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Introduction

The intended audience for this book is the novice teacher. The authors hope that this book will start teachers on their journey across the bridge of practice and experience to the other side; that of master teacher. However, the topics discussed not only will benefit the teacher new to the profession, but also the teacher who desires to continue the search for up-to-date research and practical applications.

Many who teach social studies are acutely aware and concerned about the place of the social sciences in today's classroom. Legislation on the national level (No Child Left Behind) and state and local levels (standards, proficiencies, and state tests) are emphasizing reading, writing, and mathematics to the exclusion of the social sciences and science. This is particularly critical at the elementary level and, in some cases, middle school as well. Sadly, some schools have a few weeks of social studies and then the content changes to a few weeks of science. Another major objective of this book is to illustrate (through example) the innumerable ways the skills and content of the social sciences connect to and enhance the learning of other disciplines. More importantly, however, is to demonstrate the importance of the social sciences to students' lives as they leave our classrooms and become the citizens of tomorrow.

A third and final reason for this book is to solidify teacher learning as he or she progresses through this book. Gone are the days of reading the chapter, answering the comprehension questions, and then taking the test. The authors have deliberately included “tasks” for the teacher reading this text that serve two purposes: to provide the opportunity for self-reflection which results in more effective learning, and in doing so, to model strategies or structures teachers can use with their own students for the same purpose.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is organized with chapters on specific topics designed to take readers through a process effective teachers use in their daily practice. Within each chapter are examples of strategies at primary, elementary, and secondary levels. At the end of each chapter, teachers will have the opportunity to reflect on their practice and create plans for how they might implement the discussed topic in their classrooms. It is the authors’ hope that teachers will revisit these reflections over the course of a year or so and note the changes they have discovered in their teaching.

As teachers embark upon this journey, they will want to keep several things in mind. First, they should engage their students in the pedagogy/strategies/lenses of the social sciences (civics, economics, geography, and history). Thus, what does a “historian” (political scientist, economist, geographer) do? What are the thought processes in which the “historian” engages? How are they like those in the other disciplines? How do they differ? What tools do those in each discipline use? How might those tools be used to enhance the work of the practitioner? For example, what purpose do maps serve for the historian? How do charts and graphs help both the economist and the geographer illustrate data?

Second, teachers should remember that techniques need to be revisited, re-taught, and practiced many times by students to insure their mastery of skills germane to the study of the social sciences. Teachers need to be fully aware of the levels of the students in their classrooms and adapt those techniques for a variety of learning levels. Remember, the same technique can be used K–12 if students are asked to become more independent in its use with each grade level. What resources can be used with lower level readers? How can this technique be deepened for the gifted students in the classroom? What does a particular technique look like in the upper elementary grades? How does the same technique change with middle school students?

Finally, teachers should carefully choose strategies with these critical questions in mind:

- Why am I having my students learn this?
- What do I want them to know and be able to do?
- How will I know my students are successful?
- What actions will I take if they are not?

With that, teachers are ready to begin their journey. Travel safely and enjoy!

Vocabulary Review

Education is notorious for its jargon. Many of the terms specific to the topic of social studies are used in this book. In order to have a better understanding of these particular terms, complete the vocabulary review below. Before reading on in the book, note your initial definition in the first column. Then, when you have finished reading the book, note your final definition of each term, and see whether your definitions have changed. You will also find the definition of each of these terms in the Glossary (pages 189–192).

Term	My First Definition	My Final Definition
assessment		
auditory learner		
authentic tasks		
Bloom's taxonomy		
case studies		
concepts		
constructed response		

Term	My First Definition	My Final Definition
constructivist learning		
cooperative learning		
diagnostic assessment		
expository text		
formative assessment		
graphic organizer		
integration		
learning style		
modeling		
performance-based assessment		
primary source		

Term	My First Definition	My Final Definition
prior knowledge		
problem-based learning		
rubric		
secondary source		
social studies		
summarizing		
summative assessment		
tactile/kinesthetic learner		
visual learner		