

**Social Studies: Injecting Common Good into the Common Core**

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**1. Aims matter**

**Common Core State Standards** focus on college and career ready. In the informational reading standards and reading standards for Literacy in history/ social studies 6-12 the focus is on literacy skills: “The Standards insist that instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language be a shared responsibility within the school. The K-5 standards include expectations for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language applicable to a range of subjects including but not limited to ELA. The grades 6-12 standards are divided into two sections, one for ELA and the other for history/ social studies, science, and technical subjects. This division reflects the unique, time-honored place of ELA teachers in developing students’ literacy skills while at the same time recognizing that teachers in other areas must have a role in this development as well.” (CCSS, 2010, p. 4)

**Social Studies aims:** College and career ready is a very important goal and all teachers should be included in reaching these goals, but as social studies teachers we need to focus on and protect our primary mission: citizenship education. Both the Mississippi Social Studies Framework (2011) and the National Council for the Social Studies define the aim of social studies to develop and promote citizenship (NCSS, 2010). The threat is that social studies aims can be lost or subordinated to literacy goals during implementation of CCSS. Our task as social studies teachers is to promote civic competence, while supporting overall literacy goals with quality social studies instruction.

**2. Historical thinking**

Our goals as social studies teachers and the CCSS standards have the potential to improve instruction that develops historical thinking making social studies instruction more rigorous, more student focused, and more authentic. Using primary sources to reach literacy goals of CCSS and the civic education goal of social studies is an excellent way to successfully wed the two aims. An example from the CCSS:

Reading standards for informational text 5<sup>th</sup> grade Craft and Structure 4: Determine the meaning of general academic and domain specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 5 topic or subject area.

This is obviously a literacy goal, but as social studies teachers we can achieve the literacy goal or aim but focus on social studies goals. Our students can read primary sources related to a topic of study (perhaps excerpts from the Mayflower Compact or Magna Carta as called for in the MS SS Framework). They will encounter words and phrases that are unfamiliar and will have to research the meanings of to successfully understand the document. For the Mayflower Compact

([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th\\_century/mayflower.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/mayflower.asp)) students will have to tackle with a variety of difficult vocabulary and concepts including:

- Geographic locations: Great Britain, France, and Ireland; Virginia; Cape Cod
- People: Sovereign Lord King James, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, &c.
- Domain specific vocabulary: voyage, colony, Constitution, Ordinance
- Domain specific concepts: Body Politick
- Time: 1620 (what else is going on in the world?), Anno Domini (what does this mean?)

Other CCSS standards that could be addressed using the Mayflower Compact include:

- Key ideas and details 2: Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.
- Key ideas and details 3: Explain the relationships, or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.
- Integration of knowledge and ideas 9: Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

All of these standards are gateways to not only improving students' abilities to deal with complex texts, but also gateways to deeper understanding of the development of our democracy, the actual events surrounding the founding of the colony at Plymouth Rock and subsequent events, and their ability to conduct further research using the initial document as a spring board for further study.

Though we can support the CCSS using this document from Social Studies we must focus on our social studies goals. Our social studies goal might be to teach to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Competency: Civil Rights/Human Rights 3. Understand how political, religious, and economic ideas and interests influenced the founding of the United States. Objectives A and D. As social studies teachers we must focus on the social studies goals, while supporting literacy goals. These two goals can coincide, but the danger is that the social studies goal will be lost in the narrow focus of college and career.

The point is that we use the standards from CCSS to meet a social studies goal and not let the social studies goal be lost in the effort to improve literacy.

3. **Further thoughts on historical thinking.** It is imperative that we use primary sources in conjunction with the CCSS and the Mississippi Social Studies Framework to supplement text book based instruction for a variety of reasons. We base our argument on Clausewitz's (1832/1989) four uses for historical events as examples. He wrote that people use historical examples (he was focusing on military events and the art of war, but his ideas apply to all of history) for four main reasons:

- a. Explanation of an idea- to make an abstract idea concrete
- b. Application of an idea- used for proof of the efficacy of an idea
- c. To support of statement- prove the possibility of some phenomena or effect
- d. To support a doctrine or theory- “detailed presentation of a historical event” to prove a theory through deduction.

Textbooks generally focus on the first two reasons which only touch lightly on a historical event, which causes problems when an event is new to students. Because they don’t know enough about the subject, students will accept poorly formulated or weakly supported ideas or develop erroneous understandings. Clausewitz advocated the detailed study of an event, because it is “more instructive than ten that are only touched on.” In other words, to get value from historical examples and events teachers must teach a “detailed presentation of a historical event.” (Clausewitz, 1832/1989, p. 170-174) One way for us to do this is through primary sources.

An example of a making a statement that might be challenged is from *A Placed Called Mississippi* (Sansing, 2013): “The decade of the 1950s was capped by the presidential election of John F. Kennedy in 1960. President Kennedy was a committed to the civil rights movement as Abraham Lincoln was to the abolition of slavery.” (p. 263) In the text book analysis of Kennedy’s commitment to civil rights the author writes in such a way as to codify the opinion into fact resulting in many students unthinkingly accepting that view.

An example would be to use the CCSS Reading Standards for Literacy in History/ Social Studies 6-12 Standard (Grades 6-8) 8. Distinguish between fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text and 9. Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic. This would reinforce the MS frameworks in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade Competency 4/ Objective B that addresses historical figures, circumstances and conditions related to the struggle for civil/human rights in Mississippi and their impact on Mississippi’s society and 9<sup>th</sup> grade Competency 4 Objectives A, B, and C which also focus on civil rights. Students can use primary sources to determine both the extent of Lincoln’s commitment to abolition and Kennedy’s commitment to civil rights. They could also compare President Kennedy and President Johnson. Students can use primary sources and other secondary sources to evaluate claims made in texts.

**Analyzing primary sources.** The Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources website has many resources to help teachers and students find and analyze primary sources: <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/>. There are collections of primary sources as well as analysis sheets you can use with your students. We like the idea of a three step process when analyzing primary sources:

- a. Consider the context- when was it written, why was it written, and by whom was it written?
- b. Consider the content- what was said, what arguments were made, what supporting points were made?
- c. Make connections- to your life, to other events and people in history.

**So what is a primary source?** According to the Library of Congress: “Primary sources” are the raw materials of history — original documents and objects which were created at the time under study. They are different from secondary sources, accounts or interpretations of events created by someone without firsthand experience. Students will most often work with primary sources that have been digitized. (<http://blogs.loc.gov/teachers/2011/10/what-makes-a-primary-source-a-primary-source/>)

**Why primary sources?** The Library of Congress says? “Primary sources provide a window into the past—unfiltered access to the record of artistic, social, scientific and political thought and achievement during the specific period under study, produced by people who lived during that period.” They also 1) Engage students, 2) Develop critical thinking skills, and 3) Construct knowledge. (Library of Congress) <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/whyuse.html>

**Tools for analyzing primary sources are available on the Library of Congress Website**  
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html>

**4. Example.** As a prompt we’ll use another excerpt from *The Enduring Vision* (2011). In a discussion of the suffrage movement in the 1870s the text mentions, “When Susan B. Anthony mobilized about seventy women to vote nationwide in 1872, she was indicted, convicted, and fined” (p. 476). This is a factual statement but a “detailed presentation” of the entire event provides a multitude of opportunities for our students to go beyond the light touches of history and simple memorization of the fact that Anthony voted illegally in the 1872 election to do what Thornton (2005) emphasized was the main goal of social studies to “the cultivation of good citizenship” (p. 22). Our students can do this by tangling with primary sources about Anthony’s trial.

Students could be provided or encouraged to find documents related to the trial of Susan B. Anthony for voting illegally in the 1872 election. Using the CCSS and while focusing on the objectives in the Social Studies Framework a teacher can help her students create their own “detailed presentation” of the event and learn important knowledge, skills, or dispositions that contribute to effective citizenship. (Links to several Susan B. Anthony documents can be found here: <http://pinterest.com/ncm39/susan-b-anthony/>)

Here’s an example: Students can learn about the concept of a trial by jury, where it is guaranteed in our Constitution, and who should determine the guilt or innocence of a defendant.

*Things to consider when using primary sources:* Immediate context of the document; larger context of the document to understanding basic American philosophical and political ideas and ideals; when the document was written, by whom, and why; arguments made and supporting evidence; validity of arguments; study of diverse sources about the trial; definition of difficult vocabulary words and concepts; geography; identifying and explaining the significance of people mentioned in the document, identifying and defining important concepts, related events.

## 5. Web 2.0 Applications.

- a. Affordances of web 2.0 tools can facilitate work with primary sources as well as support student engagement.
  - i. Collaboration: Work in groups to share ideas about student understanding of primary source documents
    1. Wallwisher (now Padlet): <http://www.padlet.com>
      - a. Example: <http://padlet.com/wall/9x6l0cxjfd>
    2. Glogster EDU: <http://edu.glogster.com>
      - a. Example: <http://millern.edu.glogster.com/tps-election-day/>
  - ii. Shared/group annotation: Diigo (<http://www.diigo.com>)
    1. Highlighting and sticky notes (can be shared with a class)

**6. Conclusion.** CCSS are here and they provide an opportunity for social studies teachers to improve social studies instruction by teaching historical thinking using primary sources. We must insure that the primary goal in our lessons is a social studies goal focused on increasing civic competence, understanding we can do this while supporting literacy goals.

## 7. References.

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