



## Integrating Social Studies and Literacy Instruction

Literacy is woven into the fabric of elementary social studies learning. As students build social studies content knowledge and disciplinary skills, they engage in deep literacy work: interrogating diverse 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 assessments.<sup>1</sup>

In order to reap the literacy benefits of increased social studies time, social studies instruction must support the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy (CCSS-ELA). Inquiry Journeys uses the CCSS-ELA as supporting standards for all units of study. This document describes the inquiry-based approach to integrating social studies and CCSS-ELA literacy instruction, including the direct practices and supports provided to social studies students and teachers within the Inquiry Journeys curriculum.

### About inquirED

inquirED was founded by teachers with the mission of bringing inquiry-based social studies to every classroom. Inquiry Journeys, inquirED's elementary social studies curriculum, is 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.

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Adam Tyner and Sarah Kabourek, Social Studies Instruction and Reading Comprehension: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (Washington D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2020), 5.



## The Use of Complex Texts in Inquiry-Based Social Studies

As social studies students seek answers to meaningful questions, conduct sustained investigations, and construct conclusions based on facts and evidence, they'll need to develop their literacy skills so they can wrestle with complex texts.

Inquiry Journeys provides instructional supports and careful scaffolding to help students engage with complex texts in social studies.

Scaffolds include comprehension strategies, leveled-texts to build background knowledge, and a variety of other supports (described in the tables included in this document).

It's important to note, however, that the scaffolding used in Inquiry Journeys does not replace or water down the texts that students encounter.

Instead, scaffolds serve as a support and guidance system that helps students work through challenging aspects of the text to discern meaning.

## An Inquiry-Based Approach

In Inquiry Journeys, 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.

### Reading

Students read for a specific purpose in Inquiry Journeys, whether practicing a strategy, applying a disciplinary lens, or seeking answers to a question. Sometimes teachers define this purpose, and other times students articulate the purpose themselves through reflection on progress toward their goals. As students read, they encounter a range of authentic texts, varied in length, format, and complexity.

### Writing

Students engage in a number of writing tasks that are intentionally scaffolded throughout their units of study to lead up to the summative assessment. In these tasks, special focus is given to the disciplinary writing skills of the social scientist, including the construction of developmentally appropriate claims, supported by verifiable evidence and sound reasoning.

### Speaking and Listening

Inquiry Journeys prompts students to engage in a wide range of discussions to build their social studies knowledge and skills in collaboration with their peers. Throughout the curriculum, students have opportunities to present their findings and demonstrate their learning to varied audiences.

### Language

Vocabulary instruction is a key component of language instruction in social studies. The goal of vocabulary instruction in Inquiry Journeys is not just comprehension of texts, but the acquisition, retention, and authentic use of disciplinary vocabulary. Each Inquiry Journeys module prompts students to engage with 5-10 high-leverage words. Lessons within the module encourage students to use these terms whenever possible when writing and speaking, supported by teacher modeling.

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***“All students deserve an inquiry-based classroom experience – to enrich their lives now and build the knowledge and skills they need for the future.”***

**—Shanti Elangovan**  
**Founder and CEO, inquirED**

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# Practices and Supports

Explore the tables below to learn about specific strategies, supports, and practices used within Inquiry Journeys to further the development of key CCSS-ELA skills and support teachers in literacy instruction.

Common Core Key Elements: Reading	Inquiry Journeys Practices and Supports
<p><b>Key Ideas and Details</b></p> <p>Students will read closely to understand and make inferences from texts, identify central ideas, and cite textual evidence to support conclusions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Rereading strategies to support comprehension (ex. double read-aloud, read and annotate, etc.)</li> <li>✓ Close reading strategies (ex. annotation, note-taking, text markup, etc.) scaffolded through think-alouds, modeling, and gradual release</li> <li>✓ Text previews to spark thinking, elicit questions, and prompt predictions</li> <li>✓ Targeted tools (ex. graphic organizers, mind mapping, outlines, etc.) to record relevant evidence and organize conclusions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Craft and Structure</b></p> <p>Students will interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text; they will assess how point of view or purpose shapes content.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Vocabulary anchor charts and unit-long displays used throughout units of study</li> <li>✓ Big-picture concepts (ex. freedom, revolution) developed through repeated reflection over the course of a unit of study</li> <li>✓ Source analysis to identify the author's point of view and purpose</li> <li>✓ Thinking routines (ex. see-think-wonder, predict-learn-conclude, etc.) to encourage perspective taking</li> </ul>
<p><b>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</b></p> <p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Primary and secondary sources included across media types (ex. maps, documents, photographs, websites, videos, paintings, personal narratives)</li> <li>✓ Paired texts, text sets, and thematically linked texts to build knowledge</li> <li>✓ Fiction and nonfiction texts integrated to explore themes and concepts</li> <li>✓ Claim analysis and construction across all units of study</li> </ul>
<p><b>Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity</b></p> <p>Students will read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Texts varied in length, format, lexile level, complexity, and purpose examined through a range of tasks (ex. shared reading, partner reading, read-aloud, etc.)</li> <li>✓ Choice in topic of research when possible</li> <li>✓ Self-monitoring strategies that promote independent learning (ex. double read-aloud, text markups, assessing progress toward goals, etc.)</li> <li>✓ Guiding questions to prompt prediction and reflection</li> </ul>



## Common Core Key Elements: Writing

## Inquiry Journeys Practices and Supports

### Text Types 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 in every unit of study for students to construct a developmentally appropriate claim
- ✓ Strategies, tools, and scaffolded practice linking evidence to reasoning
- ✓ Graphic organizers to collect and organize evidence
- ✓ Final products that include a variety of written work (ex. graphic novels, periodicals, persuasive posters, presentations, narrative books)

### Production and Distribution

Students will produce writing appropriate to task, purpose, and audience through a process of planning, revising, editing, and rewriting.

- ✓ Short group or independent research and writing tasks
- ✓ Guided practice drafting and revising claims orally and/or in writing
- ✓ Rubric-based self-assessment and reflection
- ✓ Peer feedback and critique of written work

### Research to Build and Present Knowledge

Students will research complex questions with evidence from multiple sources, assessing the credibility and accuracy of each source.

- ✓ Source analysis to determine origin, viewpoint, reliability, and purpose
- ✓ Multiple sources used to contextualize and corroborate
- ✓ Complex Inquiry Questions that frame research and investigation
- ✓ Essential Questions that serve as conceptual framework for claim analysis

### Range of Writing

Students will write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

- ✓ Open-ended writing tasks (ex. quick writes, etc.) to prompt personal reflection and expression
- ✓ Formative writing assessments to develop and assess standards-aligned writing skills (ex. developing claims, using transitions, vocabulary use, etc.)
- ✓ Diverse range of writing tasks scaffolded throughout units of study
- ✓ Student agency and autonomy in writing to engage curiosity and interest



## Common Core Key Elements: Speaking, Listening, Language

### 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.

- ✓ Varied informal and formal speaking and listening tasks within each unit of study
- ✓ Frequent collaborative discussion using a range of protocols (ex. think-pair-share, mingle-pair-share, conver-stations, Socratic seminar, etc. )
- ✓ Critique sessions in every unit of study to support the process of giving, receiving, and incorporating peer feedback
- ✓ Analysis of a speaker's claim, evidence, and reasoning as part of source analysis and peer feedback

### 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
- ✓ Presentation planning to identify audience, message, and goal
- ✓ Final product options that use of digital media and displays to support presentation of findings

### Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

Students will determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words; they will acquire and use a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.

- ✓ Interrelated disciplinary words and concepts introduced in clusters
- ✓ Vocabulary guides provided to support acquisition and use
- ✓ Glossary included with definitions of Tier 2 and 3 words
- ✓ Speaking and writing activities (ex. concept connections) highlight relationships between terms and concepts

## Additional Literacy Elements

## Inquiry Journeys Practices and Supports

### Generalized ELL Supports

Inquiry Journeys lessons offer integrated support for English language learners aligned with 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.)

### Specialized Instructional Supports

Inquiry Journeys supports teachers with resources, tools, embedded professional development, and professional learning sessions.

- ✓ Directions, printed posters, and handouts, guide processes (ex. Source Analysis, Claim-Reasoning-Evidence, etc.)
- ✓ Detailed reading and discussion protocols
- ✓ Video guides to support implementation of core strategies (ex. The Question Formulation Technique, critique, etc.)
- ✓ Professional learning videos and sessions to support literacy instruction

# References

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National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. [Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects](#). NGA, 2010.

Swan, Kathy et al. [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](#). The National Council for the Social Studies, 2013.

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