the map-creation exercise so critical in the class where they were studying medieval history?
3. In what areas are elementary social studies teachers going to have an impact?
4. In what ways did the NCSS task force groups referred to in the chapter stress the role of thinking skills in social studies?

### ► HELPFUL RESOURCES

Watch the first half of this video to see an overview of why social studies is important in elementary schools:

[www.teachingchannel.org/videos/tch-presents-social-studies-essentials](http://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/tch-presents-social-studies-essentials)

Watch this video of NCSS executive director Susan Griffin defining social studies and the connection with the C3 Framework:

<https://youtu.be/3HD9apVNq0I>

With limited time to teach social studies in elementary schools, teachers must consider collaborative planning and integrative learning. See the next video on the importance of collaborative teaching and integrative learning:

[www.teachingchannel.org/videos/collaborative-teaching-ntn](http://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/collaborative-teaching-ntn)

Many teachers struggle with ideas for how to cover or discuss difficult social issues. This video is an example of a way to share content about 9/11 with elementary students:

[www.flocabulary.com/unit/week-in-rap-extra-9-11/](http://www.flocabulary.com/unit/week-in-rap-extra-9-11/)

Watch the next video for an example of a kindergarten teacher engaging students in an “antiques roadshow” to help them better understand time and place:

[www.teachingchannel.org/videos/show-and-tell-themes](http://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/show-and-tell-themes)

Visit the next website (Video #5: Leaders, Community, and Citizens) to see an example of a first-grade teacher engaging students in problem solving about community issues:

<http://www.learner.org/series/social-studies-in-action-a-teaching-practices-library-k-12/leaders-community-and-citizens/>

Visit this website (Video #13: Making a Difference Through Giving) to see an example of a fourth-grade classroom engaged in a service learning project to help solve an issue important to their local community and the world:

<http://www.learner.org/series/social-studies-in-action-a-teaching-practices-library-k-12/making-a-difference-through-giving/>

## ► FURTHER READING

Engle, S. (1960). Decision making: The heart of social studies instruction. *Social Education*, 24(7), 301–306.

This article discusses the role of decision making in the social studies and emphasizes its purposes as the central and vital aspect of social studies instruction. This seminal article outlines decision making as an approach to social studies and played a significant role in the way social studies was viewed.

Russell, W. (Ed.). (2011). *Contemporary social studies: An essential reader*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

The field of social studies is unique and complex. It is challenged by the differing perspectives related to the definition, goals, content, and purpose of social studies. This book discusses the contemporary issues surrounding social studies education today. This book encourages and inspires readers to think. The 28 chapters included in this volume are written by prominent scholars in the field of social studies. The collection inspires and provokes readers to reconsider and reexamine social studies and its contemporary state. Readers will explore the various critical topics that encompass contemporary social studies.

Barr, R., Barth, J., & Shermis, S. (1977). *Defining social studies*. Silver Spring, MD: National Council for the Social Studies.

This book discusses the various perspectives and issues surrounding social studies and its identity. This book includes five chapters analyzing the nature of social studies, its goals and objectives, and the issues surrounding the lack of a consistent definition.

Ochoa-Becker, A. (2006). *Democratic education for social studies: An issues-centered decision making curriculum*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

This influential book was originally published in 1988 and written by the iconic social studies educator Shirley Engle. This volume includes a rationale for an issues-centered, decision-making curriculum for the social studies classroom.

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# Social Studies Curriculum

## ► LOOKING AHEAD

What social studies topics and themes are to be taught in elementary schools? What is to be taught about these topics and themes? Questions such as these are constant and troubling for social studies educators. Though there is little disagreement that the selection ought to be related to carefully selected goals and that the teaching itself should be done in a purposeful way, what is taught and what materials are used continue to be ongoing problems in the social studies. In this chapter, we will look at some of the forces influencing social studies and how these forces have changed the field. You need to be aware of how these developments affect how and what you will teach. This awareness will help you understand that social studies curriculum is evolving.

Recognizing that social studies has a strong knowledge base, we will also want to look at the social science disciplines. These disciplines all examine the world from a different perspective, with different emphases and foci and, often, using different scholarly tools. The social scientists working in these disciplines provide the scholarship, methods, concepts, and information that are the basis for social studies curriculum in the elementary schools. The better we understand them and their relationships to one another, the better we can utilize and select from what they have to offer.

### CAN YOU? DO YOU?

Can you . . .

- Identify reasons why there is controversy in social studies?
- Describe the Expanding Environments curriculum?
- Identify and explain the various social science disciplines?
- Explain how the social sciences relate to what students learn in social studies?

Do you . . .

- Know all the social science fields that are included in social studies?
- Know how the social studies curriculum is organized?
- Know what an instructional theme is?
- Know the history of the term “social studies”?

### **FOCUS ACTIVITY**

Before reading this chapter, try the following focus activity.

Think back on your elementary experience. What did social studies mean to you as an elementary student? What curriculum was included in social studies? Share experiences with classmates. Discuss the details of experiences and compare. Do your elementary social studies experiences share common attributes with others? If so, what attributes? What does social studies mean to you now?

## **► WHY IS THERE CONTROVERSY IN SOCIAL STUDIES?**

Social studies has been, and will continue to be, constantly under attack by critics. The content taught in social studies is constantly being examined. The root reason for this is that learning social studies is a lot more complex than developing an ability or skill such as reading and mathematics. It is almost without boundary or borders.

There are, arguably, five overlapping social studies curricula existing in most elementary schools. First, there is the formal curriculum that is the basis of social studies classes. It usually is prescribed for, or determined by, the teachers and has clearly defined goals and parameters and is embodied in a course of study, standards, or a required textbook. Second, there is a curriculum that is very pronounced in the primary grades and has to do with events and with the calendar itself. Holidays, birthdays, seasons, weather, and current events all conspire to form this curriculum which is, by its very nature, more fluid and flexible than the formal curriculum. This second curriculum may be reasoned out by the teacher to relate to the formal curriculum and have corresponding goals. The third curriculum is really embedded in the materials used to teach other subjects, especially reading and language arts. The stories in readers and the literature program deal with people, places, and events, and readers have traditionally paralleled social studies content. Through fictional and nonfictional literature, students are made aware of how people live, think, and get along with others. Science and arithmetic similarly present social studies content, particularly regarding the stories behind discoveries, inventions, and theories. The fourth curriculum has to do with the organizational functions of the school and the classroom and is embodied in what is taught about the ways to work together and independently, the development and following of class and school rules, and the way that students are taught to act throughout the school day. This curriculum is very closely tied to the fifth curriculum, which is becoming increasingly more manifest in schools: the program specifically to develop values and/or character.

With this richly varied array of curricula, which may at times be contradictory, there are factors that contribute to the controversial nature of social studies. Those factors include:

- Anything that human effort produces is, by definition, imperfect. Before we even get a curriculum together, we and others begin to see the flaws and problems. When we put something into use, those flaws become glaringly apparent to us.
- Cultural change is constant. We live in an era of immense societal complexity and rapid change. As rapidly as we develop a program, changes occur that require adjustments. Social studies curricula are responsive to changes in the social climate. Changes in emphasis are likely to reflect the times. Wars, depressions,

periods of prosperity, international relationships, and a host of other things that influence the public climate can impact what and how things are taught in social studies classrooms.

- People have differing values, priorities, and viewpoints. Social studies is not just a skills subject. In a democratic society, there is little likelihood of long-term consensus and none of universal agreement on what ought to be taught and from what viewpoint.
- Special-interest groups influence curriculum. In our society, there are pressure groups with their own agendas and expectations. They want to influence or even control what is being taught in the schools.
- Social studies represents an enormous changing body of knowledge. Social studies curriculum simply defies coverage or even adequate sampling. We can never have enough depth or breadth.

The term “social studies” is a product of the twentieth century. It was officially adopted as the name for the curricular area in 1916 by the Committee on Social Studies, a subgroup of the Commission to Reorganize Secondary Education, which had been set up by the National Education Association. The committee reported the conclusions in the *1916 Report*, which outlined the good citizenship concept and also recommended the curricula for grades five through eight (see Table 2.1), which were traditionally considered part of elementary or grammar school.

In the late 1930s, Paul Hanna proposed a sequence of instructional topics that was to revolutionize elementary school social studies. This framework, known as the Expanding Communities Model or Expanding Environments curriculum, was based on a theory that students’ ability to understand their world progresses through a series of developmental stages and that social studies programs should be structured to coincide with those stages (Hanna, 1957, 1963). The progression was from a study of the students themselves and their homes and families through increasingly larger communities that were more remote and abstract to students’ thinking.

Despite all the pressure for change, the Expanding Environments concept has been the major influence on social studies curriculum for over 50 years. The first eight grades of the twelve-grade Hanna model are shown in Table 2.2. Alongside it, the dominant pattern of curriculum organization currently used in textbook and school curricula is shown.

The beauty of the Expanding Environments model was its logic. It made sense to a lot of people both from the standpoint of its reflection of a reasonable pattern of child development and as a logical way to organize social studies curriculum. Hanna’s model was developed at a fortunate time in many ways. The social climate of the nation was ideal, with America coming through a depression and a world war from which it

**Table 2.1** Curricula for Grades Five Through Eight

| Grade         | Subject                              |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| Fifth Grade   | American History                     |
| Sixth Grade   | World History (Western Civilization) |
| Seventh Grade | Geography                            |
| Eighth Grade  | American History                     |

**Table 2.2** Expanding Environments Model and Contemporary Curricula

| Grade        | Expanding Environments Model                   | Contemporary Curricula                   |
|--------------|--|--|
| Kindergarten | Kindergartens were not mandatory at this time. | Self, School, Home, Families, Community  |
| First        | The Child, the Home, the Family, the School    | Families<br>Community                    |
| Second       | The Neighborhood<br>Neighborhood Helpers       | Neighborhoods                            |
| Third        | The Larger Community Cities                    | Communities                              |
| Fourth       | The State<br>The Region                        | State History<br>Geographic Regions      |
| Fifth        | The United States and its Neighbors            | American History                         |
| Sixth        | The World (Western Civilization)               | World Cultures<br>The Western Hemisphere |
| Seventh      | World Geography                                | World Geography                          |
| Eighth       | History of the United States                   | American History                         |

emerged as the leading power in the free world. Technology and communication as well as the economic conditions were also right. Hanna’s model was soon adopted by many school systems and by textbook publishers. It is, to this day, the most common model used in elementary schools in the United States.

From the 1960s to the 1970s, a spirit of reform gripped the social studies that was known as the New Social Studies (Byford & Russell, 2007; Fitchett & Russell, 2011). It manifested itself in a series of well-warranted criticisms of the Expanding Environment curriculum as it was by then represented in textbook series and school curricula across the country and in the development of new curricula, many of which were closely tied to the various social science disciplines. Critics pointed out that social studies teachers relied too heavily on textbooks and that there was too much memorization of facts. But there was major curricular criticism as well. Critics charged that social studies lacked sufficient substantive content; that African Americans, Hispanic Americans, women, and other groups were insufficiently represented, stereotypically represented, or misrepresented; and that significant issues and content topics of controversy were avoided. The New Social Studies movement was spurred in part by federal funding and in part by the social consciousness and concern of the period. The lasting changes injected into social studies by these reform efforts during this era included:

- A greater sensitivity to the representation of various ethnic groups and women in social studies material.
- Focus on inquiry and values.
- Greater global consciousness.
- Focus on social sciences other than history and geography as sources of insight and methods of inquiry about the world.
- Greater awareness of and ability to deal with controversy in the social studies classroom.
- An emphasis on learning concepts and generalizations rather than isolated facts.

More recent efforts to set the direction for social studies have reaffirmed the importance of history and geography while at the same time accepting a less structured and more incidental social studies content for elementary grades. Perhaps the most prestigious of the recent groups to examine the future of social studies have been two curriculum task forces. The first of these was the Curriculum Task Force of the National Commission on the Social Studies in the Schools, which published a report, *Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century* (1989). In it, the Task Force advocated a curriculum of stories about people accompanied by holiday study and following up time and location information in reading stories, mathematics, and other materials. The Task Force suggested that such a program was sufficient to ensure elementary understanding of world geography, the civic and political traditions of the United States, and human life on different continents and at different times in the past (1989, p. 9). The Task Force envisioned three courses being taught in grades four, five, and six, which would include (in no specified order) (1) United States History, (2) World History, and (3) Geography.

The second group, set up by the National Council for the Social Studies, was called the Task Force on Standards for the Social Studies. It worked over a period of three years before coming out with its original report in 1994, *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*. This report established ten themes for social studies and was intended to influence and guide curriculum design and overall student expectations for grades K–12. In 2010, the Task Force released a revised and updated report *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment*. The updated report provides a description of the ten basic themes for social studies (see Table 2.3).

## ► INCORPORATING THEMES FROM THE STANDARDS

The focus themes identified by the Standards Task Force are, to some extent, taken from the social science disciplines and represent their essential lines of inquiry. Following a kind of candlewick principle, these themes can run through topics of study and across grade levels, drawing essential content and skill development to themselves.

**FYI:** Inquiry is considered a foundation of the C3 Framework.

Thematic units represent one approach to implementing the standards. Such units are integrally related to literature-based programs and unify the content of social studies with other curricular areas. In non-graded settings, thematic units can be part of an internal structure.

Examples of thematic unit topics at each grade level are detailed in Table 2.4. The list is not presented as a sequential model curriculum and certainly will not reflect precisely any particular school or textbook curricular program. These unit topics are presented to give an idea of topics that might be taught, suggest connections to the Standards and to a specific discipline, and to illustrate the notion of thematic threads.

## ► SOCIAL STUDIES AND COMMON CORE STANDARDS

When discussing standards in education during the era of accountability, certainly one of the most popular and emerging topics revolves around the Common Core Standards (Common Core Standards, 2012a). These standards represent a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center)

**Table 2.3** Descriptions of NCSS’s Ten Themes for Social Studies

| Theme                                     | Definition  |
|---|---|
| Culture                                   | Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.  |
| Time, Continuity, and Change              | Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.   |
| People, Places, and Environment           | Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.  |
| Individual Development and Identity       | Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.   |
| Individuals, Groups, and Institutions     | Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.                                    |
| Power, Authority, and Governance          | Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance. |
| Production, Distribution, and Consumption | Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. |
| Science, Technology, and Society          | Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of relationships among science, technology, and society.  |
| Global Connections                        | Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.  |
| Civic Ideals and Practices                | Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.               |

and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to provide a list of standards for K–12 schools to help students prepare for college and the workforce (Kenna & Russell, 2014). A variety of contributors developed the standards, including teachers, administrators, and other content specialists, and were informed by all the current state standards of education as well as standards from other top-performing countries around the world. One of the primary purposes behind the Common Core Standards is to help provide a clearer and more consistent set of expectations for student learning at each grade level across the United States. Attempting to clarify and identify high-achieving expectations for student learning across the states has become increasingly important because not all states go through the same process of adopting state standards; thus, what states deem important for academic and personal growth can vary greatly.

For elementary teachers, the Common Core Standards emphasize English language arts (reading/writing) and mathematics. The Common Core Standards for other specific content areas have not been developed, and according to Common Core Initiative (<http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/frequently-asked-questions/>) (Common Core Standards, 2012b), there is no plan to develop standards specific for