Preface to the Sampler

This brief sampler is an introduction to the recently revised Standards for social studies. It was excerpted from the 171-page original with the generous permission of the National Council for the Social Studies.

This sample will introduce those new to the Standards to the ten themes, and for each theme the purposes, questions for exploration, and a snapshot of classroom practice. The purpose of the snapshot is to help readers ‘see’ the theme in practice in kindergarten through sixth-grade classrooms.

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In each chapter of my textbook, Social Studies in Elementary Education, 14th edition, readers are directed to one or more of the snapshots. This happens in the fifth Discussion Question at the end of each chapter. Instructors can systematically introduce students to the 10 themes by having them work with this question in each chapter, along with the introduction to the ten themes in chapter 1 of the textbook.
Executive Summary

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) defines social studies as:

…the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.

The aim of social studies is the promotion of civic competence— the knowledge, intellectual processes, and democratic dispositions required of students to be active and engaged participants in public life. By making civic competence a central aim, NCSS emphasizes the importance of educating students who are committed to the ideas and values of democracy. Civic competence rests on this commitment to democratic values, and requires that citizens have the ability to use their knowledge about their community, nation, and world; to apply inquiry processes; and to employ skills of data collection and analysis, collaboration, decision-making, and problem-solving. Young people who are knowledgeable, skillful, and committed to democracy are necessary to sustaining and
improving our democratic way of life, and participating as members of a global community.

The curriculum standards for social studies provide a framework for professional deliberation and planning about what should occur in a social studies program in grades pre-K through 12. National Council for the Social Studies first published national curriculum standards in 1994. Since then, the social studies standards have been widely and successfully used as a framework for teachers, schools, districts, states, and other nations as a tool for curriculum alignment and development. However, much has changed in the world and in education since the original curriculum standards were published. These revised standards reflect a desire to continue and build upon the expectations established in the original standards for effective social studies in the grades from pre-K through 12. This revision incorporates current research and suggestions for improvement from many experienced practitioners.

The revised standards continue to be focused on ten themes, like the original standards…. They represent a way of categorizing knowledge about the human experience, and they constitute the organizing strands that should thread through a social studies program, from grades pre-K through 12, as appropriate at each level.

**The ten themes:**

1. **Culture** Through the study of culture and cultural diversity, learners understand how human beings create, learn, share, and adapt to culture, and appreciate the role of culture in shaping their lives and society, as well the lives and societies of others. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with geography, history, sociology, and anthropology, as well as multicultural topics across the curriculum.

2. **Time, Continuity, and Change** Through the study of the past and its legacy, learners examine the institutions, values, and beliefs of people in the past, acquire skills in historical inquiry and interpretation, and gain an understanding of how important historical events and developments have shaped the modern world. This theme appears in courses in history, as well as in other social studies courses for which knowledge of the past is important.

3. **People, Places, and Environments** This theme helps learners to develop their spatial views and perspectives of the world, to understand where people, places, and resources are located and why they are there, and to explore the relationship between human beings and the environment. In schools, this theme typically appears in courses dealing with geography and area studies, but it is also important for the study of the geographical dimension of other social studies subjects.

4. **Individual Development and Identity** Personal identity is shaped by family, peers, culture, and institutional influences. Through this theme, students examine the factors that influence an individual’s personal identity, development, and
actions. This theme typically appears in courses and units dealing with psychology, anthropology, and sociology.

5. **Individuals, Groups, and Institutions** Institutions such as families and civic, educational, governmental, and religious organizations, exert a major influence on people’s lives. This theme allows students to understand how institutions are formed, maintained, and changed, and to examine their influence. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, and history.

6. **Power, Authority, and Governance** One essential component of education for citizenship is an understanding of the historical development and contemporary forms of power, authority, and governance. Through this theme, learners become familiar with the purposes and functions of government, the scope and limits of authority, and the differences between democratic and non-democratic political systems. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with government, history, civics, law, politics, and other social sciences.

7. **Production, Distribution, and Consumption** This theme provides for the study of how people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services, and prepares students for the study of domestic and global economic issues. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with economic concepts and issues, though it is also important for the study of the economic dimension of other social studies subjects.

8. **Science, Technology, and Society** By exploring the relationships among science, technology, and society, students develop an understanding of past and present advances in science and technology and their impact. This theme appears in a variety of social studies courses, including history, geography, economics, civics, and government.

9. **Global Connections** The realities of global interdependence require an understanding of the increasingly important and diverse global connections among world societies. This theme prepares students to study issues arising from globalization. It typically appears in units or courses dealing with geography, culture, economics, history, political science, government, and technology.

10. **Civic Ideals and Practices** An understanding of civic ideals and practices is critical to full participation in society and is an essential component of education for citizenship. This theme enables students to learn about the rights and responsibilities of citizens of a democracy, and to appreciate the importance of active citizenship. In schools, the theme typically appears in units or courses dealing with civics, history, political science, cultural anthropology, and fields such as global studies, law-related education, and the humanities.
The themes are interrelated, and a school course in a social studies discipline is likely to touch on more than one theme. For example, the use of the NCSS standards might support a plan to teach about the topic of the U.S. Civil War by drawing on three different themes: Theme 2 (Time, Continuity, and Change); Theme 3 (People, Places, and Environments), and Theme 10 (Civic Ideals and Practices).

Since standards have been developed both in social studies and in many of the individual disciplines that are integral to social studies, the question arises: What is the relationship among these various sets of standards? The answer is that the social studies standards address overall curriculum design and comprehensive student learning expectations, while state standards and the national content standards for individual disciplines (e.g., history, civics and government, geography, economics, and psychology) provide a range of specific content through which student learning expectations can be accomplished. The NCSS curriculum standards offer a set of principles by which content can be selected and organized to build a viable, valid, and defensible social studies curriculum for grades from pre-K through 12. They provide the necessary framework for the implementation of content standards. In the example above, which illustrates the use of the NCSS standards to teach about the U.S. Civil War, national history standards and state standards could be used to identify specific content related to the topic of the U.S. Civil War….

Snapshots of Practice provide educators with images of how the standards might look when enacted in classrooms. Typically, a Snapshot illustrates a particular theme and one or more learning expectations; however, the Snapshot may also touch on other related themes and learning expectations….

For social studies to perform its mission of promoting civic competence, students need both to learn a body of knowledge, and to be able to think flexibly and act responsibly to address civic issues in a diverse and interdependent world. The national curriculum standards for social studies represent educators’ best thinking about the framework needed to educate young people for the challenges of citizenship.

1. **Culture**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

**Purposes**

Learners will understand how human beings create, learn, share, and adapt to culture. They will appreciate the role of culture in shaping their lives and the society in which they live. By recognizing various cultural perspectives, learners become capable of understanding diverse perspectives, thereby acquiring the potential to foster more positive relations and interactions with diverse people within our own nation and other nations. Cultural understanding will help learners make informed decisions in an increasingly interdependent society and interconnected world.

**Questions for Exploration**
• What is culture?
• How does culture unify a group of people?
• What is cultural diversity, and how does diversity develop both within and across cultures?

Snapshot of Practice
Karen Cox is going to introduce her fourth graders to the culture of American Indians by celebrating American Indian Heritage Day. She uses websites, books, and articles to research many different games that Native Americans played. In addition, Karen invites members of the International Traditional Native Games Society to visit her classroom. Native American presenters come on the appointed day to demonstrate the games and teach the students about their cultures. Students learn from their Native American guests about the importance of participating, and what the different games meant to their creators. Students then are responsible for demonstrating and teaching the games to their first grade buddies. The class discusses each game the fourth graders will present and what will be necessary in the explanation and demonstration for the first graders to understand the game. Karen observes her students in their relationship to their younger partners, noting how they translate their own learning. She understands that teaching others forces a student to learn. She asks her students to write a short reflection piece in which they compare games in Native American cultures to those that they play at home and in school. She uses a checklist that includes a variety of items to check the understanding her students have acquired in those learning experiences: the learning of the games by the fourth graders, their ability to help younger learners acquire the skills involved; and the understanding of culture conveyed in the information included in their reflections.

2. Time, Continuity, and Change
Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.

Purposes
Through the study of the past and its legacy, learners examine the institutions, values, and beliefs of people in the past, acquire skills in historical inquiry and interpretation, and gain an understanding of how important historical events and developments have shaped the modern world.

Questions for Exploration
• What happened in the past?
• How do we know about the past?
• How was life in the past similar to and different from life today?

Snapshot of Practice
For the past three months, Leah Moulton’s class of elementary learners has been studying their community and its history. Leah organizes the class into groups of four students and gives each group a copy of a historical photograph of their community. The teacher says:
“We have read and talked a lot about our community. Photographs can help us learn much about its history. Study and discuss the photo I gave to your group to learn more about the past. Appoint a recorder, and have the recorder write answers to these questions about the photos on your worksheets:”

• What does the photograph show?
• Name two important people, places or events recorded in the photograph.
• What would be the same in a photograph taken today? What would be different?
• What is a good title for the photo? Why did you choose this title?

Leah then has the groups exchange photographs so that each photo is examined by a second group. That group responds to the same questions. Next, she has the two groups work together to discuss their responses and prepare to tell the class about the photo. After each group reports on its photo, the class also discusses what all of the photos together can teach them about the history of their community—especially about what has changed and what has remained the same. As an assessment activity, each student is asked to complete a simple three-column chart in which one heading focuses on what has remained the same over time in the community; the second, the changes that have occurred; and the third, the evidence from the photographs that led students to draw conclusions about continuity and change.

3. People, Places, and Environments

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

Purposes
This theme helps learners to develop their spatial views and perspectives of the world, and to understand the relationships between people, places, and environments. Learners examine where people, places, and resources are located, why they are there, and why this matters. They explore the effects of the environment on human activities, and the impact of these activities on the environment. This area of study is crucial to informed civic decision-making about human-environmental relationships.

Questions for Exploration
• What are the physical and human characteristics of place?
• How do people change the environment, and how does the environment influence human activity?
• How do simple geographic skills and tools help humans understand spatial relationships?

Snapshot of Practice
Jacob Stern’s first grade students are studying their community. The children have taken a field trip to see places in the community near the school. Coming into class, the young learners are very excited to find a large strip of paper going down the middle of the classroom floor. Their teacher asks them to sit next to the paper strip. He tells them that the strip is Main Street — a street like one of the streets the students saw on their tour of the community, which runs across town. A few shorter strips represent side streets. Jacob
takes a toy car and starts driving it along the street. He asks the learners what they saw along the stretch they walked along and hears responses such as a gas station, a food store, a bakery, houses, apartments, and a school. He asks each child to select a building and construct it from materials that he provides. Jacob asks each child, “Where will you place your building on Main Street, and why?” Latoya decides the gas station should be located where a side street crosses the main street. That location will make the station, to be called “Latoya’s Station,” easily visible to drivers. The teacher writes the name on the station, and Latoya places it on the street “map.” The next question is where Latoya will live. Jacob asks, “Do you want to live close to your business? Do you want to live near the main street or on one of the side streets? Do you want to be on the same side of the street?” Latoya puts her house near the gas station on a side street.

4. Individual Development and Identity
Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.

Purposes
Personal identity is shaped by family, peers, culture, and institutional influences. In order to understand individual development and identity, learners should study the influence of various times, cultures, groups, and institutions. The examination of various forms of human behavior in specific cultural contexts enhances the understanding of the relationships between social norms and emerging personal identities, of the social processes that influence identity formation, and of the ethical and other principles underlying individual action.

Questions for Exploration
• How have others influenced who I am and who I am becoming?
• How can I learn to cooperate and collaborate with others?
• How do children in other parts of the world grow and learn?

Snapshot of Practice
Jan Gonzales has been reading stories to her third grade class. The stories include characters who, for a variety of reasons, see the same situations differently. The children have noticed and discussed the fact that characters form their ideas about situations based on their own experiences, beliefs, and attitudes. The class has also been studying the way in which U.S. courts work, and has discussed how different witnesses sometimes see the same situation differently. Jan decides to follow up on these discussions with an activity focused on how and why people may see the same event in different ways. She begins by projecting a copy of a news photo that is open to different interpretations about what is occurring. After giving the students a few minutes to examine the photo, she removes it from view, and each child writes a description titled “What I Saw.” Ms. Gonzales emphasizes that they should write statements based on what they observed and are prepared to defend (as a witness would “under oath”). Once the children complete their statements, they move into groups of five or six, and share their written descriptions. They make note of the differences they see from one “witness” version to another. The
children then prepare individual written statements describing two or three discrepancies noted among the accounts offered in their group, and explain why they think the differences may have occurred. Criteria for evaluation include the learners’ ability to recognize and describe differences, to suggest causes for these differences, and to recognize that the ways an individual views an incident reflects personal beliefs, experiences, and attitudes.

5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.

Purposes
Institutions such as families, and civic, educational, governmental, and religious organizations exert great influence in daily life. Organizations embody the core social values of the individuals and groups who comprise them. It is important that students know how institutions are formed, maintained, and changed, and understand how they influence individuals, groups, and other institutions.

Questions for Exploration
- To what groups do I belong?
- How do the groups to which I belong influence me, and how do I influence them?
- How do civic, educational, governmental, and religious organizations function in our community, state, and nation?

Snapshot of Practice
Maria Foseide’s sixth grade students have been examining current events with respect to the role that various social, cultural, and civic institutions play in the decisions and actions of individuals, groups, and nations. Early in the school year, Maria’s students looked at examples of the institutions in their own lives, in their community and in the nation. They developed a working definition of social institutions, and began to look for ways in which these institutions influenced their lives and the lives of others. Periodically, Maria and her students use a variety of print and Web-based news sources to explore a current issue, and identify what institutions have had an impact on, or are impacted by, those events. Students have come to recognize the relationships between events and the institutions that shape them. The students are increasingly able to make clear cause-and-effect arguments, and to see the interrelationships between individuals and institutions, and among institutions.

Maria has also made use of political cartoons in the study of current events. The class has learned that these cartoons are one way in which people express points of view about contemporary events, people, and institutions. Maria decides to combine her work on institutions with that on political cartoons in a performance assessment activity. In order to assess her students’ understanding of the impact of social institutions on current events and of events on institutions, Maria assigns them the task of demonstrating, through a political cartoon, the relationship of one or more institutions to a significant current event.
of their choice. In the assignment, each student first selects a current event and briefly describes it in a written paragraph. After Maria approves the student’s chosen event, and is satisfied that he or she understands that event, each student creates a cartoon that demonstrates the relationship of one or more institutions to the event. The students are also encouraged to take a position on the event and the role of the institution(s), and to reflect that in their cartoon. Ability to accurately identify the role of the institution(s) in the event, and the clarity and quality of the presentation in cartoon format, serve as major criteria for evaluating evidence of understanding at the “proficient” level. Those students who are able to represent a point of view clearly through the cartoon can be rated at the “accomplished” level.

6. Power, Authority, and Governance

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

Purposes
Learners will develop an understanding of the principles, processes, structures, and institutions of government, and examine how power and authority are or have been obtained in various systems of government. They will learn how people in democratic nations organize in groups and attempt to cooperate and resolve conflicts for purposes such as establishing order and security, and seeking social justice. They will also learn about the systems of power, authority, and governance in countries that are not democratic, and compare and contrast these with democratic systems. Learners can become more effective problem-solvers and decision-makers when they address the persistent issues and social problems encountered in political life. Such persistent issues can be examined through the study of the dynamic relationships between individual rights and responsibilities, the needs of social groups, and concepts of a just society.

Questions for Exploration
- What is government?
- How are individual rights protected within the context of majority rule?
- What are the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a constitutional democracy?

Snapshot of Practice
Grace Anne Heacock’s third grade class has established a town they have named Countervail, in which each learner has created a family and its house, and the students have collectively constructed a rather complex community. The bulletin board display of the town now extends along walls and tables, and learners have become quite involved in the events in Countervail. To the children’s dismay, they discover one morning that there is trash in their park and graffiti scratched on the fences. One family’s rabbit is missing, and the new tree in front of the plaza has been cut down.

The learners have come face-to-face with the need for laws; otherwise, nothing can be done to stop this destruction of “their” property. They work in cooperative groups, each
dealing with a different set of concerns, to begin the process of developing a legal code for the community of Countervail.

Grace encourages the learners to brainstorm the problems created by the property destruction, and suggest a list of “do’s” and “don’ts” for Countervail’s population. Reviewing the list, they develop ideas about what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. They examine a set of laws in their actual town that Grace has rewritten in simplified form, and then identify those that appear to be relevant to their situation.

Grace invites their actual town’s mayor, police chief, and fire chief to visit the class. Each guest reviews the relevant laws and discusses them with the students. The learners gather information from each guest and construct charts indicating the responsibilities that citizens in Countervail assume for each proposed law.

As a culminating activity, Grace has students prepare a “charter of laws” for Countervail. This charter is then shared with local officials and experts on the law, who are asked to write letters or prepare videotaped responses to the student charter. The students review the adult responses, make any appropriate revisions to their charter, and prepare journal entries about the significance of law and its importance in the community. Grace evaluates the quality of the journal entries based upon the clarity of student language, use of examples from the case study, and the inclusion of reactions to the adult responses to the student charter.

7. Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.

Purposes
Scarcity and unequal distribution of resources dictate the need for economic systems of exchange, including trade, to improve the well-being of the economy. The role of government in different economic systems varies over time and from place to place, resulting in diverse economic policies. Increasingly, economic decisions are global in scope and require systematic study of an interdependent world economy. A variety of systems have been developed to decide the answers to fundamental questions related to what is to be produced, how production is to be organized, and how goods and services are to be distributed.

Questions for Exploration
• Why can’t people have everything that they want?
• How do people decide what to produce and what services to provide?
• How does the availability of resources influence economic decisions?

Snapshot of Practice
Keith Lyum’s Kindergarten class is producing Econo-lizards, a new toy. The lizards are made from yarn and beads. As students gather the different productive resources that they will use to produce their Econo-lizard, Keith reminds his learners about new words on the word wall. Goods are items that people make or grow and then sell. Services are things that people do for other people, like making a meal or fixing a car. He continues explaining the lesson for today. Keith states, “Today, everybody is going to produce a good or service.” He asks learners if they know whether the Econo-lizards are goods or services. When they answer “goods,” he asks them how they know. One student, Marcelo, responds that the lizard is an item he is making. Keith indicates that you sure can touch the lizard; he asks if anybody wants a lizard, and most of the class raise their hands. “OK, we must have a good, because you can touch the lizard, and people want it,” Keith states. “Where do goods come from?” he asks. Nobody in the classroom responds, so he continues, “Where are we going to get our lizards?” Anna answers that she is going to make her lizard. “Yes,” Keith says. “People like us produce goods like our Econo-lizard. People like us produce goods, but we also offer services.” He reminds the students of the Saturday in which they did yard work in the neighborhood to raise money to plant a garden in the school yard. “What was the service we provided?” he asks. The students think for a minute, and Loren answers, “It was the yard work. That was a job we did for other people that needed to be done.”

Keith demonstrates the process of weaving the Econolizards. Once the students have finished, he adds a new word to the word wall. The word is “producer.” Keith asks: “Does anybody know what this word is?” Isturez replies, “We have produced Econolizards, therefore we are all producers.” Keith continues, “All goods and services come from people just like us who produce those goods and services.” He finishes the activity by asking each child what kind of good or service they would like to produce when they grow up. These vocabulary words help students understand the production that occurs within their own homes and communities. He uses a number of pictures and has learners decide whether each refers to a good, or a service, or illustrates a producer. He listens for accuracy or any misconceptions in order to check student responses and determine understanding.

8. Science, Technology, and Society

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of relationships among science, technology, and society.

Purposes
This theme explores how developments in science and technology impact individuals, groups, institutions, and societies. Wants and needs stimulate advances in science and technology. An understanding of science and technology in their social contexts allows learners to question and analyze the impact of science and technology on society, both in the past and the present, as well as to evaluate what the future may bring in these areas.

Questions for Exploration
• What do we mean by science and technology?
• How can science and technology be used to address individual, social, and global problems or issues?
• What are various types of media, and how do media influence us?

**Snapshot of Practice**
Students in Harry Arnold’s fourth grade class are investigating how science and technology have had an impact on the growing of food. Using computer search tools, learners have investigated and compared where their food used to be grown with where it is grown today. They studied how food production over the past 50 years has changed. The children begin to wonder what other changes science and technology have made to food production. After conducting research, students decide to use Web publishing software to illustrate examples of changes related to science and technology, as well as the positive and negative effects. As part of their assessment, learners create a narrative of their findings for the class. The students describe and show how advances in transportation have allowed for produce to arrive from another hemisphere to our supermarkets fresh and ready to eat. They find that, therefore, many fruits and vegetables are available year-round, rather than seasonally. However, they also find and report on the negative impacts of this change. For example, they show that the economic cost for the global movement of foods is high. They also report that transporting foods great distances contributes to the increase in air pollution. Harry assesses their findings based on the accuracy of the information presented, the clarity of the presentation in displaying information, and evidence supporting the conclusions drawn.

9. **Global Connections**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.

**Purposes**
Global connections of many types (social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental) have increased at the personal, local, national, and international levels. New global connections have created both opportunities and challenges. The resulting global interdependence requires an understanding of the increasingly complex connections among individuals, groups, institutions, nations, and world communities in order to identify the issues arising from global connections, and support informed and ethical decision-making.

**Questions for Exploration**
• What are examples of global connections in our community or state, and what are the effects?
• What are persistent and emerging global issues?
• What actions can we suggest and take in response to global changes?

**Snapshot of Practice**
Landra Mitchell collects artifacts from various nations and cultures around the world to enable her to create hands-on cultural experiences for her third graders. Every time she hears of a colleague or friend planning a trip or an international student at the local university returning home for a vacation, she asks that they bring back an interesting
artifact—a toy, a utensil, a newspaper, a coin, or any small, inexpensive item—to add to her collection. She also downloads images from the Internet to supplement the artifacts. During a “Global Connections” unit, she organizes a “museum” with three learning centers, each about a different nation in three different parts of the world. Each center contains artifacts, picture books, and readings. The materials provide information about transportation, trade, and communication that clearly illustrate global connections. She divides her class into three groups. Each group examines the artifacts of one nation a day, responding in writing to audio taped prompts related to each nation. The prompts are: What do the artifacts teach you about the culture and daily life of the people? What are five of the most important things you can learn about the nation by visiting the exhibit and reading some of the materials? What are three more important things that your group can find out about the nation by doing more research on your own? What global connections exist between this nation and any of the others? Their responses create a “Global Connections” journal of observations that become part of the learners’ assessment portfolio for the unit. The class discusses its findings, and the global connections the students have identified are listed.

Landra assesses students’ growing recognition of global connections and their ability to apply what they are learning by having students respond individually to information about another nation that was not featured in the museum. Through her international contacts, Landra arranges for a Venezuelan friend, Manuel, to send the class an e-mail. Landra shares the e-mail in which Manuel describes a great deal about himself, his family, his school, and the community in which he lives, and explains that his favorite sport is “futbol.” He includes several photographs, one of which is of a team holding a soccer ball with a caption, “My futbol team.” The teacher asks the children, working in their groups, to use their research skills to find out more about Venezuela, its language, the daily life of its people, how people make a living, and the term “futbol.” Each group then composes an e-mail to send to Manuel and share with him what they have learned. In their e-mails, they are to include descriptions of the connections they found between the United States and Venezuela. Criteria for evaluation include whether students used effective research strategies, the clarity of descriptions and explanations, the recognition of global connections, and the overall accuracy and quality of the letter.

10. Civic Ideals and Practices

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

Purposes

An understanding of civic ideals and practices is a fundamental goal of education for citizenship in a democratic society. Civic ideals and practices have developed over centuries, and are found in societies throughout the world. Important documents that articulate civic ideals have served as milestones in the development of these ideals in different nations and worldwide. Basic freedoms and rights, and the institutions and practices that support shared democratic principles, are foundations of a democratic
republic. In some instances, civic practices and their consequences are becoming more congruent with ideals, while in other cases, the gap is wide and calls for continued civic action by individuals and groups to sustain and improve the society. Learning how to apply civic ideals to inform civic action is essential to participation in a democracy and support for the common good.

**Questions for Exploration**
- What are civic ideals?
- What are civic practices?
- What are examples of situations in which civic ideals and practices need to be more closely aligned?

**Snapshot of Practice**
Ellen Stein’s fourth grade class is studying how its local government operates to solve problems of public concern. Their school is located next to an abandoned factory, which is being considered as a site for either a shopping center or a public park. Citizens holding different perspectives have argued and debated the merits of the two proposals in the media, and many of the learners’ parents have strong opinions about the issue. Because of the local concerns, the learners want to study the issue, gather information, think about the consequences of different positions, and make their opinions heard.

Ellen invites representatives from different groups in the community that may influence the decision to talk with students. The mayor, members of the planning board, the town council, the chamber of commerce, various citizens’ groups, and a number of residents who live in the surrounding neighborhood are invited. The class develops questions before each visitor arrives, and each learner records answers to questions. After the visits, learners examine the data they gathered, the positions of the different groups, and then develop a list of any additional questions, issues, and concerns to be sent along with “thank you” letters to the visitors. They also discuss what each community group’s priorities appear to be, and how the community may be affected by the differing priorities and positions of the groups.

After further information gathering and review of the pros and cons of several alternatives, the class decides to prepare a poster campaign, supporting the alternatives it believes are most beneficial for the interests of the entire community. Ellen helps the learners consider the elements that make effective posters: attention-grabbing qualities, visuals, wording that conveys a clear message, accuracy, evidence supporting the position presented, and persuasiveness. After developing individual posters, students select the best posters using the qualities previously identified. The local newspaper is invited to send a reporter and photographer to see the poster display in their school, take photos, and write an article. They also obtain permission to place the poster display in the community library. Ellen asks each student to write a paragraph describing what he/she has learned about civic action through this learning experience, using information and examples from the experience as support.