



# Social Studies High-Quality Instructional Materials Rubric Companion Guide

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Office of Teaching and Learning

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## Purpose and Organization

The companion guide breaks down each criterion from the [K-12 Social Studies High-Quality Instructional Materials \(HQIM\) Rubric](#) into smaller components for deeper analysis and offers specific examples that highlight a strong representation of that criterion might look like in practice. The examples provided in this document are not exhaustive.

This companion guide was developed in partnership with Student Achievement Partners (SAP) and American Institutes for Research (AIR) and is grounded in SAP's [Essential x Equitable \(e<sup>2</sup>\) Instructional Practice Framework](#) and uses content from the National Council for the Social Studies' [College, Career, and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework](#). To learn more about the research and scholarship that underpins this work, please refer to [MSDE's Social Studies HQIM Identification Framework](#).

For each criterion in the Maryland ELA HQIM Rubric, the companion guide provides:

-  **Key Definitions:** for common language and interpretation of terms and jargon.
-  **How to Gather Evidence:** Guidance about where and how to look for evidence of each criterion.
-  **Examples of Evidence:** Offer some concrete ways criteria may appear in instructional materials. These examples are not intended to be exhaustive, but to provide reviewers with additional guidance about what evidence of criteria can look like within instructional materials.
-  **Red Flags:** Signal evidence that is not aligned or cautions of harmful implications.

Within both Examples of Evidence and Red Flags, additional guidance is provided through:

- **Grade-Level Considerations:** Where applicable, specific grade-level considerations are flagged (e.g., Grades K-2) within criteria to highlight evidence pertaining to a specific grade level or grade band. When evidence or red flags are not grade-band specific, consider them broadly applicable across grades, even if their application may look different. If grade-level considerations are nested underneath a bullet, they apply specifically to that example.
- **Student Considerations:** Where applicable, considerations for two specific student groups that are central to the design of these resources, multilingual learners and students with diverse learning needs are noted. These student considerations point to related ideas from key frameworks to support all students: CAST's [Universal Design for Learning Guidelines](#) to center students with diverse learning needs and resources such as Bárbara C. Cruz and Stephen J. Thornton's [Teaching Social Studies to English Language Learners](#) to support multilingual learners.

## ORGANIZATION

Each review tool in this suite follows the same overarching organization, connected to [Maryland's Social Studies HQIM Identification Framework](#). Review materials for HQIM in Maryland are organized into four categories. Categories are divided into domains, which are further broken down into individual criteria.

For further information on the instructional materials review process, visit the [Maryland HQIM website](#).

## Grade-Level and Standards Aligned

### DOMAIN 1: ALIGNMENT WITH THE MSSFS

#### INQUIRY AS A CORE TENET

Instructional materials reflect the idea that inquiry is the core tenet of effective social studies instruction. Further, materials focus on the interrelated enduring understandings, concepts, and skills from the core social studies disciplines (civics, economics, geography, and history). The instructional materials also contain clear opportunities to practice asking questions, investigate essential questions, and gather relevant evidence to develop claims. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. content of the Maryland Social Studies Frameworks & Standards (MSSFS);<sup>1</sup>
- b. investigation of compelling and supporting questions in a structured way;
- c. units that build toward taking informed action and provide students with an opportunity to apply their learning to real-world challenges;
- d. explicit instruction designed in ways that are clear and authentic;
- e. explicit opportunities for teachers and students to develop and plan inquiry arcs; and
- f. lesson objectives aligned to grade-appropriate K-12 college- and career-ready literacy standards.

#### Key Definitions:

- **Inquiry:** A process of exploration that involves asking questions, gathering and analyzing evidence, and considering multiple perspectives.<sup>2</sup>
- **Inquiry arc:** A structured framework that guides students through questioning, applying disciplinary knowledge, evaluating sources, and communicating conclusions to develop critical thinking and civic engagement in social studies.

#### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review the units and lessons for enduring and authentic compelling and supporting questions that provide teacher-guided and student-led inquiries and serve to further students' knowledge and understanding of social studies content and skills.
- Review scope and sequence and introductory materials for an understanding of how content, concepts, and skills are organized to connect and build upon students' knowledge and skills over time through inquiry.

<sup>1</sup> Maryland State Department of Education. (n.d.). State standards and frameworks in social studies. Government of Maryland. <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DCAA/Social-Studies/MSSS.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> National Council for the Social Studies. (2023, November 8). New definition of social studies approved. <https://www.socialstudies.org/media-information/definition-social-studies-nov2023>

**Examples of Evidence:**

- Units are structured to support inquiry such that they:
  - are organized around an enduring compelling question that develops students' disciplinary knowledge and skills in social studies (i.e., open-ended and focus on authentic issues in the discipline),<sup>3</sup>
  - provide opportunities for sustained inquiry through tasks that include investigations/research, evaluating sources, generating questions, analyzing/synthesizing sources, developing evidence-based arguments and communicating conclusions related to the enduring understandings, concepts, and skills in the MSSFS; and
  - center students' experiences on inquiry-based practices that build toward students' taking informed action and applying their learning to real-world challenges.<sup>4</sup>
- Units include suggestions for classroom routines and structures that support explicit instruction of MSSFS content and concepts (e.g., language for articulating lesson objectives, teacher modeling, guided and independent practices of concepts and skills) with detailed explanations.
- Units include tasks in which students reflect on and address real-world challenges that culminate in students communicating their learning or ideas to authentic audiences.
- **Grades K-5:** Student inquiry is supported by more teacher-guided questions and tasks that scaffold students through an investigative learning process. Materials include or provide guidance on the topics and questions, but students design the product or solution.
- **Grades 6-12:** More opportunities are provided for student-led inquiry where students are encouraged to ask and investigate their own questions, interests and curiosities around social studies content and concepts.
- Lessons are focused on supporting questions that connect to content or essential understandings from the MSSFS and build students' ability to provide an argument based on the unit compelling question.<sup>5</sup>
- Learning experiences are fully aligned to the rigor, depth, and intent of MSSFS for the grade level or course.
- Lessons include clear and measurable learning objectives that are aligned to the MSSFS for the grade level or course.
- **Grades K-5:** Lesson objectives include relevant alignment to the [Maryland College and Career Ready \(MCCR\) Standards for English Language Arts/Literacy](#) and are identified in the unit and/or lesson overview.

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<sup>3</sup> Grant, S., Swan, K., & Lee, J. (2017, September). Teaching the C3 framework: Questions that compel and support. *Social Education*, 81(4), 200-203. [https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/articles/se\\_8104200.pdf](https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/articles/se_8104200.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Grant, S., Swan, K., & Lee, J. (2017, September). *The inquiry design model*. C3 Teachers. [https://c3teachers.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/IDM\\_Assumptions\\_C3-Brief.pdf](https://c3teachers.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/IDM_Assumptions_C3-Brief.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Grant, S., Swan, K., & Lee, J. (2017, September). Teaching the C3 framework: Questions that compel and support. *Social Education*, 81(4), 200-203. [https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/articles/se\\_8104200.pdf](https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/articles/se_8104200.pdf)



- **Grades 6-12:** Lesson objectives include relevant alignment to the [Maryland College and Career Ready Standards for Disciplinary Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects](#) and are identified in the unit and/or lesson overview

**Red Flags:**

- Lesson objectives and learning experiences are not aligned to the rigor, depth, and/or intent of the MSSFS for the grade level or course.
- Students are asked to engage with low-level questions and tasks that are typically limited to knowledge and comprehension of social studies content and concepts (e.g., “When did the American Revolution begin?”).
- Culminating tasks lack authenticity and do not provide opportunities for students to communicate their learning or ideas to authentic audiences.

## DISCIPLINARY CONTENT FLUENCY

Instructional materials contain accurate, detailed content with a variety of culturally responsive sources and abundant, well-designed practice opportunities along with supporting resources that align with the sequence of the MSSFS.<sup>6</sup> These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. lessons and units that build disciplinary knowledge and skills through the evaluation of sources and evidence and reflect the practice of social scientists; and
- b. authentic opportunities to build content knowledge and disciplinary skills across units in history, civics, geography, and economics.

### Key Definitions:

- **Social scientists:** Experts, such as historians, geographers, economists, and political scientists, who study human societies, behaviors, relationships, or interactions.

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review units and lessons for questions and tasks that engage students in building, using, and applying practices of social scientists.
- Review units and lessons for instructional strategies and tasks with a focus on building content knowledge and disciplinary skills across social studies disciplines.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Guidance and/or resources are provided for educators on how units and lessons are aligned to and engage students in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking like social scientists around content, concepts, and sources.<sup>7</sup>
- Learning experiences include tasks and reflective questions that build students' civic, economic, geographic, and/or historical thinking and reasoning skills aligned to the inquiry arc (e.g., tasks model and engage students with questions social studies experts would ask in their field).
- Units provide students with opportunities to engage with and evaluate a variety of discipline-specific texts and sources (e.g., maps, satellite images, graphs, photographs, illustrations, speeches, legislation, audio, videos, artifacts) to build disciplinary knowledge and skills.
- Units and lessons include tasks and strategies that support students in engaging with disciplinary practices of social scientists when evaluating and using discipline-specific texts and sources (e.g., tasks model and engage students with questions regarding the application of civic virtues and democratic principles; economic decision-making; spatial patterns and movements; and/or change, continuity, and context).

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<sup>6</sup> Maryland State Department of Education. (n.d.). State standards and frameworks in social studies. Government of Maryland. <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DCAA/Social-Studies/MSSS.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> American Institutes for Research & EdReports. (2024, January 8). Criteria for high-quality instructional materials for social studies. [https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/23-23505\\_HQIM\\_for\\_SS\\_Final.pdf](https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/23-23505_HQIM_for_SS_Final.pdf)



- Units provide opportunities for students to analyze and evaluate sources (claim/evidence/reasoning or observe/reflect/question) in order to develop arguments from various disciplinary lenses (i.e., civics, economics, geography, history).
- Students engage with interdisciplinary and/or interrelated questions, sources, and tasks in order to build content knowledge and disciplinary skills across units and lessons. For example, to address the overarching concepts of “What does liberty look like?”, students may unpack related, discipline-specific questions throughout a unit (e.g., for economics, “Does more liberty mean more prosperity?”, or for geography, “How does liberty change from place to place?”).<sup>8</sup>
- Assessment materials and/or tasks ask students to apply their civic, economic, geographic and/or historical thinking and reasoning to reflect on and address real-world problems (e.g., in an economics lesson on Needs and Wants,<sup>9</sup> kindergarten students may identify, select, and act on a method for addressing a need or want for their classroom).

**Red Flags:**

- Units are focused on isolated content or concepts and do not explore interrelated historical, geographical, economic, social, or political contexts.
- Questions and tasks do not support or provide opportunities for students to think about and engage with content/concepts and sources from the perspective of social scientists.
- Tasks around reading, writing, listening, speaking, and analyzing are not tailored to the discipline and provide limited opportunities to engage in discipline-specific practices or skills.

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<sup>8</sup> National Council for the Social Studies. (2013). 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. <https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/2022/c3-framework-for-social-studies-rev0617.2.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> C3 Teachers. (n.d.). Can we get everything we need and want? [https://c3teachers.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/NewYork\\_K\\_NeedsandWants.pdf](https://c3teachers.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/NewYork_K_NeedsandWants.pdf)





## EVALUATION OF SOURCES AND LEVERAGING OF EVIDENCE

Instructional materials focus in particular on opportunities for source evaluation and the use of evidence to support claims. Materials contain systematic and supportive practice opportunities for students to investigate how the reliability of a document can be affected by the circumstances under which it was created. Further, instructional materials provide systematic opportunities for learners to gather relevant information from multiple sources while developing claims and counterclaims.

### Key Definitions:

- **Reliability:** The extent to which information from sources is credible or trustworthy.

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review information provided in student and teacher materials about the source context and authorship.
- Look for tasks and activities that prompt and support students in investigating the reliability of sources.
- Look for tasks that prompt and support students applying information, understandings, and analyses from sources to develop claims and counterclaims around content and concepts under study.
- Review units and lessons for systematic opportunities for students to use evidence from multiple sources to evaluate content and perspectives and develop claims or arguments.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Units provide opportunities for students to use evidence to support claims by:
  - using sources to identify themes and key ideas across multiple sources to draw their own conclusions from evidence and construct claims;
  - corroborating information using multiple sources; and
  - constructing arguments to answer a compelling question using evidence from multiple sources.
- Resources, tools and/or strategies (e.g., primary source analysis tools) are included to support students in gathering information, reflecting, questioning, and investigating content and concepts to develop a claim or argument.
- Units include questions, prompts, or tasks that provide students with opportunities to build and apply disciplinary thinking skills in civics, economics, geography, and history (e.g., sourcing, contextualizing, corroborating) when evaluating sources in order to develop claims and arguments. Students are asked to consider context, audience, purpose, and perspective when evaluating sources.
- **Grades 6-12:** Learning experiences and tasks include supports and opportunities for students to develop counterclaims by evaluating and using evidence from sources (Grades K-5 are not required to engage in the development of counterclaims).
- Lessons include opportunities for students to investigate the reliability of sources through tasks, procedures and/or resources that require students to use questioning around texts or sources, content, and concepts to evaluate and assess sources.

- Historical, social, and/or cultural contexts or background information are provided to support students' evaluation of sources and reflection on the reliability of a source based on the circumstances under which it was created

**Red Flags:**

- Students are asked to engage with writing and/or discussion prompts that are solely opinion-based and do not require them to use evidence to support their perspectives or claims. There may be an overreliance on anecdotal evidence to support claims.
- There is an overreliance on singular sources or sources representing limited perspectives or narratives to gather information and develop a claim or argument.
- There is a lack of supports, procedures, and/or strategies to help students counter biases when selecting, evaluating, analyzing, and using evidence (e.g., confirmation/anchoring bias, selecting evidence that only supports a desired conclusion, founding credibility and reliability of source based on author or creator authority).

## DOMAIN 2: TEXT AND RESOURCE SELECTION

### GRADE-LEVEL SOURCES

Instructional materials ensure that all students have extensive opportunities to actively engage with grade-level sources. These sources for instruction are appropriately complex for the grade based on quantitative and qualitative features.<sup>10</sup> Materials include opportunities to engage with longer primary, secondary, and historiographical works across all elementary and secondary levels. In early elementary grades, the texts may be read aloud.

#### Key Definitions:

- **Grade-level:** Alignment in complexity and content to the expected academic proficiency and developmental stages, providing adequate challenge at a given grade level.
- **Sources:** All forms of media students may encounter, including but not limited to maps, graphs, photographs, illustrations, audio, videos, and artifacts.
- **Quantitative features of text complexity:** A calculated measurement of complexity based on features such as word length, sentence length and word frequency (e.g., Lexile, Flesh-Kincaid) with benchmarks.
- **Qualitative features of text complexity:** Analysis of purpose/meaning, language, structure, and knowledge to determine the complexity of texts.

#### How to Gather Evidence:

- Identify and review core texts that reflect quantitative complexity measures (e.g., Lexile level), qualitative complexity features (e.g., purpose/meaning, language features, text structure, knowledge demands), and reader and task considerations (e.g., students' motivation, knowledge, experiences) that are grade-level appropriate.

#### Examples of Evidence:

- Grade-level texts or sources aligned with college- and career-ready standards (i.e., quantitative and qualitative complexity) are a focal point of instruction for all students.
- Grade-level texts represent diverse text and media to support the analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of social studies content and concepts presented in texts.
- **Grades K-2:** Materials should include opportunities for students to engage with sources with and without teacher support.
  - Grade-level appropriate texts or sources are included that students can engage with independently.
  - More complex texts or sources (e.g., longer primary, secondary, and historiographical works two to three grade levels above) that students may engage with are indicated in the materials with

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<sup>10</sup> Council of Chief State School Officers & National Governors Association. (2013). Supplemental information for appendix A of the common core state standards for English language arts and literacy: New research on text complexity. [https://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Appendix-A-New-Research-on-Text-Complexity-revised%20\(1\).pdf](https://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Appendix-A-New-Research-on-Text-Complexity-revised%20(1).pdf)

recommendations for supportive strategies to unpack the sources with students (e.g., read alouds, shortening to meaningful excerpts, chunking, including a glossary, visuals).

- Source sets are included to support students in building their understanding of social studies content and/or developing a claim using evidence.
- Strategies and/or supports are provided to support all students (e.g., multilingual learners, students reading below grade level, accelerated learners) in engaging with complex, grade-level texts around social studies content and concepts.
- Supports are included for questions, prompts and tasks attuned to text or source complexity (i.e., quantitative complexity, qualitative complexity, task and reader considerations).

#### Red Flags:

- Overreliance on abridged versions or excerpts of texts instead of full-length works limits opportunities for sustained engagement and deeper understanding of complex texts.
- Students engage with grade-level texts for a portion of instruction but spend a majority of instructional time with leveled texts.
- Sources or texts are modified or overly simplified to reduce the rigor of the task.
- Students' reading proficiency is labeled with a level, and they consistently read texts below grade-level or course-level expectations as a result.

## DOMAIN 3: COMPELLING QUESTIONS AND TASKS

### SOURCE-BASED AND ALIGNED TO MSSFS

Instructional materials include source-specific questions, discussion prompts, essential questions, and tasks to support students' analysis of primary and secondary sources. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. alignment to the essential questions embedded within the MSSFS;<sup>11</sup>
- b. use of the origin, authority, structure, context, and collaborative value of the sources to guide the selection of evidence from multiple sources
- c. attention to each source's particular qualitative complexities (i.e., meaning/purpose, structure, language, knowledge demands); and
- d. ways to spur the analytical thinking required by college- and career-ready standards at each grade level (i.e., attention to key ideas, details, craft, structure).

#### Key Definitions:

- **Source-specific questions:** Questions that are directly related to the content, meaning, structure, and knowledge of a particular text or source.

#### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review the grade or course and unit overviews for question and task alignment to grade-level standards.
- Look within lessons for activities that guide students to analyze the meaning/purpose, origin, authority, structure, language, and content of texts or sources through text-specific questions and tasks.

#### Examples of Evidence:

- Questions and tasks are clearly aligned to Maryland grade-level expectations, including essential questions within the MSSFS and college- and career-ready standards.
- Questions and tasks help students unpack the meaning and purpose of texts or sources, prompting students to identify, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize the central ideas, context, data (e.g., observations, measurements, statistics), spatial patterns, perspectives, and narratives of social studies content and concepts under study.<sup>12</sup>
- Sample questions, prompts, or tasks are included to help build or model sourcing of primary and secondary texts (e.g., asking who wrote or created a source and under what circumstances) when identifying and evaluating evidence across sources.

<sup>11</sup> Maryland State Department of Education. (n.d.). State standards and frameworks in social studies. Government of Maryland. <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DCAA/Social-Studies/MSSS.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> Model Teaching. (n.d.). Inquiry based learning: Can you identify what true inquiry looks like? <https://modelteaching.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Inquiry-Based-Learning-Identify-What-True-Inquiry-Looks-Like.pdf>



- Prompts help students explore the structural elements of the texts or sources (e.g., presentation of information or content sequentially/comparatively/causally).
- Discussion prompts and text or source-based questions are aligned to and promote disciplinary thinking in civics, economics, geography and history to support students' access to primary and secondary sources (e.g., questions around space, time, attributes, attribute/temporal relationships in geography).
- Discussion prompts and tasks encourage students to identify, compare, and evaluate differing points of view or perspectives, arguments, claims, and conclusions related to the same or interconnected content or concepts.

**Red Flags:**

- Source-based questioning focuses on general reading skills that can apply to any text or source rather than focusing on building meaning and understanding of the text related to social studies content and concepts.
- Questions and tasks primarily focus on recall and comprehension without consideration for development of higher-order thinking skills through analysis, evaluation, and synthesis.

## INTENTIONAL SEQUENCING

Instructional materials sequence essential questions, source-based questions, discussion prompts, and tasks to support students in building enduring understandings targeted in the MSSFS.<sup>13</sup> These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. building from students' funds of knowledge;<sup>14 15</sup>
- b. attending to the words, phrases, and sentences (including syntax) in texts;
- c. embedding checks for understanding (e.g., questions, tasks) of the source or topic under study to elicit evidence of student learning;
- d. engaging in close reading of especially complex or historically significant sections of text;
- e. building mental models of texts as students read; and
- f. integrating understandings across multiple sources.

### Key Definitions:

- **Close reading:** A method for examining an author's claims about an event which includes the evidence and/or reasoning the author uses as well as the author's word choice, building towards an understanding about why authors might use the language they do.

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review the grade or course and unit overviews for question and task alignment to grade-level standards.
- Look within lessons for activities that guide students to analyze the meaning/purpose, origin, authority, structure, language, and content of texts or sources through text-specific questions and tasks.

### Examples of Evidence:

- A suggested pacing guide with sequencing that aligns with the standards and/or social studies content progression is included.
- Lessons are sequenced such that they build on previous understanding and prior knowledge to connect social studies content and concepts across lessons.

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<sup>13</sup> Maryland State Department of Education. (n.d.). State standards and frameworks in social studies. Government of Maryland. <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DCAA/Social-Studies/MSSS.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & González, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849209543534>

<sup>15</sup> Keefer, N., Young, J., Lopez, J., & Haj-Broussard, M. (2024). Leveraging economic and linguistic funds of knowledge through biliteracy strategies. *Social Education*. 88(3), 142-147. <https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/2024-05/se-88032024142.pdf>



- Guidance and/or strategically sequenced instructional strategies (e.g., anchor charts, group discussions) are included for identifying, amplifying, and connecting students' lived or home experiences and knowledge (e.g., socio-cultural, economic, historical) to build on the content and concepts under study.<sup>16</sup> Opportunities are provided for students to share their funds of knowledge.
- Content, concepts, and complex skills are logically sequenced and segmented to support the gradual acquisition and application of new knowledge and skills. For example, in Grades 3-12, learning experiences or tasks are structured to build toward students' independent engagement with source sets at the top end of the quantitative complexity range for the grade level. Source sets include 3-4 sources, with more than half being primary sources.
- Content within a lesson is presented and organized in a manner that clearly distinguishes related concepts to support students in engaging with abstract ideas. For example, to answer the question "Which civilization best meets the common good?", learning experiences and tasks within lessons must help students distinguish between different civilizations.
- Sources are intentionally sequenced in lessons to build, expand, and/or deepen students' knowledge and skills related to disciplinary content and concepts embedded within the MSSFS.<sup>17</sup>
- Prompts and questions in lessons are intentionally sequenced to support students in unpacking and making meaning of sources or source sets.
- Lessons identify close reading strategies or procedures for complex sections of text or sources (e.g., read-aloud text, independent review, text-dependent questions, visual representations, class discussions) to help students in building enduring understandings targeted in the MSSFS.
- Various types of formative assessments (i.e., checks for understanding) are embedded in the materials and are aligned to relevant supporting questions that allow students to demonstrate their enduring understandings and learning progression.

#### Red Flags:

- Questions and tasks are fragmented and lack a cohesive narrative or overarching theme when building students' enduring understandings across lessons. This causes content and concepts to be disconnected, creating a shallow understanding of complex and interrelated ideas.
- Questions, prompts, and/or tasks are not logically sequenced for the grade level or course. Ideas or concepts are presented to students without the prerequisite knowledge or skills needed to engage with more complex content and concepts.

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<sup>16</sup> Keefer, N., Lopez, J., Young, J., & Haj-Broussard, M. (2020). Gathering funds of knowledge: an elementary social studies unit plan for bilingual settings. *Social Studies and the Young Learner*. 33(2), 14-19. <https://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/view-article-2020-12/y133022014.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> American Institutes for Research & EdReports. (2024, January 8). Criteria for high-quality instructional materials for social studies. [https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/23-23505\\_HQIM\\_for\\_SS\\_Final.pdf](https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/23-23505_HQIM_for_SS_Final.pdf)



## DOMAIN 4: VOLUME, QUALITY, AND RANGE OF WRITING

### PROMINENT, AUTHENTIC WRITING OPPORTUNITIES

Instructional materials provide frequent opportunities for students to write, which are connected to taught skills, texts, and topics under study.<sup>18</sup> These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. conducting short, focused research projects;
- b. crafting prose, sentences, paragraphs, and texts that allow students to communicate information and their ideas through multiple means of expression;<sup>19</sup>
- c. constructing explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples, and details with relevant information and data while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanations;
- d. refining claims and counterclaims attending to precision, significance, and knowledge conveyed through the claim; and
- e. identifying evidence that draws information directly and substantially from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence to revise and strengthen claims.

#### Key Definitions:

- None

#### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review writing tasks for authentic opportunities clearly connected to disciplinary content and skills under study.
- Review writing tasks in lessons for opportunities to demonstrate learning in social studies content and skills through a variety of writing formats.

#### Examples of Evidence:

- Materials provide regular opportunities for students to engage in authentic writing tasks in social studies using historical thinking and other discipline-specific (i.e., civics, economics, geography) skills (e.g., short, focused research projects that analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts or construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims with evidence from multiple sources while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses).<sup>20</sup>
- **Grades K-5:** Research-based writing projects are more teacher led, with step-by-step guidance in the research process, evidence gathering, and writing.

<sup>18</sup> Brodsky Schur, J. (2020, July). *Teaching writing in the social studies*. National Council for the Social Studies. <https://members.socialstudies.org/store/teaching-writing-in-the-social-studies/2633/>

<sup>19</sup> Brodsky Schur, J. (2020, July). *Teaching writing in the social studies*. National Council for the Social Studies. <https://members.socialstudies.org/store/teaching-writing-in-the-social-studies/2633/>

<sup>20</sup> National Council for the Social Studies. (2013). 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. <https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/2022/c3-framework-for-social-studies-rev0617.2.pdf>



- **Grades 6-12:** More opportunities are provided for short, research-based writing projects around student-created questions using multiple sources.
- Disciplinary rationale or purpose and alignment to college- and career-ready expectations of each writing task are clearly defined.
- Materials include opportunities for students to engage with diverse print and digital writing formats (e.g., short writes, essays, [analytical, document based, argumentative], letters, speeches, reports, online discussion platforms, blogs, social media) in order to synthesize or present claims or arguments to a range of audiences.<sup>21</sup>
- Writing tasks have students develop claims or construct arguments to a compelling question from the perspective of social scientists using evidence from multiple, authentic discipline-specific sources (e.g., government policies, interviews, news reports, statistics, map representations, oral histories, diaries, journals, photos, economic data, artifacts).<sup>22</sup>
- Writing tasks provide real-world audiences (e.g., school leaders, community members, public officials) and purposes (e.g., inform, persuade, defend, solve a problem) for students to synthesize and construct arguments and explanations using evidence from multiple sources (e.g., students investigate and develop a claim around a current social issue in order to write a letter in response to a news report).<sup>23</sup>
- Prompts are included for students to practice and reflect on writing from the perspectives of social scientists (e.g., historian, geographer, economist, political scientists) along with how it connects to real-world applications and civic engagement.
- Prompts are included for students to reflect on the different purposes for writing and how their process and style changes (e.g. taking notes, writing an essay, sharing feedback on a peer's work).
- Reflective questions are included to support students in critiquing and refining their own claims by evaluating the credibility of sources and application of reasoning, sequencing, and details used to support arguments and explanations.<sup>24</sup> Regular opportunities are provided for students to revise or strengthen their claims through writing tasks.
- **Grades 6-12:** Reflective questions, resources, supports, and scaffolds are included to support students in identifying, analyzing, and refining counterclaims using multiple sources (Grades K-5 are not required to engage in the development of counterclaims).

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<sup>21</sup> National Council for the Social Studies. (2013). 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. <https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/2022/c3-framework-for-social-studies-rev0617.2.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> National Council for the Social Studies. (2013). 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. <https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/2022/c3-framework-for-social-studies-rev0617.2.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Monte-Sano, C. & Hughes, R. E. (2024). Read.Inquire.Write.: A scaffolded progression to support diverse learners' social studies argument writing in middle school. *Social Education*. 88(4), 234-240. <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=curriculum+guide+reading+and+writing+skills+grade+11&id=EJ1441297>

<sup>24</sup> National Council for the Social Studies. (2013). 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. <https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/2022/c3-framework-for-social-studies-rev0617.2.pdf>



**Red Flags:**

- Writing instruction utilizes models without explicitly guiding students to identify specific writing strategies to grow their writing skills.
- Instructional materials and support resources lack flexibility, which limits individual student expression and produces formulaic writing.
- Materials only focus on a specific form of writing and lack variety for instruction and student use.

## EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION

Instructional materials include attending to the discrete disciplinary-aligned skills of social studies-aligned writing. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. explicit instruction on paragraph and text structure (e.g., via structure-focused mnemonic devices, graphic organizers);
- b. use of relevant tools needed for access to effective construction and composition of writing;
- c. grammar/usage instruction in the context of the source or topic under study; and
- d. attention to the writing process and language development alongside development of writing skills.

### Key Definitions:

- **Writing process:** Series of stages that a writer goes through to produce a written piece (e.g., prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, publishing).

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Look for research-based instructional strategies for disciplinary writing with a logical sequence of skills from basic to more advanced across the scope and sequence.
- Review units and lessons for explicit instruction and related practice opportunities for discipline-specific writing (e.g., modeling).
- Review units and lessons for targeted instruction of discipline-specific skills, including prompts and guidance for explicit communication of concepts to be learned.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Materials include explanations, examples, or guidance for direct instruction (e.g., repeated modeling, sample teacher language for explanations) that are accessible to students and support their development of discipline-specific skills through writing (e.g., use of historical thinking skills—sourcing/contextualization/corroboration—for discipline-specific writing instruction).
- Materials include opportunities for targeted practice of specific writing strategies, including utilizing sources students have read or engaged with and a variety of high-quality written models that attend to audience and purpose of writing in a social studies discipline (civics, economics, geography, history).
- Writing tasks are logically sequenced and connected throughout a unit to support grade-level appropriate thinking and writing within a discipline (e.g., constructing an argument, constructing explanations using correct sequence and relevant information, and/or presenting a summary of an argument).
- Materials support multiple types of writing practice (guided, independent, collaborative) and provide recommended structures (whole group, small group, individual) for students to address supporting questions or unpack social studies content and concepts using multiple sources.
- Writing tools (e.g., sentence starters, outlining tools, concept maps) are integrated into instruction and materials to provide supports for disciplinary writing using various source types (e.g., maps, charts, informational videos, political cartoons).

- Supports and scaffolds are included for building students' writing skills in a discipline (e.g., graphic organizers, mind mapping, source analysis tools, text/source annotations) to address supporting questions using source-based evidence.
- **Grades 3-12:** Supports (e.g., templates for students) are included for students to cite evidence and sources accurately and appropriately. Supports are sequenced in a coherent and linear format to build students' research skills with increased complexity (e.g., crafting citations, identifying plagiarism).
- **Grades 6-12:** Scaffolds are included to support multilingual learners and students below grade level in writing counterarguments related to social studies content and concepts using evidence (e.g., writing is broken down into stages: interpretation, critique, and counterargument).<sup>25</sup>
- Teacher materials include support for analyzing and responding to student writing on content and clarity.

#### Red Flags:

- Writing instruction utilizes models without explicitly guiding students to identify specific writing strategies to grow their writing skills. Models may also employ generic or common writing strategies rather than strategies adapted for the discipline (civics, economics, geography, history).
- Instructional materials and support resources lack flexibility, which limits individual student expression and produces formulaic writing.
- Scoring tools (e.g., guidelines, rubrics, criteria) for students' writing in social studies do not include guidance or expectations around writing quality (e.g., fluency, content, conventions, syntax, grammar, and vocabulary).

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<sup>25</sup> Monte-Sano, C. & Hughes, R. E. (2024). Read.Inquire.Write.: A scaffolded progression to support diverse learners' social studies argument writing in middle school. *Social Education*. 88(4), 234-240.

<https://eric.ed.gov/?q=curriculum+guide+reading+and+writing+skills+grade+11&id=EJ1441297>



## DOMAIN 5: SPEAKING, LISTENING, AND ORAL LANGUAGE

### PROMINENT, AUTHENTIC DISCOURSE OPPORTUNITIES

Instructional materials include frequent opportunities for students to discuss texts and topics under study. This academic discourse simultaneously builds knowledge, vocabulary, and language skills to express ideas and comprehension. These discourse opportunities include prompts that are explicitly connected to various historical sources (primary and/or secondary documents: text, speech, visual arts, music).

#### Key Definitions:

- **Academic discourse:** Ways of thinking about and discussing information related to a specific area of academic study. It involves language used in school or higher education contexts, including content-specific terminology and registers.

#### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review unit and lessons for tasks that encourage authentic discourse opportunities clearly connected to disciplinary content and skills under study.
- Ensure materials analyze information across multiple sources and perspectives and include varied forms of evidence and sources (e.g., primary and/or secondary documents, texts, and visuals) to allow students to build context and authentic discourse.

#### Examples of Evidence:

- Regular and varied opportunities are provided for students to engage in conversations about social studies content and skills that have been taught in the lesson.
- **Grades K-5:** Students are guided by their teacher with specific prompts that drive their thinking and encourage ongoing discussion.
- **Grades 6-8:** Student-led discussion is supported by teachers that promote individual student thinking with opportunities to select from prompts.
- **Grades 9-12:** Students create their own discussion prompts that connect with the social studies content to build on their own knowledge and further authentic discourse.
- Materials include extended and supportive opportunities for discourse about grade-level texts/sources and tasks that outline clear discussion structures, prompts, student roles, and supports for engaging (e.g., slides, protocols, anchor charts, student-facing materials).
- Routines for discourse support sustained discussion through repeated protocols, sentence stems, and reflection prompts (e.g., "How has your thinking changed?").
- Clear expectations, purpose, and common goals for the discussions along with teacher support are outlined to prompt students toward using evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. At Grades 6-12, this may include using evidence to develop and support counterclaims.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> NCSS, [College, Career & Civic Life C3 Framework For Social Studies](#), Appendix A: C3 Framework Disciplinary Inquiry Matrix, Dimension 2

- Structured discussion strategies, approaches (e.g., Socratic seminar, Structured Academic Controversy, structured peer-to-peer discourse), and deliberative processes (e.g., consensus-building, decision-making) are included that promote perspective-taking, active listening, and civic reasoning.<sup>27</sup>
- Strategies and resources are included for preparing and engaging students in collegial discourse of social studies content using a variety of credible evidence or sources (e.g., graphic organizers to frame discourse, simulations, role-playing).<sup>28</sup>
- Strategies and procedures are included for encouraging respectful dialogue, active listening, and collaborative learning through discourse (e.g., student-teacher created classroom norms or shared agreements, modeling behaviors and dialogue, student reflections).
- Tasks include opportunities for students to apply civic virtues (honesty, mutual respect, cooperation, and attentiveness to multiple perspectives) and democratic principles in multiple settings (e.g., classroom, school, community) to engage in authentic discourse.<sup>29</sup>
- Tasks include opportunities for students to engage in discourse around authentic, real-world issues based on students' lives and experiences (e.g., experiences with civic life) that are connected to the social studies content taught within the lesson.<sup>30</sup>
- Community-building practices (i.e., relationship-building between students, their peers, and their teacher) are included to help students engage in discourse around authentic, real-world issues.
- Questions and prompts for discourse encourage students to engage in disciplinary thinking and reasoning across social studies disciplines (civics, economics, geography, history).

#### Red Flags:

- Discourse is off topic and focuses on one student explaining rather than a discussion between two or more students (e.g., questions or prompts solely focus on information from a single source or material without consideration for broader contexts/perspectives, questions or prompts for discourse do not connect to the lesson or unit objectives).
- Materials have not been provided or represent limited perspectives and source types.
- Discussion questions and prompts are inauthentic and/or do not require students to use evidence to support their claims.

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<sup>27</sup> Lee, C. D., White, G., & Dong, D. (Eds.). (2021). *Educating for Civic Reasoning and Discourse*. National Academy of Education. <https://naeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/NAEd-Educating-for-Civic-Reasoning-and-Discourse.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Lee, C. D., White, G., & Dong, D. (Eds.). (2021). *Educating for Civic Reasoning and Discourse*. National Academy of Education. <https://naeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/NAEd-Educating-for-Civic-Reasoning-and-Discourse.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> National Council for the Social Studies. (2013). 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. <https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/2022/c3-framework-for-social-studies-rev0617.2.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Lee, C. D., White, G., & Dong, D. (Eds.). (2021). *Educating for Civic Reasoning and Discourse*. National Academy of Education. <https://naeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/NAEd-Educating-for-Civic-Reasoning-and-Discourse.pdf>



## VOCABULARY BUILDING

Instructional materials include explicit and research-based teaching of discipline-specific and text-based vocabulary, including special attention to academic and content-based vocabulary. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. practice of newly taught words in a variety of modes (i.e., orally, in writing), including through multiple relevant examples that support students making connections with words;
- b. student-friendly definitions;
- c. visual representations; and
- d. encouragement for the use, review, and assessment of targeted words throughout the unit.

### Key Definitions:

- None

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Identify teacher guidance and materials that support the development of academic vocabulary, increasing comprehension and building background knowledge.
- Review units, lessons, and teacher resources for guidance on explicit and research-based teaching of discipline-specific and source-based vocabulary related to social studies context.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Priority academic (Tier 2) and content-specific (Tier 3) vocabulary is identified in units and lessons.<sup>31</sup>
- Various sources are included with rich language and context to support vocabulary development and comprehension of complex topics and content.
- Instruction and activities engage students in meaningful vocabulary-building exercises that move students from recognition (i.e., understanding vocabulary terms within their context) to production (i.e., application of vocabulary terms in meaningful contexts).
- Explicit supports, instructional tools, and practices are included throughout lessons for engaging with and unpacking academic (Tier 2) and content-specific (Tier 3) vocabulary.
- **Grades K-5:** Students utilize tools and lesson activities that target the vocabulary through its definition and connections.
- **Grades 6-12:** Students develop their own definitions to source-based vocabulary and can teach the word to their peers.
- Students engage with academic (Tier 2) and content-specific (Tier 3) vocabulary across multiple sources.

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<sup>31</sup> For more information on tiered vocabulary in social studies review the Collaborative for Teaching & Learning's blog on [Vocabulary Development in the Social Studies Classroom](#).



**Red Flags:**

- Vocabulary definitions are not student-friendly or are overly simplified in a way that makes them inaccurate or incomplete.
- Students only engage in simple tasks to define the vocabulary terms, such as finding the definition online/in a dictionary.
- Vocabulary instruction and supportive materials focus only on Tier 3 (content-specific) terms.
- Materials do not provide space to use and apply the academic and content-specific words throughout the unit, nor are they reviewed or connected to later material.

# Designed to Affirm Students

## DOMAIN 1: CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE-SUSTAINING INSTRUCTION

### AFFIRMATION AND CENTERING OF STUDENTS

Instructional materials are designed to encourage students to anchor learning in their individual experiences, backgrounds, and cultural knowledge to support and expand their social studies knowledge and skills. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. regular opportunities for students to share who they are and what they know, bringing their unique funds of knowledge to their learning experiences;<sup>32</sup>
- b. reflection and conversation within the context of the text or topic under study that affirm students' identities and experiences;
- c. tasks that support students to express (orally, in writing, in media, and in other formats) how texts and topics under study do or do not affect their understanding of the world; and
- d. tasks that require students to integrate what they have read and/or learned from others with their own knowledge and synthesize ideas across sources.

#### Key Definitions:

- None

#### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review grade or course and unit overviews for commitment to representing diverse voices, perspectives, and experiences with an alignment to those principles throughout the curriculum.
- Review units and lessons for tasks and opportunities that leverage the cultural assets of students and acknowledge their value.
- Review units and lessons for opportunities that encourage students to reflect on and share their personal experiences, backgrounds, and cultural knowledge that are related to the topic of study.

#### Examples of Evidence:

- Questions and tasks invite students to actively share and integrate personal stories (e.g., heritage narratives<sup>33</sup>), experiences, and culturally authentic perspectives related to the topic of study.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & González, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849209543534>

<sup>33</sup> Levy, S. A. (2017). How students navigate the construction of heritage narratives. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 45(2), 157-188. <https://doi.org/10.1080/009333104.2016.1240636>

<sup>34</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 7.2: Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/interests-identities/relevance-value-authenticity/>



- Discussions and writing tasks provide opportunities for students to critically reflect on their lives and experiences alongside past and present events or topics under study.
- Questions and tasks in each unit ask students to grapple with the diverse perspectives, narratives and stories and to make connections to better understand themselves and their own cultural context as it relates to the content and concepts under study.
- **Grades 6-12:** Discussions and writing tasks require connecting students' prior knowledge, experiences, and perspectives to sources in order to understand broader societal issues including power, prejudice, and oppression (Grades K-5 do this with support).
- Prompts and activities include considerations for the historical and cultural context of students' identities (e.g., conversation norms around potentially harmful topics; teacher framing; identifying potential stereotypes, misconceptions, or biases that may arise).
- Culminating tasks ask students to leverage their cultural and linguistic knowledge alongside the content knowledge they have built over a period of study.

#### Red Flags:

- Tasks and prompts related to student reflection rarely connect explicitly to students' cultural identities.
- Tasks reinforce a focus on a single, dominant perspective on present historical events or movements led by Black, Indigenous, Brown, and non-Western groups of people from a single dominant perspective.

## SOCIAL STUDIES AS A TOOL FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Instructional materials consistently use texts and tasks that prompt students to apply the knowledge of disciplinary concepts and tools to develop their civic engagement skills, examine current events, build authentic inquiries, and take informed action. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. opportunities for students to read, write, listen, and speak in an effort to think critically about the content/perspective of the text or resources;
- b. opportunities for students to apply disciplinary knowledge, skills, and perspectives to inquire about problems involved with public issues;
- c. attention to historical and social contexts in texts; and
- d. opportunities for critically examining texts for influence, bias, and diversity of perspectives and for considering whose voice is elevated and whose is absent.

### Key Definitions:

- **Civic engagement:** Active participation in local communities, society, and government for the betterment of the collective.

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Look for tasks and activities that prompt and support students applying and developing skills for civic engagement through disciplinary reading, speaking, and writing.
- Look for tasks that prompt and support students applying and developing civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions to investigate public issues.
- Review units and lessons for opportunities for students to identify and reflect on content and perspectives provided in texts or sources.
- Review units, lessons, and tasks for resources and instruction that provide additional historical and social context for texts or sources and topics under study.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Tasks and activities create opportunities for students to read, analyze, and discuss primary sources (e.g., political speeches, policy documents, articles about community issues) and current events to develop civic knowledge and skills.
- Materials include texts or sources that demonstrate or encourage authentic civic engagement at different levels of participation.
- Units include opportunities for students to build and apply civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions to question, research, and/or investigate public issues and/or real-world challenges in their communities.
- Prompts and questions are included for students to reflect on and make connections between the content under study and their current contexts.

- Units include opportunities for civic engagement by asking students to critically examine what they are reading for influence, bias, and diversity of perspectives, including thinking about whose voice is elevated and whose is absent.<sup>35</sup>
- Instructional activities related to critically evaluating perspectives of historical context include supports for students' analysis (e.g., series of prompts or tasks related to analysis of primary sources, providing additional context through teacher-provided or student-sourced background information).
- Instructional and supplemental resources (e.g., videos, articles, primary sources) provide historical, social, or cultural context to enrich students' understanding. These resources help build students' understanding of historical and social contexts in texts or sources to support authentic inquiries and taking informed action on public issues and/or real-world challenges.
- Units include consensus-building approaches and democratic procedures to model civic behaviors and support students in collectively making decisions and acting on public issues.
- Guidance, additional resources, or suggestions for extensions are provided for educators to identify opportunities for integrating civic engagement within a lesson or unit based on the content and concepts under study.

**Red Flags:**

- Limited structured and scaffolded tasks that support students to analyze, interpret, and challenge the content and viewpoints presented in texts and resources.
- Author identities, backgrounds, and views are not addressed in instruction.
- Inaccurate or misleading historical facts and social contexts that can lead to misguided interpretations and harmful assumptions or stereotypes (e.g., downplaying the contributions, achievements, or hardships of historically marginalized groups of people).

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<sup>35</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 6.1: Set meaningful goals. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression/strategy-development/goals/>

## REAL-WORLD CONNECTIONS

Instructional materials consistently connect with students' lives, their future goals, their communities, and world and nurture ways for students to engage in their own communities and beyond. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. use of historical sources and disciplinary tasks to connect to current events;
- b. engagement in collaborative tasks and/or projects that involve real-world problem-solving through meaningful interactions with peers and their local communities; and
- c. connections between developing social studies skills and knowledge and students' academic and personal goals.

### Key Definitions:

- **Real-world problem-solving:** Identifying, analyzing, and resolving authentic problems students encounter in their daily lives and applying critical thinking in the context of their experiences.

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review for historical texts or sources and disciplinary tasks that enable students to make connections between disciplinary content or concepts and current events.
- Review units and lessons for tasks that provide opportunities to connect content or concepts with students' lives, interests, and experiences, as applicable.
- Review units and lessons for collaborative tasks or projects that involve real-world problem-solving and goal-setting opportunities.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Projects and group work engage students in problem-solving activities that involve connections and contributions to positive change, equity, and justice in their communities and society (e.g., letters to leaders, conducting interviews, researching local issues).
- Tasks include opportunities for students to use sources to connect and critically examine historical events and current events.
- Guidance is offered for educators to make direct local connections to the topic under study within lessons (e.g., organizations to research or websites to review, facts to contextualize in your community, additional resources to gather).
- Guidance or strategies are offered for educators and students on identifying, selecting, analyzing, and engaging with reliable sources around current events connected to the content and concepts under study.

- Tasks offer opportunities for students to navigate aspirations for their future endeavors and establish relevance and meaningful connections between their academic and personal goals, including codifying their generational strengths and ways of knowing (e.g., passions, careers, continued study).<sup>36</sup>
- **Grades K-5:** Opportunities are provided for students to identify and reflect on academic and personal goals related to the content and concepts under study with teacher guidance and support (e.g., when learning about saving money, students may set, act, and track goals on a plan to save their own money).
- **Grades 6-12:** Opportunities are provided for students to identify and reflect on postsecondary goals related to the content and concepts under study

**Red Flags:**

- Throughout a unit, texts or sources and tasks do not provide opportunities for connections to students' personal and cultural experiences, interests, and aspirations.
- Texts or sources, topics, and tasks provide superficial connections to current context and events that impact students' lives, communities, and the world (e.g., avoidance of acknowledging or analyzing lasting impact of historical events and outdated social structure and practices, focus on national advancements without acknowledging the cost of harm inflicted on historically marginalized groups as well as cultural and linguistic erasures).
- Insufficient flexibility and adaptability in instructional design and delivery to support diverse interests, strengths, needs, and personalization of students' lived experiences (e.g., topics for research projects are overly narrow and limiting).

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<sup>36</sup> CAST (2024). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 3.0, Action & Expression, Strategy Development, Consideration 6.1: Set meaningful goals. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression/strategy-development/goals/>

## DOMAIN 2: LANGUAGE AFFIRMING INSTRUCTION

### MULTILINGUALISM IN SOCIAL STUDIES

Instructional materials are deliberately designed to support multilingualism with a specific focus on building disciplinary-specific thinking skills (corroboration, sourcing, contextualization) while encouraging students to leverage their linguistic repertoire to communicate with one another via reading, writing, speaking, and listening. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. promoting sustained oral and written communication, including explicit encouragement to use a range of language practices and registers and to use their full language repertoire through translanguaging so all students express themselves in a language they are comfortable with while working to learn social studies content and meet language objectives in the target language;<sup>37</sup>
- b. building vocabulary and understanding of new concepts in English and home language(s), including use of social and academic vocabulary; and
- c. making translanguaging connections, such as by making connections between students' home language(s) or register and the language or register of instruction (e.g., cognates, academic language registers).

#### Key Definitions:

- **Linguistic repertoire:** Full range of linguistic abilities and resources that students possess and can draw upon during their learning experience, including all the vocabulary, syntax, and ways of speaking across languages.
- **Registers:** The different ways speakers use language in different contexts.
- **Translanguaging:** The practice of using multiple languages flexibly and strategically for fluid communication, which includes the use of students' home languages and their full linguistic repertoire.
- **Home language(s):** Language(s) that students use most frequently and comfortably in their everyday life, often the language they acquired first and use most often for communication.

#### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review grade or course and unit overviews for commitment to building upon students' multilingualism with an alignment to those principles throughout the curriculum.
- Review unit overviews and lessons for explicit opportunities for vocabulary development through multilingualism in social studies, including opportunities for sustained oral and written communication.
- Review lesson objectives and instructional strategies for explicit translanguaging opportunities and elevating cross-linguistic connections.
- Assess the overall quality of texts, student-facing resources, and supplemental materials and whether these materials include home language(s) and authentic translations.

<sup>37</sup> English Learners Success Forum. (n.d.). *Translanguaging strategies*. [https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5b43fc97fcf4773f14ee92f3/5cca8e1dbfa8f118e41c578a\\_Translanguaging%20Strategies%20ELA.pdf](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5b43fc97fcf4773f14ee92f3/5cca8e1dbfa8f118e41c578a_Translanguaging%20Strategies%20ELA.pdf)





**Examples of Evidence:**

- Lesson activities and tasks create opportunities for students to express themselves comfortably and confidently in their home language(s) to fluidly demonstrate understanding and learning.
- Dedicated time for exploring text-based vocabulary (academic and content-specific) and linguistic structures, including social and academic language, through the use of strategies and resources to build understanding of target words and invite students to connect to words in their home language(s) (e.g., word walls, word banks, vocabulary list with visuals for context, tiered vocabulary words, cognates).<sup>38 39 40</sup>
- When possible, materials include opportunities for exploration of different languages and dialects to foster positive attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about multilingualism and language learning (e.g., translated texts, non-English videos with English captions, students learning from each other's languages, celebration of linguistic abilities).
- Materials include resources (e.g., call-out boxes) and/or pedagogical practices to support teachers in identifying similarities and differences between students' home language(s) and the target language of instruction, including attention to academic register (i.e., writing and speaking language conventions in academic contexts).
- **Grades K-1:** Utilizing the full range of language resources during writing may include supports in multiple languages (e.g., anchor charts, word walls, dictation) to support student writing.

**Red Flags:**

- Instructional materials assume monolingual English students, with no attention to students' diverse language assets or goals.
- Lessons, texts, and tasks perpetuate myths, misconceptions, and biases that equate the English language to intelligence or academic capabilities (e.g., narratives that implicitly or explicitly suggest that accomplishments or advancements were made due to acquiring English).
- Vocabulary is taught without contextual reference for meaning-making or sufficient opportunities for language acquisition and application (e.g., sharing word and definition and asking students to orally repeat).
- Teacher guidance and support resources overlook the ways home languages other than English support comprehension and production in English.

<sup>38</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 2.4: Cultivate understanding and respect across languages and dialects. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation/language-symbols/languages-dialects/>

<sup>39</sup> Cruz, B., & Thornton, S. J. (2025). *Teaching social studies to English language learners*. (3rd ed.) Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Teaching-Social-Studies-to-English-Language-Learners/Cruz-Thornton/p/book/9781032499437>

<sup>40</sup> Jaffee, A. T., & Salinas, C. (Eds.). (2024, August 23). *Teaching culturally and linguistically relevant social studies for emergent bilingual and multilingual youth*. Teachers College Press. <https://www.tcpres.com/teaching-culturally-and-linguistically-relevant-social-studies-for-emergent-bilingual-and-multilingual-youth-9780807786048>



# Instructional Design

## DOMAIN 1: BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

### KNOWLEDGE-BUILDING FOCUS

Instructional materials center on building knowledge through engaging, inquiry-based investigations about civics, people of the nations and world, geography, economics, and history. Units feature regular interaction with, but are not limited to, knowledge-rich texts, data sets, and simulations. Literacy skills and strategies are primarily taught and used in service of building disciplinary knowledge through reading, writing, speaking, and listening. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. scaffolding of the degree of difficulty or complexity within activities;
- b. opportunities to generalize learning to new situations; and
- c. support for prior knowledge and key ideas.

#### Key Definitions:

- **Inquiry-based investigations:** A process by which students learn through investigations.
- **Knowledge-rich texts:** Materials that provide substantial content knowledge and deep understanding of a subject by incorporating a variety of sources, including primary and secondary sources, maps, graphs, videos, audio clips, and artifacts.
- **Scaffolding:** An instructional practice that provides tapered supports to students as they gain new knowledge, with a gradual release moving from teacher-directed and concrete work or ideas to independent student learning and abstract ideas.

#### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review the scope and sequence for instructional components organized around building knowledge through sustained inquiry with focused content and concepts. These components should draw on knowledge-rich primary and secondary sources and literacy experiences to deepen understanding of the targeted content and concepts over time.
- Review units and lessons for instructional strategies with a primary focus on building knowledge through inquiry-based investigations.

#### Examples of Evidence:

- Units have a clear knowledge-building focus based on integrated reading, writing, listening, and speaking instruction.
- Instructional design integrates the branches of social studies (history, civics, geography, and economics) in order to build disciplinary knowledge.
- Units and lessons are organized such that students continuously build their knowledge and skills by engaging in challenging and meaningful inquiry-based learning. Source-based questions and/or protocols are included to support and scaffold students' engagement with different source types (e.g., texts, data sets, maps) at varying levels of complexity.

- Materials encourage students to build content or conceptual knowledge through analysis of a coherent selection of strategically sequenced, discipline-specific primary and secondary sources.
- Materials clearly articulate and highlight for students both the lesson-level knowledge focus (e.g., content objectives, teacher notes about knowledge gained, displaying goals) and how that knowledge builds over time (e.g., compelling or essential questions addressing the big ideas and content knowledge of the unit).<sup>41</sup>
- Materials provide supports for building students' knowledge around similar content or topics across grade levels with increasing rigor and depth through inquiry-based investigations (e.g., embedding historical thinking skills at varying levels of complexity across grade levels).
- Frequent opportunities are provided to integrate and apply knowledge gained across multiple sources through discussion, writing, projects/research, or culminating assessments/activities (e.g., lesson opener that asks students to recall what they have already learned; anchor charts or student note catchers to track knowledge over time; prompts or routines that ask students to discuss and draw upon their growing knowledge bases).
- Opportunities are provided for students to apply new knowledge and skills to investigate and address real-world problems.
- The four Depths of Knowledge levels<sup>42</sup> are incorporated throughout units to build students' knowledge and skills about content and concepts.
- Tasks scaffold students' understandings, culminating in work that demonstrates the knowledge and skills gained throughout a unit.<sup>43</sup>
- Diagnostic assessments to identify students' prior knowledge and/or gauge students' learning and development are included to inform social studies instruction and identify opportunities for acceleration or enrichment.

### Red Flags:

- Branches of social studies (history, civics, geography, and economics) are taught in isolation.
- Units are fragmented and lack a cohesive narrative or overarching theme. Content and concepts are disconnected, creating a shallow understanding of complex and interrelated ideas.
- Tasks and/or assessments focus on performing a skill absent of knowledge gained from analyzing and evaluating sources (e.g., solely including recall or memorization of facts rather than a variety of tasks that include application, analysis, and evaluation of knowledge gained).
- Tasks and/or assessments lack application in authentic contexts.

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<sup>41</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 8.1: Clarify the meaning and purpose of goals. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/effort-persistence/meaning-purpose-goals/>

<sup>42</sup> Webb, N. L. (2005, July 24). *Depth of Knowledge (DOK) Levels*. [https://www.wssd.k12.pa.us/Downloads/dok\\_wheel\\_slide.pdf](https://www.wssd.k12.pa.us/Downloads/dok_wheel_slide.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 3.3: Cultivate multiple ways of knowing and making meaning. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation/building-knowledge/making-meaning/>



## INCLUSIVE CONTENT

Instructional materials for key areas of the Maryland Social Studies Frameworks and Standards (MSSFS)<sup>44</sup> are expansive and representative of diverse identities, including content from a variety of community, cultural, and language backgrounds within and across school years. At each grade level, these materials include all of the following elements:

- a. elevation of multiple perspectives;
- b. counternarratives offer the opportunity to critically examine dominant narratives;
- c. inspiration for reflection, motivation, or civic engagement in response to ideas and content presented; and
- d. engagement of students in learning about the joy, resilience, determination, ingenuity, and leadership of all groups and communities, including historically marginalized communities.

### Key Definitions:

- **Diverse identities:** A variety of community, cultural, and language backgrounds (e.g., ability, ethnicity, gender, home language, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status).
- **Counternarratives:** Perspectives that are often not told or centered (e.g., learning about an historical event through the eyes of a person who is not often highlighted in textbooks that focus more on dominant narratives).
- **Dominant narratives:** Explanations or stories told from and/or reflecting the perspectives, interests, and/or ideologies of a dominant social group.

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review sources (e.g., texts, data sets, maps) for diversity of perspectives, voices, and narratives that are affirming and expansive.
- Closely review sources for inclusive presentation of content (e.g., no perpetuation or validation of stereotypes, integrating narratives of historically marginalized people that highlight individual and collective agency).
- Review sources for balanced inclusion of perspectives not often given in dominant narratives.
- Examine units and lessons for educator supports that promote student engagement in learning about the joy, resilience, determination, ingenuity, and leadership of all groups and communities.

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<sup>44</sup> Maryland State Department of Education. (n.d.). State standards and frameworks in social studies. Government of Maryland. <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DCAA/Social-Studies/MSSS.aspx>

**Examples of Evidence:**

- Topics have the potential to connect with a range of identities and perspectives as well as to offer insight into the ways that others think and live.<sup>45</sup>
- Units and/or lessons include a variety of source types (e.g., photographs, speeches, videos, artists, works of art) from authors and creators that present diverse narratives and identities.
- Authentic and culturally relevant sources are included that give agency and voice to the individuals and communities represented. When possible, instruction intentionally highlights the agency and achievements of historically marginalized people and communities, including sources with affirming portrayals of people (historical or current voices) in each grade level from a variety of community, cultural, and language backgrounds.
- Diverse perspectives, narratives, and stories from marginalized groups are fully interwoven within the curriculum rather than appearing as “featured” stories.
- Materials include opportunities for students to reflect critically about the content based on their own identities, lived experiences, and backgrounds.
- Materials allow students to critically examine dominant narratives through providing sources that represent multiple perspectives, examining narratives of the past and present, and encouraging students to ask critical questions, and conduct evidence-based critiques about these presented narratives.
- Type and sequencing of sources elevate multiple perspectives and interpretations of content being studied rather than promote or encourage a singular point-of-view.
- Questions and prompts encourage students to develop their own claims and understandings from sources rather than guide students to a singular or defined conclusion about the content being studied.
- Resources, tools, and/or teaching strategies are included to support instruction of authentic texts and sources around and from diverse communities. Supports or key features may include
  - tools for sharing authentic stories from a community;
  - pairs or collections of sources that allow students to understand and unpack a particular event, topic, or issue from multiple viewpoints or lived experiences;
  - sources that are contextualized and emphasize authentic events and ideas of content being studied; and
  - use of historically accurate and appropriate terminology along with explanations of and/or additional context for the use of this terminology (e.g., “colored” vs. “African American” vs. “Black”).

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<sup>45</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 7.2: Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/interests-identities/relevance-value-authenticity/>

**Red Flags:**

- Units centered on historically marginalized groups only focus on challenges and/or oppression (e.g., only learning about Black history through slavery, limiting the portrayal of Brown people to immigrant stories, or only featuring Native American perspectives during a unit on European colonization) and/or promotes deficit thinking.
- Diverse perspectives and narratives are tokenized or essentialized by primarily being featured during cultural heritage months/holidays or during units that focus on a particular culture or culturally-specific event (e.g., learning about culturally specific holidays or foods only at specific times or the year and/or without delving deeper into what is meaningful to this culture).
- Emphasis is placed on studying only well-known or prominent historical figures associated with an event or topic rather than providing opportunities to explore other individual and group achievements and/or experiences.
- Only superficial diversity is included, in which various perspectives and narratives are provided for the sake of inclusion rather than meaningfully integrated and explored to support and build students' understanding of the event, content, and concepts being studied.
- Texts use stereotypical or monolithic representations of languages, cultures, and identities (e.g., cats in sombreros to represent Mexican culture; an exaggerated, harmful depiction of culture; referring to Native Americans solely as historical figures).

## HISTORICAL THINKING SKILLS

Instructional materials include the synthesis of historical thinking skills throughout, including opportunities for critical historical inquiry. These skills should include regular opportunities for:

- a. contextualization: locate a document in time and place and to understand how these factors shape its content;
- b. corroboration: consider details across multiple sources to determine points of agreement and disagreement;
- c. sourcing: consider who wrote a document as well as the circumstances of its creation;
- d. chronological thinking: consider how events in history unfold over time; and
- e. claim development: analyze claims, interrogate the credibility of evidence and develop counter claims.

### Key Definitions:

- **Historical inquiry:** A process of investigating the past by gathering evidence and evaluating sources to answer questions.

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review units and lessons for instructional strategies and supports with a primary focus on building students' historical thinking skills.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Evidence of historical thinking skills in units and/or lessons include instructional strategies that support the following:
  - Evaluation of multiple sources and source reliability (e.g., identifying perspectives, biases, and credibility) when engaging in historical thinking (e.g., sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating).
  - Construction of various methods of contextualization (e.g., economic, political, geographic, cultural) to analyze historical events or concepts.
  - Evaluation of multiple perspectives and claims to examine viewpoints, values, and rationales of decisions made by individuals who lived in the past through various lenses (e.g., political, economic, social).
  - Evaluation of historical events and concepts from different perspectives that are connected to larger historical developments or concepts.
  - Evaluation of sources from multiple time periods to analyze change and continuity over time for historical events. Source- and inquiry-based questions and tasks around literary and historical narratives are included to prompt chronological thinking (e.g., identifying patterns, cause and effect relationships).
  - Use of close reading or examination of sources to interpret and communicate conclusions using relevant evidence.
  - Reflection on themes and key ideas across a variety of sources for students to draw their own conclusions and construct arguments.

- Analysis of and discussions on sources within historical eras or periods and connections to real-life situations or current events.
  - Use of rigorous evidence to construct arguments and develop claims in response to compelling questions.
- Tasks include specific reflective questioning clearly aligned with learning objectives to promote deeper analysis of sources and historical thinking.
- Inclusion of relevant historical, social, cultural, and political background information to provide context for the content and concepts being studied and support students as they engage in historical inquiry.

**Red Flags:**

- Historical thinking skills are taught in isolation from one another and/or from content. Materials lack application of skills to authentic, meaningful, or real-world historical situations.
- Units around historical events and periods lack thematic connections to overarching ideas (e.g., interconnected historical, social, cultural and political contexts or structures).
- Lack of evaluating evidence and sources when engaging in historical inquiry.



## DOMAIN 2: STUDENT AGENCY

### METACOGNITIVE PROCESSES

Instructional materials develop students' metacognition by directly teaching and supporting students to monitor understanding during reading and self-regulate during writing. This includes setting goals; self-monitoring growth; and reflecting on the impact of students' choices and ongoing development as readers, writers, and communicators. For multilingual learners, materials provide guidance on developing students' meta-awareness around language use and choices.<sup>46</sup> These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. setting goals and self-monitoring growth;
- b. reflecting on the impact of students' choices;
- c. modeling and developing strategies that support students in making their thinking visible through speaking or writing as they develop their understanding; and
- d. providing guidance for building metacognition for students with diverse learning needs.

#### Key Definitions:

- **Metacognition:** A set of skills that support students in actively monitoring, planning for, and adapting their learning process.
- **Diverse learning needs:** The different ways in which students learn and engage in their learning, including students below reading level, learners with individualized support plans, accelerated learners, and multilingual learners.

#### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review units and lessons for metacognitive process supports through teacher modeling, questioning, student routines (including goal-setting cycles), or student tools/resources.
- Review units and lessons and supporting resources (e.g., graphic organizers, reflection prompts) for opportunities to guide students to organize their thoughts, reflect on their learning, and monitor their understanding.

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<sup>46</sup> Cruz, B., & Thornton, S. J. (2025). *Teaching social studies to English language learners*. (3rd ed.) Routledge.  
<https://www.routledge.com/Teaching-Social-Studies-to-English-Language-Learners/Cruz-Thornton/p/book/9781032499437>

**Examples of Evidence:**

- Clear suggestions within lessons to model and support students' use of metacognitive strategies in social studies related to disciplinary thinking skills (historical, civic, geographic, economic), perspective taking, debate, and discussion.
- Student materials contain specific, lesson-embedded suggestions for students setting their own goals and include tools for student reflection and self-assessment about writing, reading, and discussion, such as models, rubrics, checklists, and self-reflection templates.<sup>47 48</sup>
- Thinking is made visible to students through the use of questioning around texts or sources, content, and concepts (e.g., for sources, "Who is the author or creator?", "What is the author's or creator's perspective or point of view?", "Who is the intended audience of the source?").
- Opportunities are provided for students to use cognitive processes to organize and monitor their own thinking, solve challenges, and explain approaches related to social studies content and concepts.<sup>49</sup>
- Inclusion of specific small-group strategies related to building metacognition in students (e.g., providing metacognitive questions and prompts to facilitate group discussions, collaborative learning, practice with peer feedback, mind-mapping/concept-mapping).
- Guidance includes culturally responsive metacognitive strategies such as oral reflection, storytelling, and collaborative reasoning, which may align with the strengths of students from non-dominant cultural backgrounds.

**Red Flags:**

- Self-monitoring strategies are suggested or modeled by the teacher without connections to authentic student reflection, application, and ownership (e.g., focus on teacher-driven feedback and not student reflection; "Watch me as I...").
- Assessments are not connected to opportunities to build metacognitive awareness and skills (e.g., focus on summative assessments without formative assessments; "Here is your grade").
- Scoring tools created for students (e.g., rubrics, guidelines) are unclear and not student-friendly (e.g., overly simplified or vague language, overly complex or adult- or teacher-level explanations).

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<sup>47</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 6.2: Anticipate and plan for challenges. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression/strategy-development/challenges/>

<sup>48</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 6.4: Enhance capacity for monitoring progress. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression/strategy-development/monitoring-progress/>

<sup>49</sup> High-Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities. (2024, December 30). The structure (4 domains/22 HLPs). Council for Exceptional Children. <https://highleveragepractices.org/structure-4-domains-22-hlps>



## CHOICE AND VOICE

Instructional materials include a balance of student-choice and teacher-defined tasks. Students are provided regular opportunities to make choices about how to spend time, whom to spend it with, and what materials are used (texts, topics, and tasks). These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. options for choosing methods to express students' understanding that best reflect their strengths as learners and their understanding of the content;
- b. self-selection of texts or resources (e.g., selections that represent their interests, identities, abilities);
- c. tasks that invite students to identify and pursue their own inquiry arcs;
- d. regular student feedback about learning experiences and instruction; and
- e. sources learners can identify themselves within.

### Key Definitions:

- **Student-choice:** Opportunities for students to make decisions about how to learn and demonstrate knowledge and understanding of social studies concepts.
- **Inquiry arcs:** A structured framework that guides students through questioning, applying disciplinary knowledge, evaluating sources, and communicating conclusions to develop critical thinking and civic engagement in social studies.

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review units and lessons for prompts and tasks that create opportunities for student choice and feedback within regular instruction, including regular and long-term formative feedback.
- Review tasks and assessments across units and grade levels for identification of opportunities for students to choose ways to demonstrate learning.
- Look for performance tasks, research projects, or summative projects throughout materials that allow for student choice.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Clear and lesson-embedded opportunities for students to make self-selected choices in regular instruction, including text, topic, or task. These choices during each unit comprise:
  - activities that allow students to explore and investigate areas of interest (e.g., problems, issues, and needs in their tribal, indigenous, local, state, national, and/or global communities) within the topic of study;<sup>50</sup>
  - tasks and prompts that provide opportunities for students to share, explore, and research their curiosities and questions within the topic of study (e.g., crafting and investigating an inquiry-based question to answer using self-selected sources as evidence);

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<sup>50</sup> American Institutes for Research & EdReports. (2024, January 8). Criteria for high-quality instructional materials for social studies. [https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/23-23505\\_HQIM\\_for\\_SS\\_Final.pdf](https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/23-23505_HQIM_for_SS_Final.pdf)

- tasks that provide opportunities for students to choose how to demonstrate their learning and understanding;
- a set of topic-focused readings, such as a curated list of trade books, or resources to deepen students' understanding of the topic of study (e.g., an included set of authentic texts on Civil Rights leaders to learn about in more depth during a Civil Rights unit); and
- a variety of source types and perspectives for students to choose from to deepen their understanding of the topic being studied at different complexity levels.
- **Grades K-5:** Choice typically focuses on opportunities to choose the format or processing style of practice rather than the content of focus.
- **Grades 6-12:** Short, self-selected research tasks and inquiry-based investigations connected to student-driven questions around the topic of study.
- Tasks encourage students to deepen their understanding of the topic being studied by selecting texts based on interests, identities, or abilities and create opportunities for acceleration or enrichment through text selections.
- Materials invite student input to shape the content, structure, or tasks within upcoming lessons (e.g., through exit ticket, surveys, or conferencing).<sup>51</sup>

#### Red Flags:

- Opportunities for student choice interfere with students' ability to engage with grade-level content and tasks, and the opportunities are not comparatively rigorous or worthy of students' time.
- Choice opportunities are solely driven by students' interests and lived experiences that lack connection to and/or do not deepen students' understanding of the topic under study.
- Choice opportunities are framed as "extension" work and not a part of core instruction.
- Choice opportunities are not grade appropriate.

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<sup>51</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 7.1: Optimize choice and autonomy. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/interests-identities/choice-autonomy/>

## COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Instructional materials engage all students in collaborative learning through a variety of research-based routines, structures, and tasks that allow for whole-group, small-group, and independent thinking. Materials explicitly plan for students to demonstrate their curiosity and share their tentative thinking; ask questions; and adjust their understanding by building on one another's ideas through speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

### Key Definitions:

- **Collaborative learning:** Learning, problem-solving, and meaning-making through interactions among peers.

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review units and lessons for opportunities for students to learn collaboratively through speaking, listening, reading, and writing.
- Review teacher guidance for explicit support and lesson-embedded structures to facilitate collaborative learning and encourage the sharing of tentative thinking.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Regular opportunities are provided for student collaboration that include a variety of structures, group sizes, and tasks such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing (e.g., frequent partner conversations, extended group-learning activities, independent stop and jot before whole-group discussion, lead or take on different roles in collaborative groups).
- Extended and supportive opportunities are provided for discourse about grade-level texts, and tasks include clear discussion structures, prompts, student roles, and supports for engaging (e.g., slides, protocols, anchor charts, student facing materials).<sup>52</sup>
- Opportunities are provided for students to revisit their thinking over the course of a lesson or unit after interacting with peers (e.g., returning to anchor charts, reflection questions, and/or portfolios).
- Guidance, tools, and/or prompts are provided for students in supporting one another through challenging academic tasks and asking for help as needed (e.g., sample teacher prompts and modeling, sample student prompts, intentional opportunities for pausing to share challenges and potential strategies).<sup>53</sup>
- Resources, tools, tasks, and/or teaching strategies are included to encourage students to use active listening and speaking skills in peer-to-peer interactions for collaborative learning.
- Resources, tools, and/or teaching strategies (e.g., language supports, strategic grouping) for educators are included to support multilingual learners during collaborative learning when possible.

### Red Flags:

- Limited guidance for supporting students during collaborative learning time (e.g., "Ask students to discuss in small groups" vs. including guidance on roles, timing, or guiding questions).

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<sup>52</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 8.3: Foster collaboration, interdependence, and collective learning. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/effort-persistence/collaboration/>

<sup>53</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 8.3: Foster collaboration, interdependence, and collective learning. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/effort-persistence/collaboration/>

## DOMAIN 3: PROGRESS MONITORING AND SUPPORTING STUDENTS

### SUPPORTS AND SCAFFOLDS<sup>54</sup>

Instructional materials are designed to support a variety of student strengths and diverse learning needs in ways that are based on research and do not interfere with their ability to engage with grade-level content. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. text- and/or content-specific guidance on identifying and addressing potential individual student needs so that supports, scaffolds, and extensions can be effectively differentiated;
- b. reteaching opportunities for students not yet proficient in reading, writing, and language grade-level skills; and
- c. supports and scaffolds that are designed to shift responsibility to students over time.

#### Key Definitions:

- **Diverse learning needs:** The different ways in which students learn and engage in their learning, including students below reading level, learners with individualized support plans, accelerated learners, and multilingual learners.
- **Scaffolds:** A variety of instructional techniques used to move students progressively toward stronger understanding and, ultimately, greater independence in the learning process.

#### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review teacher guidance or supplementary materials for information about how to implement provided supports, extensions, and scaffolds for diverse student learning needs.
- Identify supporting resources that provide reteaching of reading, writing, and language skills and concepts for students who have not yet reached grade-level content and skills.
- Examine core and supporting resources for enrichment and extension activities designed to challenge students who are exceeding grade-level content and skills.
- Examine supports and scaffolds in early-year or early-semester units and later units to identify shifts in responsibility to students.

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<sup>54</sup> Thoughtfully designed questions and tasks that provide access to grade-level, culturally responsive-sustaining, and language-affirming experiences for students are one form of support for students and are addressed in other sections of this framework

**Examples of Evidence:**

- Materials include scaffolds and supplemental resources that offer additional support or challenge for students based on their learning needs.<sup>55</sup>
- Text-, task-, and topic-specific guidance is included on:
  - utilizing supports and scaffolds within each lesson, including a focus on connecting to previous key ideas and guiding the processing of information;<sup>56</sup>
  - structures for presenting materials or examples of questions that reflect a shift in rigor from concrete or simple concepts to more abstract or complex ideas (e.g., in a world geography lesson, students address the compelling question “Where are we?” by exploring materials that build students’ understanding of their geographic location [concrete concept] to reflect on the broader impact of actions beyond their direct surroundings [abstract idea]); and
  - methods of adapting provided content to meet student needs (e.g., alternative teaching approaches, pacing, instructional delivery option, questioning).
- Instructional design integrates the gradual release of supports and scaffolds over the course of a series of lessons or unit, beginning with models and releasing to more independence (e.g., initially providing a partially completed graphic organizer and shifting to students co-constructing a graphic organizer with peers; providing exemplars or peer mentors and transitioning to checklists or templates).<sup>57</sup>
- Supplemental resources are specifically designed to support reteaching opportunities (e.g., small-group instructional guides, visual aids, guided practice resources).
- Supplemental resources, tasks, and recommendations are designed to provide additional challenge by deepening students’ understanding of content and concepts under study (e.g., extension tasks, additional readings aligned to text and topic).
- If included in the materials, supporting multimedia and/or resources (e.g., videos, visual art, music, virtual museums or galleries) are broken down by associated topic under study and/or standard.
- Suggestions are given for classroom routines and structures that scaffold students’ reading, writing, and language needs at various levels. Consistent routines and structures are established throughout a unit, such as pre-teaching vocabulary, modeling, and reflection activities (e.g., think-pair-share, Socratic seminars).

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<sup>55</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 5.3: Build fluencies with graduated support for practice and performance. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression/expression-communication/fluencies-practice-performance/>

<sup>56</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 3.3: Cultivate multiple ways of knowing and making meaning. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation/building-knowledge/making-meaning/>

<sup>57</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 5.3: Build fluencies with graduated support for practice and performance. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression/expression-communication/fluencies-practice-performance/>

**Red Flags:**

- Scaffolds and supports are formulaic and do not attend to the specific content, skills, or tasks at hand (e.g., repetitive use of the same scaffolds and supports throughout a unit without consideration of the content and context).
- Scaffolds and supports reduce the rigor of the task (e.g., simplifying the language demands instead of amplifying them).
- Limited or no lesson-embedded supports for engaging students with grade-level texts and sources; limited or no supplemental resources to specifically build social studies content knowledge and skills.
- Supportive multimedia and resources included are superficial and do not enhance or deepen students' content knowledge.



## SIMULTANEOUS LITERACY AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Instructional materials provide appropriate supports for multilingual learners. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. explicit instruction in writing, text structure, syntax (sentence structure), and cohesive devices (words that connect ideas in a text such as although, however);
- b. sentence or discussion frames; and
- c. strategic grouping to allow for students to converse in home languages.

### Key Definitions:

- **Explicit instruction:** Instruction that centers on an explicit, clear learning purpose and uses clear explanations, modeling, frequent checks for understanding, and targeted support and practice.

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review units and lessons for instructional strategies that explicitly teach text or source organization, sentence structure, and cohesive devices (e.g., conjunctions, transitions) to support social studies instruction.
- Review units and lessons for identification of language development supports that are specific to the text or source and content under study and provide access to grade-level work.
- Review units and lessons and teacher resources for guidance on small-group instruction and differentiation related to language development.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Integration of writing across disciplines with an emphasis on the value of writing as a tool for learning, thinking, and communication (e.g., writing for varied purposes and audience; writing like a historian, geographer, economist, political scientist).
- Explicit instruction for writing in social studies includes supports for sentence construction, paragraph organization, and text structure to help students summarize or analyze sources and develop arguments around social studies content and concepts.
- Lesson-level, embedded scaffolds are provided that support students' academic reasoning and language skills in the social studies disciplines (e.g., visual/graphic organizers, hands-on materials, role-plays, electronic dictionary or glossary).<sup>58</sup> 59
- Suggestions are included for oral language activities before engaging with grade-level, discipline-specific texts or sources (e.g., identifying and sharing related background knowledge).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Cruz, B., & Thornton, S. J. (2025). *Teaching social studies to English language learners*. (3rd ed.) Routledge.  
<https://www.routledge.com/Teaching-Social-Studies-to-English-Language-Learners/Cruz-Thornton/p/book/9781032499437>

<sup>59</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 2.3: Cultivate understanding and respect across languages and dialects. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation/language-symbols/languages-dialects/>

<sup>60</sup> Cruz, B., & Thornton, S. J. (2025). *Teaching social studies to English language learners*. (3rd ed.) Routledge.  
<https://www.routledge.com/Teaching-Social-Studies-to-English-Language-Learners/Cruz-Thornton/p/book/9781032499437>



- Guidance on grouping for discourse opportunities that
  - encourage students to use oral language resources while they work collaboratively to develop disciplinary language in English and co-construct knowledge (ask and answer questions about the text or source);
  - provide opportunities for students to hear and use the speech of more fluent peers;<sup>61</sup> and
  - provide opportunities for students to converse in home languages.
- Embedded high-leverage language development supports are included that are aligned with the content and literacy goals (e.g., identifying cognates, sentence frames, discussion frames) for the discipline.

**Red Flags:**

- There is a lack of focus on a singular topic when guiding students through an inquiry arc.
- There is a lack of alignment between lesson topics and practiced skills, examples, and materials within a lesson (e.g., students are learning about Aztecs, but tasks are focused on building students' map skills using maps from the Middle East for practice).
- Identified cognates are not critical to understanding the text/content objectives.
- Cross-linguistic connections are identified without educator supports for where or how to meaningfully leverage these connections within instruction (e.g., cognate box at the beginning of the lesson without attention in speaking and writing activities).
- Scaffolds attend to language development outside of the context of the text or topic (e.g., disconnected language mini-lesson using different content).
- Supports do not align with language proficiency levels or provide minimal access to the task or content.
- Grouping recommendations focus on static labels of perceived ability and do not allow students to engage with a range of peers or to learn alongside students with a range of assets, language proficiencies, and experiences.

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<sup>61</sup> Cruz, B., & Thornton, S. (2009). Social studies for English language learners: Teaching social studies that matters. *Social Education*, 73(6), 271-274. [https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/articles/se\\_7306271.pdf](https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/articles/se_7306271.pdf)

## PROGRESS MONITORING

Instructional materials embed frequent opportunities to monitor and develop students' progress in disciplinary literacy skills, application of those skills, development of language, and growth of content knowledge. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. embedded and consistent formative assessment practices for content and language learning;
- b. varied and multiple means of demonstrating integrated content, historical thinking skills, literacy, and language learning (e.g., podcast, mock interview, blogpost); and
- c. regular monitoring of oral language development.

### Key Definitions:

- **Formative assessment practices:** Collaborative processes and data collection to understand students' learning and identify strengths and areas for improvement, used by teachers for instructional planning and by students to deepen their understanding.
- **Oral language development:** The development of language through speaking and listening, including the sounds in words, vocabulary, putting words together, and using language in different contexts and for different purposes.

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Examine front matter and materials overview for description of an assessment system and analyze samples of each component of that assessment system.
- Review unit overview, lessons, and assessment resources for explicit opportunities for progress monitoring (e.g., exit tickets, assessments, collecting student work, checklisting) that simultaneously attend to the integration of content knowledge.
- Review units and lessons for varied activities for students to demonstrate their learning (e.g., debates, multimedia presentations, collaborative projects).
- Review teacher-facing resources for guidance in using student learning data to make informed instructional decisions that prioritize student needs and supports.
- Review teacher guidance at the lesson level for opportunities to assess student mastery in every lesson along with guidance on how to respond.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Multiple opportunities are provided for students to show their disciplinary thinking (i.e., historical, civic, geographic, economic), language skills, and content knowledge (e.g., partner discussions, quick writes, exit tickets), including tracking progress over time.
- Culminating tasks, projects, or performance tasks demonstrate content knowledge and language learning related to content and concepts under study and are scaffolded by text-based reading, writing, speaking and listening throughout the unit.
- Varied formats for unit culminating tasks (e.g., variety of student created products—video, essay, art piece, podcast, blogpost, etc.—and formats, including presentation, mock interviews).

- Clear guidance is provided for teachers on how to measure students' disciplinary thinking (i.e., historical, civic, geographic, economic), language skills, and content knowledge (e.g., supports for scoring students' work, guidance on rubrics).
- Task-specific guidance for teachers to assess students' oral language, practices, and content knowledge during student debates and discussions around discipline-specific content and concepts (e.g., checklists with target language skills).

**Red Flags:**

- Assessments are overwhelmingly only summative in nature (e.g., end-of-unit project or assignment) and do not provide ongoing evidence of student learning.
- Assessments focus on the performance of an isolated skill (e.g., disciplinary thinking skills) out of the context of the lesson's topic or text.
- Assessment scoring guidance suggests grouping students in ways that regularly restrict their access to grade-level content.
- Assessments isolate the assessment of language and content (e.g., assess language skills outside of the content knowledge students are learning about).

## MEANINGFUL FEEDBACK

Instructional materials provide frequent opportunities for feedback to advance content understanding and disciplinary literacy skills, as appropriate to the type of social studies instruction. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. peer and teacher cycles of feedback, including communicating progress;
- b. normalization of mistake-making and affirmation of effort and growth;
- c. guidance for explicit, timely, informative, and accessible formative feedback to address partial understandings and alternative thinking about tasks, texts, and topics in ways that allow learners to monitor their own progress effectively and to use that information to guide their own effort and practice; and
- d. guidance on how and when to collect data, as well as how to respond to specific student strengths and needs.

### Key Definitions:

- **Cycles of feedback:** Regular, iterative processes at key points in the learning experience that evaluate students' understandings and skills to refine teacher practice and student learning (i.e., continuous efforts to gather information, assess, reflect, and identify growth areas).

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review units and lessons to identify opportunities for teacher- or peer-led feedback (feedback for students and teachers) within each instructional component.
- Review lesson activities and assessments for processes that support revisions and improvements over time (e.g., opportunities for multiple drafts, peer feedback)
- Review units, lessons, and teacher-facing resources for content- and task-specific guidance that leverages student's assets to help students work through gaps in knowledge and partial understandings.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Materials include regular and consistent opportunities for meaningful peer and teacher feedback, including communicating progress and needs bi-directionally.
- Lessons include clear connections to standards, learning objectives, or other measures of success to direct learning and guide teacher feedback.
- Lesson-embedded suggestions are included for when and how teachers should collect student work or other in-the-moment data about student understandings (e.g., checklist observational notes).
- Clear protocols or task- and content-specific guidance are included for how to review students' work/thinking (e.g., what to look for; sample student responses, standards-aligned rubrics).
- Guidance is provided on how teachers can model and highlight students' efforts and growth (e.g., end-of-class share or reflection prompt).

- Clear guidance is included on how teachers should prioritize feedback to students (e.g., focusing on only the highest leverage pieces of feedback at a time).<sup>62</sup>
- Suggestions for differentiated and flexible instruction, including goals, instructional practices, and materials are included that connect to students' strengths and needs.
- Regular opportunities are included for students to review each other's work along with clear ways to support student-to-student feedback (e.g., checklist, sentence starters, feedback protocol, models).
- Regular opportunities are provided for students to revise work based on feedback.

**Red Flags:**

- Feedback guidance is overly formulaic, not customized to specific student strengths/needs, or focused on a fixed notion of performance, compliance, or competition (e.g., relative performance).
- Feedback guidance only addresses student needs (e.g., does not highlight opportunities to identify and build on student strengths).

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<sup>62</sup> CAST. (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines, version 3.0, consideration 8.4: Offer action-oriented feedback. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/effort-persistence/feedback/>

## Educator Supports

### DOMAIN 1: EDUCATOR KNOWLEDGE

#### EXAMINATION OF SELF

Instructional materials support teachers in examining their own identities, biases, and belief systems to help them understand how these factors might influence instructional choices and the lens through which they interpret student thinking. These materials may include reflection prompts, examples of educator thinking, or embedded professional learning.

##### Key Definitions:

- None

##### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review teacher-facing guidance and resources for inclusion of reflection prompts for teachers to explore self-identities, biases, or beliefs that may impact instructional decisions.
- Identify embedded professional learning opportunities (e.g., model lessons, annotated lesson plan, suggested professional reading) in materials that guide teachers to reflect on their interpretations of student experiences, discussions, and/or thinking.

##### Examples of Evidence:

- Guidance at the beginning of each grade/unit invites teachers to identify and reflect on how their identities, experiences, and knowledge might impact their views of students and students' thinking/work (e.g., prompts or reflection activities, sample educator thinking).
- Materials are designed to help address, identify, and interrupt biases (e.g., research summaries, prompts, sample educator thinking about the inherent capabilities of multilingual learners or students with diverse learning needs).
- Guidance and/or prompts are provided to support relationship-building and understanding of or reflection on students' backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences (e.g., prompts to encourage students to share about their lived experiences and how these experiences may inform their understanding of the content, strategies for engaging in intentional listening and feedback gathering from students).
- For lessons with culturally sensitive or difficult topics, guidance is provided to support educators in identifying biases, omissions, and/or gaps in their instructional materials around these concepts.
- For lessons with culturally sensitive or difficult topics, strategies are included to build educators' background knowledge and capacity to reflect on the presentation and facilitation of difficult conversations.

**Red Flags:**

- No acknowledgement of users of the instructional materials.
- Lack of supports or resources for educators to examine the biases, omissions, and/or gaps in their instructional materials, particularly for addressing culturally sensitive or difficult topics.
- Lack of support for building educators' background knowledge, capacity for reflection about difficult conversations or culturally sensitive topics, or capacity to engage deeply with students.



## INQUIRY-BASED TEACHING PRACTICES

Instructional materials support teachers in engaging with students in the inquiry process and inquiry-based pedagogical practices (question formulation, research, inquiry reflection, evaluation, and synthesis).<sup>63 64</sup>

### Key Definitions:

- **Inquiry:** A process of exploration that involves asking questions, gathering and analyzing evidence, and considering multiple perspectives.<sup>65</sup>

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review the units and lessons for teacher supports around enduring and authentic compelling and supporting questions that provide teacher-guided and student-led inquiries and serve to further students' knowledge and understanding of social studies content and skills.
- Identify opportunities in the units and lessons for educator self-reflection and prompts to make connections between social studies content and student's own lives or experiences.

### Examples of Evidence:

- The unit structure and flow for the inquiry process is clear and easy to navigate for teachers.
- Units and/or lessons include a description and/or explanation of the intended inquiry process to support educators in unpacking the compelling and supporting questions with students (e.g., goal of the inquiry, background knowledge or context, purpose of the compelling and supporting questions, suggestions for tasks to unpack the compelling and supporting questions).
- Essential questions and aligned resources are sequenced in a linear format to support facilitation of the inquiry process.
- Callouts, readings, instructional videos, Professional Learning Community agendas/activities, or other professional learning opportunities focus on inquiry-based teaching practices for social studies content and concepts. In Grades K-5, emphasis is placed on building educator pedagogical knowledge for inquiry (including disciplinary thinking skills in history, civics, geography and economics) alongside building social studies content knowledge of topics and concepts being covered in a unit or lesson.
- **Grades K-5:** Materials include supports and instructional strategies for teachers to serve as a facilitator and guide for students' investigations by asking questions, providing diverse resources, scaffolding students' thinking, and facilitating discussions. Emphasis is placed on teacher-direct inquiry, in which teachers choose topics and questions, but students design the product or solution.

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<sup>63</sup> Grant, S. G., Swan, K., & Lee, J. (2022, September 14). *Inquiry-based practice in social studies education: Understanding the inquiry design model*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003262800>

<sup>64</sup> C3 Teachers. (n.d.). Inquiry design model. <https://c3teachers.org/idm/>

<sup>65</sup> National Council for the Social Studies. (2023, November 8). New definition of social studies approved. <https://www.socialstudies.org/media-information/definition-social-studies-nov2023>



- **Grades 6-12:** Materials include supports and instructional strategies for teachers to facilitate student-led inquiry, allowing students to ask and investigate their own inquiries, interests, and curiosities around social studies content and concepts. Guidance is provided to teachers on how to scaffold students in constructing their own questions, identifying topics for further investigation, researching a wide variety of sources, designing their learning evidence, etc.
- Strategies and/or tools are included to promote self-reflection, analysis, and evaluation of the inquiry process for teachers and students

**Red Flags:**

- Supports for teachers have students engage more often with low-level questions and tasks that are typically limited to knowledge and comprehension of social studies content and concepts (e.g., “According to the text, why does climate vary by location?”).
- Lack of support or guidance for teachers in facilitating the inquiry process with students and unpacking compelling and supporting questions.
- Guidance and suggestions for teaching strategies and processes focus on one-directional flow of knowledge, resources, or questioning (i.e., teacher-to-student only vs. teacher-to-student, student-to-teacher, student-to-student).

## SOURCE AND TOPIC KNOWLEDGE

Instructional materials support educators to engage students with authentic sources and topics. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. text analysis for sources, including quantitative and qualitative complexity;
- b. considerations for engaging a diverse group of students in content in inclusive ways (e.g., guidance, explanatory content, teacher notes); and
- c. explanations, examples of concepts, and/or additional resources to support teachers in building their own knowledge of the content and topics under study.

### Key Definitions:

- **Quantitative complexity:** A computer-generated measurement of complexity based on features such as word length, sentence length and word frequency (e.g., Lexile, Flesch–Kincaid) with benchmarks.
- **Qualitative complexity:** Analysis of purpose/meaning, language, structure, and knowledge to determine the complexity of texts..

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review grade/unit text overviews for text-specific analysis and guidance for the use of included anchor texts (e.g., cautions of sensitive content).
- Review unit preparation materials and lessons for additional teacher-facing content to build knowledge and understanding of text complexity.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Text-specific anchor text analysis includes explicit guidance related to
  - quantitative complexity and grade-level band placement;
  - qualitative complexity with brief, text-specific explanation (e.g., connections between range of ideas, processes, or events) that prepares educators for instruction;
  - rationale for grade-level and unit placement;
  - student considerations (e.g., relevant potential background knowledge, life experiences; potentially sensitive or text-based content with suggestions for how to address); and
  - curated lists of educator-facing resources to build content knowledge in advance of a unit (e.g., links to articles, videos, or websites).
- Teacher- and student-facing resources are provided for engaging with and pulling meaning from sources that increase in rigor over time (e.g., call-out boxes with prompts for students, including guidance for how to parse key information from a source).
- Supports are included for educators to help students learn to analyze and synthesize sources with levels of complexity suited for different grade levels.
- Supports and resources are included to build educators' background knowledge and understanding of the social studies content and concepts under study.

- Materials include guidance or additional resources for educators to connect or integrate the branches of social studies (history, civics, geography, economics) as students engage with rich sources and topics.

**Red Flags:**

- Educator supports for qualitative analysis (meaning/purpose, structure, language, knowledge demands) of anchor texts do not include text-specific information (e.g., only names high complexity but does not offer rationale).

## STUDENTS' LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL ASSETS

Instructional materials support educators to leverage students' linguistic and cultural assets. These materials include prompts for educators to learn about and integrate the knowledge, strengths, and resources of students, families, and the community — especially those who have been historically marginalized.

### Key Definitions:

- None

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review program- and grade-level educator-facing materials for prompts, activities, or protocols that address student and community assets.
- Identify additional professional and collaborative learning opportunities (e.g., interactive modules, instructional frameworks, videos, webinars) throughout materials that support educators in building asset-based language and community engagement strategies.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Guidance, materials, reflection prompts, and/or resources help teachers gain better understanding of student assets (e.g., student surveys, activities to identify student linguistic and cultural assets).
- Guidance, materials, reflection prompts, and/or resources support communication between classroom and home, as well as classroom and community.
- Guidance, materials, reflection prompts, and/or resources are provided for teachers to use related to their own understanding of the assets of their learning community (e.g., family letters, family surveys, suggestions for family or community partnerships related to the topic of study).
- Particular attention is given to the ways that educators can attend to the assets of students, families, and communities who have been historically marginalized (e.g., centering multilingual students as thought leaders through instruction, prompts to consider the inclusion of families of color).

### Red Flags:

- Content meant to support students is framed around addressing deficits without acknowledging that all students have assets they bring to any social studies task.

## SUPPORTING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL LEARNERS

Instructional materials build educators' understanding of research-based practices to support language development for all learners, especially for multilingual learners and students with diverse learning needs. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. use of home language, translanguaging, and development of cross-linguistic connections to deepen understanding of the linguistic features across languages and registers; and
- b. development of oracy skills.

### Key Definitions:

- **Translanguaging:** Practice of using multiple languages flexibly and strategically for fluid communication, which includes use of students' home language(s) and their full linguistic repertoire.
- **Cross-linguistic connections:** Identifying and exploring the ways that languages are the same and different (e.g., sound, spelling, vocabulary, syntax).
- **Registers:** The different ways speakers use language in different contexts.

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review program- and grade-level educator-facing materials for language development through prompts, activities, or additional professional learning (e.g., model lessons, instructional frameworks, interactive modules).
- Identify teacher guidance in materials that supports the development of academic and content-specific vocabulary, increasing comprehension, building background knowledge, and making cross-linguistic connections.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Resources for educators that support language development across all four language domains (reading, writing, speaking, and listening).
- Resources are provided for educators that support the development of cross-linguistic connections (e.g., comparisons of linguistic structures, and alphabet or sound/spelling charts in different languages for social studies content and concepts) and engage teachers to learn about students' linguistic assets.
- Callouts, readings, instructional videos, Professional Learning Community agendas/activities, or other professional learning opportunities are included, with a focus on language development for all students through social studies instruction, including supports for multilingual and diverse learners.
- Example materials provide guidance or activities to help teachers engage all students in multilingual classrooms, including group work, translation analysis, and supports for note-taking.
- Example materials provide guidance, strategies, or activities that help teachers facilitate students' development of oracy skills (e.g., modeling oracy skills, visual aids for discussions, language supports).

- Explicit acknowledgement of the assets of students' full linguistic repertoire (all the languages and registers that students know and use).<sup>66</sup>
- When possible, texts or resources are available in multiple languages to support content knowledge acquisition and language development.

**Red Flags:**

- The research-based “why” behind instructional practices to support language development is not explicitly named.
- Limited opportunities for students to use home languages or work with students who speak different languages.
- Translanguaging is treated as an add-on.

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<sup>66</sup> Jaffee, A. T., & Salinas, C. (Eds.). (2024, August 23). *Teaching culturally and linguistically relevant social studies for emergent bilingual and multilingual youth*. Teachers College Press. <https://www.tcpres.com/teaching-culturally-and-linguistically-relevant-social-studies-for-emergent-bilingual-and-multilingual-youth-9780807786048>

## SUPPORTING LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Instructional materials build educators' understanding of research-based practices to support literacy development through social studies instruction. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. building of knowledge of students' language development, including oracy, and language development standards;
- b. simultaneous development of language, content, and literacy skills; and
- c. examples of student language with varying levels of language proficiency within the lesson context.

### Key Definitions:

- None

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review course- and grade-level educator-facing materials for attention to language, content, and literacy skill development that relate to key ideas in the indicator through prompts, activities, or additional professional learning.
- Review unit overviews for a list of key literacy standards connected and aligned to social studies lessons.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Callouts, readings, instructional videos, Professional Learning Community agendas/activities, or other professional learning opportunities are embedded within instructional materials, with a focus on understanding research-based practices aligned to the science of reading that support literacy development through social studies instruction.
- Support for educators weaves together the development of language, content, and literacy skills (e.g., identify essential content knowledge, language, and literacy skills for each lesson).
- Discussion questions and reflection prompts are given for teacher collaboration focused on literacy instructional practices that are geared toward and support social studies instruction (e.g., teacher-focused questions and prompts to connect and analyze the application of literacy research-based practices in social studies content and contexts throughout the lesson).
- Teacher-facing tasks and assessment resources include sample student responses with guidance or annotations that analyze linguistic features and offer suggestions for supporting language development directly connected to social studies content and concepts.
- Supports are included for educators to use inclusive literacy materials, (e.g., read-alouds, historical narratives, journaling, text-based vocabulary instruction) that are designed to encourage diverse student engagement with multiple texts.
- **Grades K-5:** Support for literacy development at the elementary level emphasizes building students' social studies content knowledge as opposed to literacy skills.
- **Grades 6-12:** Support for literacy development at the secondary level emphasizes reading, writing, speaking and listening specific to social studies disciplines (history, civics, geography, economics). For example, vocabulary development is domain-specific where students analyze and evaluate multiple sources to build an understanding of the meaning and application of key social studies terminology.



**Red Flags:**

- The research-based “why” behind instructional practices is not explicitly named.
- Educative materials silo educators’ understanding of the development of language, content, and literacy skills (e.g., vocabulary development is discussed outside of the content that students are learning).

## DOMAIN 2: USABILITY

### DESIGN AND FUNCTIONALITY

Instructional materials are designed to support ease of student and teacher use. These materials include all of the following elements:

- a. a visually appealing design with an organized and logical format;
- b. materials that are appropriately paced;
- c. clear and concise educator-facing guidance; and
- d. a variety of ways to engage with the content, including leveraging current technology.

#### Key Definitions:

- None

#### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review the grade or course and unit overviews, including the scope and sequence documents, for provided pacing, instructional components, and methods of accessing materials.
- Review units and lessons to determine how design, material organization, and language contribute to or detract from usability and functionality.
- Assess overall materials for layout, typography, and use of images that are user-friendly for students and teachers.
- Identify technology features for delivery of content or engagement throughout the materials that enhance learning experiences.

#### Examples of Evidence:

- Materials for one lesson or instructional experience are easy to access, ideally in one place.
- Lessons orient educators to the most important information (e.g., overview of lesson structure alongside needed materials and preparation).
- Pacing for instructional time is comprehensive such that:
  - guidance is provided on the amount of time a task may reasonably take in a lesson (estimated preparation and instructional time) and suggested timing is considered for each individual task;
  - units and lessons are paced for completion within the allotted instructional time during the school day and/or with time remaining for students to engage in social studies tasks outside of the classroom (through homework or other extensions);<sup>67</sup>
  - when applicable, lessons are paced to provide students with time to apply social studies skills; and

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<sup>67</sup> American Institutes for Research & EdReports. (2024, January 8). Criteria for high-quality instructional materials for social studies. [https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/23-23505\\_HQIM\\_for\\_SS\\_Final.pdf](https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/23-23505_HQIM_for_SS_Final.pdf)

- o additional time is built into unit pacing for teacher-directed adjustments and necessary teacher adaptations.
- **Grades K-5:** Teacher guidance is written in an easy-to-digest way that allows teachers to effectively and efficiently implement lessons and activities (e.g., teachers can prepare for a lesson in 20 minutes or less).
- **Grades 6-12:** Teacher guidance is written in a way that effectively describes lesson activities and allows teachers to implement them efficiently (e.g., teachers can read and prepare for a lesson in 45 minutes or less).
- Student- and teacher-facing resources are available in digital formats that can support text-to-speech or other assistive technology.
- Digital and print resources are clearly marked and organized (e.g., clearly organized digital interface, use of color-coding or visuals, consistent labeling).

#### Red Flags:

- Student- or teacher-facing materials are only available in non-editable format, creating an unnecessary burden for educators to adapt them for their context.
- Pacing of content and concepts in units and lessons is unrealistic.
- Print-only resources do not allow for the use of assistive technology.
- A volume of materials or additional optional components is provided with unclear guidance on what is core instruction (and/or variance in the quality of volume of materials).

## ADAPTABILITY FOR CONTEXT

Instructional materials contain materials and/or meaningful suggestions for how to adapt for district, school, and/or classroom context. This may include varied selections for topics under study; flexibility to modify tasks to connect to local resources, organizations, or issues; or varied pacing suggestions based on number of school days or minutes of instruction.

### Key Definitions:

- None

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Review the grade or course and unit overviews, including the scope and sequence documents, for attention to varied instructional context restraints (e.g., school days and instructional minutes) and options for choice-based or adaptable units of study.
- Review lesson materials, guidance, suggestions, materials, and resources for adaptability support, including identification of optional and required elements.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Materials include clear guidance or adapted lesson materials for varied instructional contexts (e.g., scope and sequence options for a 30- or 45-minute instructional block, prioritization of instructional components [must do/may do], extension).
- Units and/or lessons provide opportunities to integrate local context through task or topic.
- Materials may offer a selection of units or arcs of learning that schools and/or teachers could select from (e.g., a range of research project materials on the same topic).

### Red Flags:

- Instructional materials are strictly paced for regular instructional minutes and school days that are not feasible for local contexts.

## PROGRAM COHERENCE

Core instructional materials work in concert with (or have the potential to work in concert with) additional supplemental social studies materials (e.g., intervention materials). This includes aligned and research-based content and instructional approaches across materials.

### Key Definitions:

- **Core instructional materials:** Main instructional materials used to engage students in regular instruction.
- **Supplemental social studies materials:** Additional materials designed to support students outside of the core instructional block.

### How to Gather Evidence:

- Identify the presence of supplementary materials across grade levels and review how supplemental materials are integrated into core instruction (e.g., remediation, extension materials outside of core instruction).
- Review supplemental materials to determine instructional strategies and approaches that are aligned to core content and research-based instructional practices.
- Review grade-level annual overviews in multi-year programs for progression of content and skill development across years.

### Examples of Evidence:

- Included supplementary or intervention materials attend to addressing students' strengths and needs in ways that systematically leverage and build their core social studies content knowledge and skills.
- Descriptions and/or explanations for the purpose and use of provided supplementary materials in connection with core instructional materials are included. Supplementary materials are clearly aligned with learning objectives and goals.
- For multi-year programs, there is a clear and coherent vertical progression of content. Early grades provide a foundation of vocabulary and knowledge that is used and explored with greater depth and complexity in later years.
- Assessment materials in core instruction provide clear guidance and connections to core and supplementary materials.
- Assessment materials in units and lessons are coherently aligned to content and instruction. Guidance, supports, and/or descriptive explanations are provided for the alignment between assessments with the rigor and depth of the standards and learning outcomes for the course or grade level. For example, assessment materials build toward students demonstrating their ability to engage independently with source sets containing multiple sources (i.e., 3-4 with more than half being primary sources) at the top end of the qualitative complexity range for the grade level.

### Red Flags:

- Included supplementary or intervention materials are not research-based (e.g., focus on use of leveled texts, do not attend to building students' knowledge and skills).

## Additional Resources

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### GENERAL

- [Criteria for High-Quality Instructional Materials for Social Studies](#), American Institutes for Research and EdReports

### GRADE-LEVEL AND STANDARDS ALIGNED

- [Social Studies Frameworks and Standards](#), Maryland State Department of Education
- [Effective Pedagogy in Social Sciences](#), Claire Sinnema and Graeme Aitken
- [Questions, Tasks, Sources: Focusing on the Essence of Inquiry](#), Kathy Swan, John Lee, and S.G. Grant
- [What's In a Claim? A Framework for Helping Students Write Persuasive Claims](#), Ryan Lewis

### DESIGNED TO AFFIRM STUDENTS

- [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework](#), New York State Education Department
- [Culturally Responsive Teaching & The Brain](#), Zaretta Hammond
- [Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0](#), Gloria Ladson-Billings
- [Developing Content-Area Literacy for Diverse ELLs/MLLs in Secondary Classrooms](#), CUNY-NYS Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals
- [Teaching Strategies to Develop Cross-Language Connections](#), District of Columbia, Office of the State Superintendent of Education
- [Translanguaging: Practice Briefs for Educators](#), Joanna Yip and Ofelia García

### INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

- [Depth-of-Knowledge Levels for Four Content Areas](#), Norman L. Webb
- [e2 \(Essential X Equitable\) Instructional Practice Suite](#), Student Achievement Partners
- [Getting Serious about Sourcing: Considerations for Teachers and Teacherpreneurs](#), Lauren McArthur Harris, Leanna Archambault, and Catharyn Shelton
- [How Do We Teach Elementary Students to Think Like Historians?](#), Tammara Purdin
- [Universal Design for Learning Guidelines](#), CAST
- [Show and Tell: Scaffolding Practices in Lower Secondary Social Science Classrooms](#), Nora Elise Hesby Mathé and Anders Stig Christensen
- [Social Studies Knowledge Map™](#), Johns Hopkins University, School of Education
- [Supporting Students to Read Complex Texts on Civic Issues: The Role of Scaffolded Reading Instruction in Democratic Education](#), Shira Eve Epstein

### EDUCATOR SUPPORTS

- [Fostering Civil Discourse: Difficult Classroom Conversations in a Diverse Democracy](#), Facing History & Ourselves

