

# Effective Social Studies Instructional Practices

Social Studies teachers often choose this field out of inherent love of the social sciences. We have the intrinsic ability to see the interconnectedness and implications of social studies and desire to share those with our students. The challenge is two-fold. First, our students do not think like social scientists if they do not have that innate skill and love of the field. Secondly, we believe that it is all important and must all be discussed in the finest of details. These challenges set the stage for stale classrooms full of resistant students and frustrated teachers. However, there is hope! Shifting our instructional practice can make the social sciences more accessible for our students and free the educator from an ever growing content to manageable sized instruction.

## 1 - Choosing Content Wisely

**First**, look at the standard and identify priority content. This is the core content necessary for students to demonstrate mastery of that specific standard. For example, in 8<sup>th</sup> grade the students touch on World War II. The standard specifically identifies two factors that led to U.S. involvement - the Lend Lease Act and the bombing of Pearl Harbor. While we love the whole context of World War II, learning about Hitler and the Holocaust is unnecessary for mastery of the standard. Additionally, 8<sup>th</sup> grade is setting the stage for high school U.S. and World History courses. Do not steal their thunder!

**Secondly**, choose what students can receive via a handout and what needs to be discussed as part of a note taking session. Spending copious amounts of time writing down twenty vocabulary words is boring and does not build student thinking or interest while stealing precious time away from the actual tasks of a social scientist. Create a unit overview handout that identifies key vocabulary, people and events. Choose to assign this as homework or to include the definitions and descriptions on the handout. This may be used as a reference tool for delving deeper into the content. See the example below for how to effectively use this teaching strategy.

Seventh grade students study the history of Southeast Asia which includes a range of vocabulary, people, movements and events. Instead of lecturing, students receive an overview sheet that lists the vocabulary: nationalism, independence, non-violent protest, communism, Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, Tiananmen Square, containment, foreign involvement, Korean War, and Vietnam War. Some of these words are defined and a few, such as non-violent protest, are not defined. The first lesson focuses on India and is an activity centered on an article on Nationalism and Nonviolent Protest in India, highlighting Gandhi. During the first read the students use the overview sheet as a tool when they encounter new vocabulary such as nationalism. This helps by providing reading

supports for struggling readers while going quickly into deeper content. While reading students also develop a contextual definition for non-violence based on the reading. Finally, notes consist of annotation of the text during reading and discussion. The teacher can facilitate the discussion or have small groups discuss, using questions that lead students to mastery of the standard.

## 2 - Designing Thinking Lessons Based on Investigation

Our students will be more apt to engage in social studies content if they are given the skills and freedom to think and question. However, we must design instruction that models and teaches them those thinking skills. Instructional units or sub-units can be designed using any of the following models.

### Option A: 5E Model

The 5E Model comes from the science field, but works just as well as we are the social sciences. The 5Es scaffold students over a series of lessons where each phase may take part of a class period or several class periods. The phases are student centered.

- Engage - The goal of this phase is to draw students into an experience where they feel and connect to the concept or content. This is before any notes or
- Explore - The goal of this phase is for students to investigate and explore the content using a driving question. Students may read primary sources, complete a webquest, watch videos, etc.
- Explain - This phase is designed for more direct instruction to correct misconceptions, delve deeper or broader into the content and provide connections to meet the overall standard.
- Extend - This phase allows students to extend the content to show deeper application or analysis.
- Evaluate - This phase is the assessment which should match the language of the standard in both content and skill demonstration.

Designing instruction requires time to develop resources and tools for students. This also requires careful attention to how this model fits with the daily instructional framework (opening, work session and closing). See the sample unit overview and lessons on the subsequent pages. [NOTE: Full access to this unit including active hyperlinks to activities may be found here -

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1IAylu5cO7XFkMpMSK2Au97KIT015FkbG>]

## Unit Overview

### Cumulative Summative Assessment:

North Korea has been making decisions that seem to be leading to the reunification of North and South Korea, beginning with sending a united Korean team to the Winter Olympics of 2018. You will be serving as a political advisor at the reunification meetings. You must design the ideal government and economic system for these merging countries. You must be able to defend/justify your decisions, using details from the unit.

### Part A: Government Systems

Engage: Skittles Simulation  
Explore: Malala video (whole group); Document analysis stations  
Explain: Group share; Concise notes  
Extend: Choice project  
Assess: Common Quiz & Choice Project

### Part B: Economic Systems

Engage: Chocolate Chip Cookie Simulation  
Explore: Elements of an Economy Stations  
Explain: "Diagnose" the type & health of Asian economies  
Extend: Should the U.S. or UN place an embargo on any nations? Why?  
Assess:

### Part C: Standard of Living

Engage: Gibber Jabber Task  
Explore:  
Explain:  
Extend:  
Assess:

## Part A: Government Systems

### Engage

#### **Activator/Mini Lesson:**

Today we have a bag of Skittles to split between the class. The question is, what is the best way to split these? You will experience several ways to distribute the Skittles - consider the reason for each way to distribute and how you feel experiencing each situation.

Each one of you has a cup. Each round you will receive food necessary for living. In order to have full nutrition you need at least one of each color Skittle and a total of 7 candies. This food will last you one week.

#### **Work Session:**

Complete simulation ([see directions sheet](#)). Students may receive the [Note & Notice guide](#) to journal observations, reflections and conclusions during the simulation.

#### **Closing:**

Processing Discussion:

Did you ever have full nutrition? Enough food for a week? How did you feel during each of these scenarios? Why did you feel that way? Think from the ruler's perspective - what motivation did they have for making decisions that way? What and who did the government value based on your observation/experience? Did you ever observe some form of equality or equity? What forms of government do you believe these might have represented?

## Explore

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### **Activator:**

We will be watching a video about a young woman from another country. She is arguing for a certain topic. As you watch the video, make notes about the following questions, noting evidence you hear that supports your conclusions. We will discuss this as a whole class after the video.

- What does this video reveal about the abilities of citizens in her country?
- What role do you think citizens might play in their government if this is how people live?
- What kinds of job opportunities are most likely available to citizens if this is how people live?

Watch a [video of Malala](#) advocating for the rights of women/children to attend school and discuss the questions (choose one of the videos from the resource PPT).

### **Mini Lesson:**

Considering our discussion from the video, how does Malala's government and country seem different from ours? (Allow for discussion - possibly create a compare/contrast thinking map on the board as a whole class.) Asian countries have very different government and economic systems which impact how their people live. Understanding other countries can be difficult for us as most of us have never lived in one of these countries. We are going to investigate these countries during this unit by asking two big questions:

- Are Asian countries benefiting the most people through their government and economic systems?
- How do government and economic systems reflect the values of the culture/society?

We will be exploring these questions during our work session. Before beginning the work session, let's think for a moment. Do you think the government determines the economic system or does the economic system determine the type of government? (Governments determine economic systems)

### **Work Session:**

Our first step is to explore the governments of these countries. In groups you will examine various primary and secondary sources. What do these sources reveal about how people are ruled and what role they play in their government? There are key vocabulary words related to government that allow us to have a common vocabulary. Here is a [KIM chart](#) with the words already noted. As you go through your stations, if you encounter these terms, this is your reference sheet to help you understand what you read. You can also add the memory cue from the article, pictures, etc. At the closing we will create a class anchor chart of these terms where you will share your memory cue and where you got the idea.

Students will rotate through [stations](#).

Each station will highlight one of the key countries.

Students will explore pictures, letters/stories, news articles and election statistics and may use the [Library of Congress artifact analysis tools](#) to aid in analysis and accountable talk.

Students will create a thinking map or KWL chart or something to organize their discoveries

**Closing:**

1. Students share vocabulary from the KIM chart to create a class KIM chart of new and previous terms.
2. Students will work in teams to create Tweets expressing responses to one or both of these questions:
  - a. Is this country benefiting the most people through its government system?
  - b. How/what cultural or social values are being reflected by the governmental practices?

## Explain

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**Activator:**

Political cartoon caption/dialogue on an Asian government. Highlight issue of power or fairness

**Work Session:**

(Flip Work Session/Mini Lesson)

Students share discoveries about governments and predict what type of government each country has and justify with evidence about equality, fairness and civic participation

**Mini Lesson:**

Concise notes highlighting key information about government systems in Asia. Use questioning to draw students back to essential questions. Students can record notes and connect to conclusions from the Exploration through the [Classifying Thinking Map](#).

**Closing:**

Reflecting on the forms of government, which form do you believe is the best for countries in Asia? As we go through this unit you will be gradually designing what you believe to be the ideal government and economic system. Record what you believe on the [“Best Of” chart](#).

## Extend

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Students have choice to:

- A. draw political cartoons illustrating governmental practices and the impact on citizens
- B. write an inspirational speech to the children of Asian countries to be engaged in civic participation to either promote or change their government

## Evaluate

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Common formative assessment

## Option B: Social Studies Labs

Social Studies labs are grounded in the teaching method proposed by Bruce Lesh in his book *"Why Won't You Just Tell Us the Answer?" - Teaching Historical Thinking in Grades 7-12*. Lesh struggled with the challenge we presented at the beginning of this guide - bored students because they do not naturally think like social scientists or historians. In brief, his method of teaching changed to center on debatable questions. Each unit of study began with a driving essential question that was open ended, requiring students to defend a position. Students then use the direct teaching and student centered learning to develop and defend their answer.

While Lesh uses this method to design whole units of instruction, this can be modified to explore smaller issues in a single lesson. Many social studies standards focus on cause and effect or compare/contrast. How can those be flipped into debatable questions? The other advantage of this method of teaching is in freeing students from fear of failure. An open-ended question allows all students to have a belief they can succeed as long as they can prove their point. Along the way they must learn and use content! Students will try harder and be willing to think if risk of failure is low or non-existent.

The Georgia Department of Education has sample Social Studies Labs for certain courses. These may be found at [www.georgiastandards.org](http://www.georgiastandards.org) by clicking into Social Studies and then into the appropriate grade level or course. Scroll below the standards, curriculum map and sample videos. It is usually one of the last resources on the page. Here is a sample from 6<sup>th</sup> grade: <https://www.georgiastandards.org/Georgia-Standards/Documents/Social-Studies-6th-Grade-Environmental-Issues-Latin-America-Social-Studies-Lab.pdf>

Learn more directly from Bruce Lesh by watching his video segments. These may be found at the following links:

<https://www.georgiastandards.org/Georgia-Standards/Pages/Thinking-Like-a-Historian-Social-Studies-Video-Series.aspx>

<https://www.georgiastandards.org/Georgia-Standards/Pages/Marrying-Social-Studies-and-ELA-The-Inquiry-Method.aspx>

## Option C: Document Based Questions

DBQs are grounded in social studies inquiry and were first developed for social studies Advanced Placement exams. DBQs are similar to social studies labs in that there is a driving essential question that frequently requires students to make a decision. The DBQ engages students in learning content through an examination of primary documents and

culminates in a formal essay drawing from those resources. Students can learn content without lecture by engaging in examination of the primary sources.

The DBQ Project takes the DBQ process one step further and designs a sequence of lessons that draw from best practices like the 5E model, first engaging students in the topic, providing some background knowledge and leading into discovery. There are various amounts of scaffolding or tiering within the lessons. These resources may be found at <https://www.dbqproject.com/dbq-project-library/>

Another tool for DBQs is the National Archives. There are links to documents and primary sources that may be searched by topic. There are various tools for analyzing primary sources and these are also at varying levels depending on your grade level and learner. These resources may be found at: <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets>

The Stanford History Education Group has resources and lessons that support DBQs and historical thinking (similar to Bruce Lesh's ideas). These resources can be found at: <https://sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons>

### **3 - Active, Accountable Engagement**

Any given class period should engage students in application or use of knowledge for at least 60% of the time. Students should not just be receiving knowledge. When students are engaged in application, ensure that they are thinking about knowledge and not just repeating or receiving in another format. One strategy to increase thinking and rigor is requiring accountable talk during student centered work session.

A common lesson includes map skills. The standards for map skills are often low thinking level as well. This does not mean our instructional design must suffer; we can increase thinking and engagement with a few tweaks such as accountable talk. See the sample geography activities on the pages below. Expect students to be using the language of the standards and geographical terms while they work and talk.



# LATIN AMERICAN GEOGRAPHY UNIT

PART A –

- 1.) I can locate selected physical and political features in Latin America on a political-physical map.
- 2.) I understand relationships between geographical features and can describe relationships between key physical and political features.

## Locating & Predicting With Physical Features



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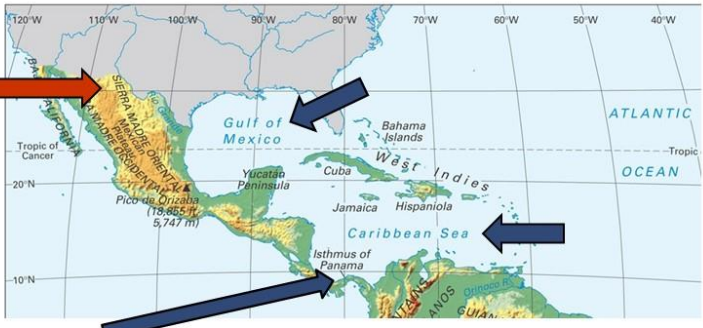
1 – Locate the key physical features on your map and color code them.

2 – As you work in small groups, discuss these questions:

- What types of resources might Latin America have as a result of these physical features? Why?
- What environmental problems might face Latin America as it relates to these physical features? Why?

The expectation is that I will hear **accountable talk** where you use the key terms from the map and your prior knowledge of geography and environmental issues to make predictions for this unit. We will share for closing.





**Physical Features of Latin America**

The map shows the physical features of Latin America, including the Andes Mountains, the Amazon Basin, the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea, and the Isthmus of Panama. Key locations like Pico de Orizaba (18,685 ft / 5,747 m) and the Tropic of Cancer are marked. Arrows point to the Andes, the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea, and the Isthmus of Panama.

**S** 1 – Locate the key physical features on your map and color code them.

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**u** 2 – As you work in small groups, discuss these questions:

**d**  What types of resources might Latin America have as a result of these physical features? Why?

**e**  What environmental problems might face Latin America as it relates to these physical features? Why?

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**T** **The expectation is that I will hear accountable talk where you use the key terms from the map and your prior knowledge of geography and environmental issues to make predictions for this unit. We will share for closing.**

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The map shows the political boundaries of Central America and the Caribbean region. Countries labeled include Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Cuba. Major cities like Mazatlán, León, Guadalajara, Veracruz, Mérida, Cancún, Acapulco, Oaxaca, Belmopan, Tegucigalpa, San Salvador, Managua, San José, Barranquilla, Cartagena, Colon, Panama, and Medelán are marked. Arrows point to Mazatlán, Havana, and Panama.

**S** 1 – Label all countries in Central America, but color the KEY countries as noted.

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**u** 2 – As you work in small groups, compare the physical and political maps to discuss these questions:

**d**  What types of natural resources might each country have as a result of the location physical features? Why?

**e**  What countries might have more economic or political power based on physical features? Why?

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**T** **The expectation is that I will hear accountable talk where you use the key terms from the map and your prior knowledge of geography and environmental issues to make predictions for this unit. We will share for closing.**

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1 – Label all countries in S.America, but color the KEY countries as noted.

2 – As you work in small groups, compare the physical and political maps to discuss these questions:

- What types of natural resources might each country have as a result of the location physical features? Why?
- What countries might have more economic or political power based on physical features? Why?

The expectation is that I will hear accountable talk where you use the key terms from the map and your prior knowledge of geography and environmental issues to make predictions for this unit. We will share for closing.