

# Using the Newspaper to Teach Curriculum Standards for the Social Studies

The National Council for the Social Studies curriculum standards presents ten themes that form the framework for excellence in teaching social studies. They are:

- I** Culture and Cultural Diversity
- II** Time, Continuity, and Change
- III** People, Places, and Environments
- IV** Individual Development and Identity
- V** Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- VI** Power, Authority, and Governance
- VII** Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- VIII** Science, Technology, and Society
- IX** Global Connections
- X** Civic Ideals and Practices

This guide provides sample lessons using the newspaper to address most of the student performance expectations for each of the ten thematic standards. Use the lessons as a starting point to create or expand your own lesson plans incorporating the standards.

Membership in the National Council for the Social Studies is highly recommended as is purchasing their book, *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*. For more information on the *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* and the ten Thematic Standards, please visit the National Council for the Social Studies web pages at:

<http://www.socialstudies.org/>  
<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/teachers/vol1/thematic/>

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the National Council for the Social Studies.

## **I** Culture and Cultural Diversity

- a)** Newspapers provide a window into the cultures of our nation and world. Have students find articles about groups, societies, or ethnic cultures. Using the articles and online resources have students analyze and explain how various groups, societies, and ethnic cultures address the human needs and concerns of their communities.
- b)** Most classes are now diverse, with students representing a variety of cultural perspectives and frames of reference. Find controversial news articles on topics such as immigration, race, international conflict, or other issue. Have students predict how one or more of the other students may respond to or interpret the issue. Then discuss the issue as a class. Have the students determine if their predictions were correct. Discuss and/or do a written report on what they have learned about their fellow classmates and their perspectives on the issue.
- c)** Newspapers can help students reach an understanding of culture and how it impacts language, literature, the arts, traditions, beliefs and values, and behavior patterns. Have students find stories, editorials or other content on these topics. Using the newspaper content, have them write a report explaining how that information contributes to the development and transmission of culture.
- d)** Have students find articles where individuals or groups are responding differently to changes in their social or physical environment. Have them explain what are the shared assumptions, values and beliefs of each individual or group that cause them to respond differently. If there is conflict between them, discuss how that conflict could be resolved.
- e)** Find several articles that demonstrate cultural unity as well as cultural diversity. Using the articles as cases in point, have students describe the importance of cultural unity and diversity within and across groups.
- f)** Using news stories and features, have students interpret patterns of behavior reflecting values and attitudes that contribute to, or pose obstacles to, cross-cultural understanding. Create a graph of how many articles show activities that contribute to cross cultural understanding and how many pose obstacles.
- g)** Using articles that show specific cultural responses to persistent human or social issues, have students write a well-reasoned report on why that particular culture continues to respond in the same way to the issue and whether a different response might bring about a change or resolution of the issue.

## **II Time, Continuity, and Change**

**a)** Different newspapers, reporters or editorial writers may describe the same event, situation, or topic in different ways. They may differ in the evidence, facts, or reasoning they offer to support their conclusions or editorial opinions (referred to as bias or spin). Have students find a major national or international news story or an editorial on a national issue. Then have them go online to research the story or editorial in another newspaper or other online news source. Discuss how the stories or editorials differ, whether different facts and/or opinions are offered, and whether they are biased by the editorial stance of the newspaper.

**b)** Have students clip articles on a topic in the newspaper that can be followed for an extended period of time, such as a war, regional conflict, major natural disaster, etc. Have them research and apply these key concepts/questions in their report on the topic: What is the timeframe of the event? What is the chronology or order in which events are taking place? What are the causes and/or effects? What change has occurred? What conflict is occurring, why, and how can it be resolved? How will the event change the future for those involved and affect the continuity of their lives?

**c)** Many current news events occur based on significant historical periods and patterns of change within and across cultures, such as the rise of nation-states, and social, economic, and political revolutions. Have students find news articles that encompass such roots and have them identify and describe the historical context for the story.

**d)** Have students find a major front-cover news story. Have them identify the sources of information and quotes and answer the questions: Do the sources seem credible. Why? Has the reporter validated or shown evidence that suggests the sources are reliable? What was the cause of the event and what was the outcome? If possible, students should research the sources to conclude whether they believe the sources are reliable or not.

Now, have them employ the same processes to write their own news story reconstructing and/or interpreting a past historic event that they are studying in class.

**e)** Have students find an article on an important current event, a recurring dilemma or problem, or a persistent issue. Have them identify the issues in the story. Do people involved interpret or analyze the issue in different ways that reflect their personal or cultural background? Now have them look at the story from a personal viewpoint to examine: Do they, or should they, feel empathy for those involved? Are they skeptical about some aspects of the issue? What is their critical judgment about how the issue should be addressed?

**f)** Students should choose a major public policy issue currently in the news to write a report or research paper on. They should clip all articles and editorials that relate to the public policy issue. For their written report each student should use facts, opinions and historical background information from the clippings plus research from a variety of other sources to develop their own informed decision on what actions should be taken to address the policy issue.

### **III People, Places, and Environments**

**a)** Newspapers make extensive use of maps, graphs, charts, photos and other illustrations to help readers understand the news and the locations where it is taking place. To help students develop mental and general mapping skills of locales, regions, and the world, and to understand concepts of relative location, direction, size, and shape, have students clip from the newspaper all maps and images that reference locations. Have them find the locations on a globe or other map and make reference to the direction and distance from their own location. They can also determine latitude and longitude, what continent the location is on, etc. Compare all the different locations students find.

**b/c)** 1) Have students clip maps, graphs, charts, photos and other illustrations of locations from the newspaper, or 2) find the datelines for news stories taking place in the U.S. and around the world. Then have students do a variety of activities: Find the locations on a globe or atlas; develop a database of locations; create charts or graphs of all the locations discovered. Then have them go online to find aerial photos, satellite images, detailed area maps and other geographic information about the locations found in the newspaper.

**d)** 1) Looking in the sports section, have students find teams that have or will be competing with each other. Then estimate the distance between the hometowns of each team followed by a more accurate calculation of the distance.

2) Find a map or other image in the paper. What is the scale of it compared with the actual area? How large is the actual area detailed? Does it provide information on population density of the area or distribution patterns of resources?

**e)** Have students locate in the newspaper examples of landforms and geographic features such as mountains, plateaus, islands, rain forests, deserts, and oceans. Have them describe the features of each and explain their relationship(s) within the ecosystem.

**f)** As a class, look at the newspaper weather map. Discuss why cities in the U.S. and around the world have a variety of weather conditions based on seasons (what causes seasons), climate, geography, weather patterns, and water cycles.

**g)** Newspapers write stories about the design and building of specialized buildings (stadiums, etc.), neighborhoods, shopping centers, urban centers, industrial parks, etc. Using those newspaper stories, have students describe how and why people create these places and how they reflect culture, human needs, current values and ideals, and government policies.

**h)** Have students find articles on topics such as land use, settlement patterns, how customs are passed on, or how and why ecosystem change. Discuss how the interactions between human cultural patterns and the physical environment affect what is occurring.

**i)** Historic and current events, both natural and man-made, influence physical and human geography. Students should find articles on current or historic events on the local, regional, national and/or global levels and write a report describing how the event(s) have influenced physical and/or human geography. Online sources may also be used to uncover additional information to enhance the report.

**j)** Newspapers provide many stories about natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, droughts, etc. Using news stories about such events, write a report assessing and describing the social, economic and environmental effects of the event.

**k)** Have students find news stories and/or editorials about a use of land and/or another resource in a community, region, nation, or the world. Students should evaluate the proposed policies for use of the land or resource by the parties involved and then write an editorial offering their own alternative policy recommendation or one in support of a position advocated that they believe is the best course. Make sure they use solid facts to support their editorial opinions.

## **IV Individual Development and Identity**

- a)** Searching throughout the newspaper, have students make a list of things to which they personally feel connections. It may be a connection to a time in their lives, places that have meaning to them, or social/cultural activities such as going to a movie or performance. Have the class discuss why items on their list are important or meaningful to them.
- b)** Have students find several articles about historical and contemporary cultures. Then have students discuss or write reports where they identify, describe, and express appreciation for the influences culture has on their daily lives.
- c)** Students will write a research report using several articles from the newspaper and online resources to describe the ways family, religion, gender, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, and other group (peers) and cultural influences contribute to the development of a sense of self.
- d)** Have students find articles about important or interesting people in the news. Discuss in class or have students write a summary of what factors such as physical ability, learning, motivation, behavior, perception, and personality have led to that individual's personal development and success.
- e)** Students should examine news stories where interactions of ethnic, national, or cultural influences are affecting specific situations or events. Have students identify and write down the 5W's and H (who, what, when, where, why & how) of the stories in order to examine the issue more deeply.
- f)** Have students find articles on important or interesting people in the news. Using the articles and online resources, identify and describe in writing the roles of perceptions, attitudes, values, and beliefs in the development of that individual's personal and professional identity.
- g)** Newspapers regularly feature stories about individuals or groups being stereotyped or experiencing prejudice, conforming to the norm, acting altruistically, and/or other behaviors. Using such articles, have students compare, evaluate and then describe in discussion or writing the impact of the experiences on the individuals and/or groups involved.

## **V** Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

- a)** Using newspaper articles that address the concepts of role, status, and social class, have students describing how these concepts affect the connections and interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions in society.
- b)** Find newspaper articles with examples of how group or institutional influences such as religious beliefs, laws, and peer pressure have an effect on people, events, and elements of culture. Identify what group or institution is bringing the influence to bear. What is the influence? How are the people involved responding? Is the event or our culture changing due to the influence?
- c)** Many institutions are written about in the newspaper. Find articles about various institutions in the news. Discuss what the institutions are and what influences they have on people and society. Discuss how the institutions were developed and how they have changed over time.
- d)** Find newspaper articles or editorials that identify and/or analyze tensions between expressions of individuality and efforts by groups and institutions to promote social conformity. How are the individuals expressing themselves? What pressure to conform is being exerted? Discuss personal experiences related to these issues and the balance between individual expression and social conformity.
- e)** News stories often identify and describe the tension between an individual's beliefs and expressions of them and government policies and/or laws. Find such articles and discuss the issues involved. Also find stories of individuals exerting their First Amendment rights to free speech. Discuss the issues of free speech. Is there a point where free speech goes too far?
- f)** Using newspaper articles and other resources, write a report describing the role that institutions play in both maintaining continuity of society and culture and changing it.
- g)** As a class, discuss examples in the news of how groups and institutions are helping to meet the needs of individuals and/or are promoting the common good. Also discuss examples where they are failing to do so. Are there things the class can do as a group to help needy individuals described in the stories or to promote the common good? If so, consider implementing a service-learning project to help those in need.

## **VI** Power, Authority, and Governance

- a)** Use newspaper articles to examine the rights and responsibilities of individuals in relation to their families, social groups, communities, and nation. What rights are they expressing? How are they assuming responsibility? Are they assuming responsibility for the family, social groups, the community, or nation?
- b)** Find articles about government action on the local, state or national level. Discuss what purpose(s) the government is acting to achieve. How is the government's power being used? Do you believe the government entity is justified in its use of power?
- c)** Use news articles to analyze and then discuss how government does or does not provide for:
- the needs and wants of citizens;
  - establishment of order and stability;
  - regulation of territory, or;
  - management of conflict.
- d)** Find newspaper articles that describe how nations, groups or organizations are encouraging unity among peoples while also dealing with issues of diversity in order to maintain order and security. What nations, groups or organization are involved? Are they being successful in their efforts to encourage unity or are the issues of diversity leading to disorder and/or a lessening of security? What can be done to unite the groups? How can diversity be appreciated by those involved?
- e)** The newspaper presents stories about local, state and national government representatives. Use the newspaper to identify important government officials at each level of government such as mayor, governor, senator, congressman, president, etc. Discuss or write a report on the level of government they represent, the features of that level, and their limits of power.
- f)** Write an essay using the newspaper and other resources that explains the conditions, actions, and motivations that are contributing to a major conflict between nations or within a nation. Explain what you believe can be done to end the conflict.
- g)** Technology used in communication, transportation, information processing and weapons development can contribute to or help resolve conflicts. Find newspaper articles where technology is either contributing to a conflict or helping to resolve one. What technology is involved? How is it being used? If it is contributing to conflict, how can that be dealt with? What can be done in the future to ensure that technology is used to help resolve conflicts?
- h)** Find newspaper articles where individuals, groups or governments are using their power, role, status, or influence to affect a persistent social problem or issue. In writing or class discussion, have students describe the social problem or issue? Who is — and how is — power, role, status, or influence being applied to deal with the issue? What outcome do they believe will occur?
- i)** Find newspaper stories that provide examples of how governments attempt to achieve their policy goals and objectives at home and abroad. Read and discuss a newspaper editorial. Then, write your own editorial about the policy goal or objective, supporting or opposing it. Make sure to use facts from the article and other sources to support your opinion.

## **VII** Production, Distribution, and Consumption

**a/b)** Find several automotive classified and display ads for several major auto brands such as Ford, Toyota, GM, Honda, etc. Compare the prices of new and used cars for comparable models produced by each of these brands. What are the price differences between comparable new cars and used cars of the same model year? Does the quality and/or reliability of a car manufacturer affect the prices? Is one brand or model more popular than another? Does that affect the price of the car? Do some brands use incentives such as rebates or low interest loans to try to sell their cars? Why do they use incentives?

**c)** Find newspaper articles or ads that show goods and services that are being provided by private enterprise and by the public sector. What are the differences between what they provide? What factors affect which goods and services are provided by each?

**d)** Find articles and ads for various institutions that comprise economic systems such as households, businesses, banks, government agencies, labor unions, and corporations. Write a report describing some of the relationships between these various economic institutions and how they may affect each other.

**e)** Look through the help wanted ads for several jobs that may interest in you the future. What specialized jobs were of interest to you? How might those jobs contribute to the production and exchange of goods and services in our economic system?

**f)** Find newspaper articles about economic issues in nations around the world. How do the values and beliefs in those different societies influence their economic decisions? What are the outcomes?

**g)** Use the newspaper to explain and demonstrate the role of money in everyday life. For example, in the classified section find ads for houses for sale or rent. How much does housing cost? Examine the food section to get an idea of the cost for food. Find the automotive classifieds and determine the cost for new and used cars. What are other newspaper examples that demonstrate the use of money in our daily lives?

**h)** Read newspaper articles about nations around the world. Compare their basic economic systems. Who determines what is produced, distributed and consumed? Define the various types of economic systems you encounter and describe each of those systems in a written report.

**i)** Find economic stories about resources like oil, gasoline, or commodities such as gold, soybeans, etc. Is supply and demand an issue in the story? How is supply and demand affecting the price of the resource? How does the price of that resource affect the economy of the U.S. or other countries?

**j)** Find stories about compelling social issues such as unemployment, acid rain, high-quality education, environmentally-friendly disposal of trash, etc. Write a newspaper editorial proposing an economically reasonable way to deal with the issue in a manner that results in a desirable outcome.

## **VIII Science, Technology, and Society**

- a)** Science and technology have dramatically changed people's lives. Find examples of science and technology throughout the newspaper and create a poster or collage of stories and images that tell the story of how these affect peoples' lives.
- b)** Identify and describe examples from the newspaper in which science and technology are leading to changes in the physical environment, such as the building of dams and levees, offshore oil drilling, medicine from natural resources, loss of habitat due to extracting resources, etc.
- c)** Identify and describe examples from the newspaper in which science and/or technology are likely to influence core societal values, beliefs, and attitudes. How are they likely to be affected? Conversely, are societal attitudes likely to shape this scientific and/or technological change?
- d)** Identify laws and public policies in the news or editorials that govern scientific or technological applications that are being implemented or debated. Do these laws or public policies affect issues like environmental protection, safety of workers or consumers, regulation of business, genetic engineering or other issues? Write an essay on whether you agree with the law or public policy and how it is likely to affect those cited in the news.
- e)** Often, there are conflicts between scientific advancement and social norms or values. Find such conflicts in the news, editorials or commentary sections of the newspaper. Write your own editorial proposing a reasonable and ethical solution to the conflict. Make sure to use fact from the news and other sources to support your opinion.
- f)** Formulate a media strategy and develop a policy proposal associated with a science/technology-society issue, such as the continued use of fossil fuel, development of nuclear or alternative energy sources, genetic engineering, or other issue in the news. Create a strategic newspaper display ad campaign and write editorials or commentaries promoting your policy.

## **IX** Global Connections

- a)** Search the newspaper for articles where language, art, music, belief systems, and/or other cultural elements are helping to foster global understanding or cause misunderstanding. Which elements above are involved? Why are they helping or hurting the situation? What can be done to improve things?
- b)** Find examples in the newspaper of conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among groups, societies, and nations. Discuss what is occurring. What conditions or motivations may be contributing to the issue?
- c)** Use newspaper articles to describe and analyze the effects of changing technologies on the global community. What technologies are having an impact? Will they affect the global standard of living?
- d)** Find newspaper articles about persistent, contemporary, and emerging global issues, such as health care, security, resource allocation, economic development, and environmental quality. Using the newspaper articles and online resources, write a report analyzing the causes and consequences of the issue, and offer possible solutions.
- e)** Every day newspapers carry international stories and commentaries on territorial disputes, economic development, nuclear and other weapons deployment, use of natural resources, and human rights concerns. Find newspaper stories, editorials and commentaries on such issues. Using the newspaper content and other resources, discuss the relationships and tensions between the nations involved. Do both sides have legitimate concerns? How may those concerns be addressed or resolved?
- f)** Study the 30 Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from the United Nations site at: [www.un.org/rights/50/decla.htm](http://www.un.org/rights/50/decla.htm). Find newspaper articles where you believe these universal human rights are being violated. Analyze what is occurring. Then, formulate a written policy statement that outlines the issue(s) or conflict(s) taking place, defines the article(s) being violated, recognizes the concerns of all parties involved, and provides an equitable solution to the problems.
- g)** Find articles about the United Nations or other international and/or multinational organizations that are acting in the global arena. In discussion or in writing, describe and evaluate the role that the organization is playing. What do you think is the likely outcome of the organization's efforts?
- h)** Find newspaper articles that illustrate how individual behaviors and decisions connect with or affect global systems. Describe the behaviors or decisions. What global system is being affected and what is the result?

## **x** Civic Ideals and Practices

- a)** Find newspaper articles, editorials or commentaries that you think exemplify key ideals of the democratic republican form of government, such as individual human dignity, liberty, justice, equality, and the rule of law. Research the origins of these key ideals. What influence do these key ideals have on our present society?
- b)** Discuss as a class the Bill of Rights as well as the responsibilities of being a U.S citizen. Then, identify examples in the newspaper of citizens exercising their rights and/or responsibilities. What right or responsibility are they exhibiting? What action is being taken and why? Will their actions make a difference?
- c)** Find news stories, editorials and/or commentaries about a public issue in the news. Identify and describe the multiple viewpoints of the various parties involved. Decide which position you agree or disagree with. Write an editorial either supporting the position you agree with or opposing the one you disagree with.
- d)** Find an issue in the newspaper that you either agree with or disagree with. Write a Letter to the Editor either in support of or disagreeing with a position stated on the issue and send it to your local newspaper.
- e)** Find newspaper stories where citizens are taking action on a public policy issue. Do you agree or disagree with their positions and/or actions? Are their positions or actions having a positive or negative influence on the issue?
- f)** In many newspaper stories there may be government agencies or experts of various kinds involved in public policy issues. Often, regular citizens are also involved. Find articles where agencies, experts and citizens are involved. What are the different concerns or viewpoints each group brings to the issue? Is each group able to make a contribution to the issue? What impact would more citizen involvement produce?
- g/h)** Newspaper articles, editorials, commentaries and letters to the editor are venues where individuals and/or the newspaper express facts and opinions to influence public policy development and decision-making. Find a public policy issue that is likely to be in the newspaper for a while and follow that issue. Then, evaluate how effective the newspaper and the individuals involved are in influencing public opinion on the issue. Do the policy-makers involved change their positions or actions based on public opinion? To what degree do the public policies and citizen behaviors reflect or foster the stated ideals of a democratic republican form of government?
- i)** Find a news story or editorial dealing with an issue of public concern. From the information provided, and if possible from other sources as well, describe the public policy being described and the action plans to implement the policy. With this information as an example, write your own policy statement and plan that addresses a concern you have in the community or at school.
- j)** Find news articles about people who are working together to strengthen the "common good" in some way in the community. As a class, develop a service-learning project with a written plan that includes options the class can take — as citizens — to support the project you read about. If possible, use what you learned from the articles to help implement your own local or school project to benefit those around you.