

Social Studies

Accomplished teachers have a strong foundation in the many disciplines that comprise social studies, such as civics, economics, geography, and history. They understand that social studies interconnects these disciplines to provide students with a broad basis for critical investigation and that this foundation will later enable students to pursue specific disciplines in greater depth. Each discipline represents its own area of knowledge based on research, theories, methods, themes, and concepts. Accomplished teachers understand that social studies is a core content area that interweaves these disciplines and presents students with a common means of understanding the human and physical worlds. They demonstrate their ability and skill to teach social studies by designing lessons that incorporate and interweave the disciplines. These lessons challenge students to build their knowledge and engage in higher level thinking.

Accomplished teachers understand the major issues, concepts, and themes in social studies, such as culture, technology and society, and global connections. They are also aware of the current issues and events in their communities, nation, and world. Teachers design lessons that require students to employ critical thinking skills as they gain an appreciation of these topics. Using available technology helps to make global connections possible. An accomplished teacher might collaborate with an English language teacher from Germany to conduct videoconferences between classes, thus providing students with opportunities to engage in dialogue with a peer group from another culture. Local resources can also help social studies concepts come to life. Teaching the economic concept of scarcity becomes tangible, for example, when a teacher has five water bottles for a class of twenty. How should the water be divided among the students? What is the value of each bottle? Is it the same for

every student? These are the types of questions that students might pursue in small and large group discussions. Accomplished teachers use their content knowledge to structure meaningful lessons and simulations for their students. They make sound curricular choices and design compelling instructional activities so that students may become informed, critical, and questioning citizens engaged in a global society.

Accomplished teachers realize that lessons become powerful when students can make connections to their surroundings, world events, and cultural environment. Teachers connect abstract concepts with concrete, real-world experiences. For example, after discussing the United States *Bill of Rights*, students could develop a children's bill of rights. When participating in discussion groups to determine which rights should be addressed, students may share personal opinions and learn to listen respectfully to the opinions of others. Further inquiry might require students to use their research skills to find the published version of *The Children's Bill of Rights* and compare this document to the one they have created. Acknowledging the viewpoints of others and respecting their rights are crucial responsibilities for a democratic citizenry.

Accomplished teachers use secondary sources such as textbooks, political cartoons, online stories, and magazine articles for students to acquire new knowledge and information, draw conclusions, assess perspectives, and think critically. They also use primary sources such as autobiographies, memoirs, oral histories, diaries, photographs, cultural artifacts, and other creative work to engage students in learning. For example, an accomplished teacher might have students listen to taped slave narratives from the National Archives while studying the Civil War. After a unit on immigration, another teacher may ask students to choose countries or cultures with which they identify and share the reasons for their connections. A student might decide to share a story related to Japanese heritage and describe the journey that student's parents took to reach the United States; this student might also bring photographs and artifacts from home to help illustrate this culture's influence on the student's life. These activities demonstrate personal connections to humanity's ongoing challenges and conflicts.

As accomplished teachers guide students through tasks such as recognizing propaganda and bias or discerning fact from opinion, they have them integrate skills like organizing, interpreting, critiquing, analyzing, and synthesizing across curricula to promote strong social studies programs. When studying world cultures, teachers may choose to read non-fiction picture books aloud and have students take notes on newly learned facts before writing an expository essay that incorporates previously learned knowledge as well. To extend this activity, students could analyze Web sites for bias and present their findings by creating products such as editorial responses that use appropriate citations.

Recognizing that social studies relates the social sciences with the humanities, accomplished teachers often extend student inquiries into the arts, religion, philosophy, science, and technology. This interweaving of subjects creates a stimulating environment. Students may address current and future global challenges while

examining the dynamic interaction of human beings and their ethical dilemmas and choices. They may be asked to write essays discussing conservation efforts around the world and offer their opinions on the most economically effective measures, using their social studies, science, and mathematics knowledge. Accomplished teachers create opportunities for students to use their information processing skills across curricula to increase their students' social science vocabulary, ability to read, critical thinking skills, and effective use of technology.

Accomplished teachers create integrated lessons to help students build a foundation of facts and information for their exploration of social studies. With an acknowledgement of their biases and perspectives, teachers design activities that encourage respect for opposing points of view, appreciation of well-supported opinions, sensitivity to cultural differences, and commitment to the social welfare of communities. Teachers link new content with pre-existing knowledge and beliefs to help students make connections across curricula. They develop activities that encourage community involvement through which students may apply their knowledge to current, local issues. They provide experiences that feature active learning in small group settings to stimulate student interaction and collaboration. Accomplished teachers provide students with opportunities to develop a sense of belonging and heighten their awareness of the multicultural world in which they live so they may become engaged and empowered citizens.