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Literacy Practices and Supports

Integrating Social Studies and Literacy Instruction

Literacy is woven into the fabric of social studies learning. As students build social studies content knowledge and disciplinary skills, they engage in deep literacy work: interrogating diverse primary and secondary sources, evaluating and constructing arguments, examining differing points of view and perspectives, and developing the skills to share their ideas and findings.

Recent research also indicates that when teachers integrate high-quality social studies and literacy instruction, literacy outcomes for students improve significantly. On average, elementary students who receive **an additional 30 minutes of social studies instruction per day outperform students with less social studies time by 15 percent on fifth-grade standardized reading assessment**. (Tyner & Kabourek, 2020).



Knowledge building in social studies, integrated with reading writing, listening, and speaking opportunities, is essential for developing deep and lasting literacy skills in students.

Shanti Elangovan, Founder and CEO, inquirED

Literacy in inquirED's Social Studies Curriculum

In inquirED's social studies instructional materials, students explore complex questions, investigate diverse sources, and engage in authentic tasks. This inquiry-based approach not only builds knowledge and skills in social studies but also promotes the development of literacy skills across the CCSS-ELA domains of reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language.

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About inquirED

inquirED works to support every teacher with highquality instructional materials that make joyful, rigorous, and transferable learning possible for every student. Our elementary and middle school social studies curricula are used in schools and districts across the country to help students develop deep social studies content knowledge and build the inquiry skills that are essential for a thriving democracy.

Complex Texts in Inquiry-Based Social Studies

As social studies students explore meaningful questions, conduct investigations, and draw evidence-based conclusions, they need strong literacy skills to handle complex texts. inquirED's instructional materials provide scaffolding to help students engage with these texts, including comprehension strategies, leveled texts for background knowledge, and more. These scaffolds don't replace or simplify the texts but guide students through challenging content to help them understand the material.

Reading Comprehension

Students build background knowledge for reading comprehension by investigating diverse content in texts and multimedia of varying complexity and perspective. Lessons include explicit close reading instruction, helping students understand and analyze text features, purpose, and structure.



Students collaborate to analyze and interpret a variety of texts, including narratives, informational articles, and non-linear formats. Pictured: examples from DK and the Library of Congress.

Writing Composition

In each Inquiry Unit, students complete structured writing tasks that support their learning. These tasks encourage students to connect personal experiences or draw authentic, evidence-based conclusions, rather than seeking predetermined answers. By focusing on social scientists' skills, students learn to make claims backed by evidence and supported by logical reasoning.



Students support claims with evidence and reasoning. In this example, they illustrate the steps of the civil rights movement in a unique wall display.

Speaking and Listening

Students engage in a wide range of speaking and listening experiences to build social studies knowledge and skills. These include frequent informal opportunities for dialogue using prompts, accountable talk strategies, and discussion protocols. Additionally, formal presentations allow students to demonstrate their understanding and impact an audience.



Students engage in varied discussions, such as concentric circles, mingle-pair-shares, and formal presentations.

Vocabulary Instruction

Key vocabulary terms are embedded in texts, multimedia content, and student-facing instructional materials like prompts, handouts, questions, and sentence stems. Throughout the unit, students revisit these key vocabulary terms and practice using them.



Each module engages students with 5-10 high-leverage vocabulary words. In this lesson, students engage with a term (eco-logical footprint) in an article, a video, and a discussion, before adding it to their Vocab Wall.

Literacy Practices in inquirED's Social Studies Curriculum

Reading Comprehension

Core Competency	inquirED's Social Studies Curriculum Practices
Key Ideas and Details Students will read closely to understand and make inferences from texts, identify central ideas, and cite textual evidence to support conclusions.	 Close reading strategies (ex. annotation, note-taking, text markup, etc.) scaffolded through think-alouds, modeling, and gradual release
	 Text previews to spark thinking, elicit questions, and prompt predictions
	 Writing to learn activities to support comprehension (ex. annotation, note-taking) scaffolded through think-alouds, modeling, and gradual release
	 Targeted tools (ex. graphic organizers, mind mapping, outlines, etc.) to record relevant evidence and organize conclusions
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas Students will integrate and evaluate content from diverse media and formats, delineate and evaluate arguments and claims, and analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics.	 Primary and secondary sources included across media types (ex. maps, documents, photographs, websites, videos, paintings, personal narratives)
	 Activities that call on students to think across related texts to build knowledge of topics and concepts and topics
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity	 Students engage in the shared reading of rich, complex texts to build knowledge in social studies
Students will read and comprehend complex literary and informational	 Instruction that supports students as they comprehend, analyze, and express understanding of texts

complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

- Metacognitive strategies that promote independent learning (ex. KWL, predictions, reflections)
- Opportunities for independent investigations

Writing Composition

Core Competency	inquirED's Social Studies Curriculum Practices
Writing Form and Purposes Students will support written claims using valid reasoning and relevant evidence; they will write informative texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information.	 Opportunities to construct claims and explanations, supported by evidence, in every Inquiry Graphic organizers to collect and organize evidence Prompts and guided practice regularly support students in using evidence to support claims and explanations
Production and Distribution Students will produce writing appropriate to task, purpose, and audience through a process of planning, revising, editing, and rewriting.	 Rubrics that support the development of work, based on the task, purpose, and audience Opportunities to draft and revise work Structured protocols support peer feedback of in-progress work Final products that target a specific audience and purpose
Research to Build and Present Knowledge Students will research complex questions with evidence from multiple sources, assessing the credibility and accuracy of each source.	 Frequent short group or independent research and writing tasks Investigations center on complex questions that require authentic, evidence-based conclusions Ongoing frequent opportunities to analyze sources, considering origin, viewpoint, purpose, and/or credibility
Range of Writing Students will write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision)	 Frequent writing tasks for a variety of purposes, connected to module topics, content, and texts Open-ended writing tasks (ex. quick writes, etc.) prompt personal reflection and expression of understanding

about topics

research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

- Informal writing tasks scaffold toward more complex writing tasks
- Pre-writing activities to support the synthesis of text evidence

Speaking, Listening, and Language

Core Competency	inquirED's Social Studies Curriculum Practices
Comprehension and Collaboration Students will participate in a range of conversations and collaborations; they will integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats.	 Teacher guidance supports students in creating an inclusive classroom community that prioritizes student discourse Frequent opportunities to engage in purposeful dialogue and discourse with peers; many opportunities for students to engage in both informal (ex. turn-and-talk) and formal discussions to deepen comprehension, analyze perspectives, and construct meaning Multimedia resources (e.g., audio, video, interactive presentations) provide opportunities for active listening Resources like sentence frames and sentence stems to support discussion
Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas Students will present information, findings, and supporting evidence to listeners; they will make strategic use of digital media and displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.	 Opportunities for speaking and discussion involving real world contexts (ex. presenting to stakeholders, etc.) Rehearsal and feedback sessions in each unit to improve presentation skills Final product options that use digital media and displays to support presentation of findings
Vocabulary Acquisition and Use Students will acquire and use a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.	 Prioritization of specific content knowledge, allowing key vocabulary words to be revisited across multiple texts and student-facing instructional materials (ex. prompts, questions/sentence stems) Vocabulary words are introduced via context and through student-friendly descriptions, explanations, or examples Instructional activities deepen students' understanding and support vocabulary usage
Generalized ELL Supports inquirED's social studies instructional materials and lessons offer integrated support for English language learners informed by the WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework.	 Prompting of written response in native language Collaborative creation of anchor charts and other unit-long displays to activate key learnings and information Authentic language practice with partners, small groups, and the whole class Sentence stems that support construction of responses Scaffolded assessments with varied response options (ex. written, oral, pictorial, etc.)

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