



Must-Have Components of High-Quality Elementary Social Studies Curriculum

Finding the right elementary social studies curriculum for your school or district is not an easy task. Textbooks are outdated almost as fast as they are printed – and states have issued new guidelines requiring inquiry-based materials and culturally responsive instruction. With this in mind, inquirED has consulted with our partners to create a series of rubrics aligned with five must-have components of a high-quality elementary social studies curriculum.



INTEGRATES INQUIRY-BASED INSTRUCTION

Units are designed as deep explorations of social studies content that are structured by compelling and supporting questions – and culminate in informed action. Lessons integrate student-centered strategies to promote critical thinking, collaboration, and creative problem-solving.



SUPPORTS CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION

The curriculum supports instruction that connects to the cultural information and learning processes familiar to historically marginalized students. It provides diverse sources and prompts critical investigations that allow students to see themselves and analyze the factors shaping their world.



UTILIZES STANDARDS-BASED INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

Units and lessons support the development and assessment of knowledge and skills called for by national and state social studies standards, as well as the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy.



CONNECTS TO HIGH-QUALITY, DIVERSE SOURCES

Sources of content are accurate and authentic, including multiple perspectives that originate from diverse authors and creators. Sources include a range of media types, including printed texts, web-based information, videos, images, audio, etc.



PROVIDES INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS AND CONTINUOUS PD

Curriculum provides tools to differentiate and customize instruction. Units and lessons integrate continuous professional learning to develop teacher capacity for inquiry-based social studies instruction and culturally responsive practice.

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC
INTEGRATES INQUIRY-BASED INSTRUCTION

What should you look for?

Investigates Compelling and Supporting Questions

Are the units coherently designed to engage students in the creation and sustained investigation of compelling and supporting questions? (C3 Dimension 1)

- Engages students in the investigation of a compelling question that connects social studies content to students' background knowledge and lived experiences.
- Uses supporting questions to connect individual lessons across a unit into a sustained investigation.
- Prompts students to generate and reflect upon their own investigation questions throughout a unit.

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Builds Disciplinary Knowledge and Skills

Do lessons prompt students to evaluate sources and evidence as they build content knowledge across social studies disciplines? (C3 Dimensions 2&3)

- Provides opportunities across units for students to build disciplinary content knowledge and skills in History, Civics, Geography, and Economics.
- Integrates the analysis and evaluation of sources and arguments (claims, evidence, and reasoning) across social studies disciplines.
- Engages students in learning experiences that reflect the practice of social scientists.

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Prompts Informed Action to Validate & Deepen Learning

Do units culminate in informed action, providing students an opportunity to use their learning to respond to real-world challenges? (C3 Dimension 4)

- Allows students to reflect upon learnings from their unit, and identify key ideas and concepts to share with an audience.
- Prompts students to identify opportunities in their local community to take action related to their key learnings.
- Guides students through a process of brainstorming, feedback, revision, and implementation/presentation.

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Promotes Student-Centered Learning Experiences

Do instructional strategies used across lessons promote independent learning and ownership of the learning process?

- Structures lessons to engage students in active, inquiry-based investigations of content.
- Requires the integration of student ideas and contributions to carry out investigations.
- Provides opportunities for students to create assessment criteria and engage in a process of structured peer feedback.

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CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

SUPPORTS CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION

	What should you look for?	
<p>Designed to Activate Lived Experiences</p> <p>Do units and lessons require the activation of students' cultural background knowledge and ways of knowing to build new knowledge and skills?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Integrates students' questions and background knowledge into unit and lesson design.<input type="checkbox"/> Prioritizes collectivist learning strategies that allow students to process new knowledge and skills collaboratively.<input type="checkbox"/> Provides teachers with tools to customize learning experiences in connection with students' homes and communities.	/3
<p>Develops Critical Awareness Analysis</p> <p>Does the curriculum support students and teachers in understanding and critiquing narratives, arguments, and sources of information that support systemic racism and oppression?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Prompts students to question and critique dominant narratives in the past and present.<input type="checkbox"/> Presents different perspectives on the same event or experience, especially perspectives of marginalized people and communities.<input type="checkbox"/> Supports teachers and students in engaging with difficult topics and participating in culturally sensitive learning activities.	/3
<p>Affirms and Nurtures Learner Identities</p> <p>Does the curriculum provide authentic opportunities for students to understand and reflect upon their own identities and the identities of others (mirrors and windows)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Presents the achievements and contributions of diverse individuals and communities throughout units.<input type="checkbox"/> Encourages student perspective-taking and empathy toward people from backgrounds, cultures, and contexts different from their own.<input type="checkbox"/> Integrates reflection on personal strengths and challenges into unit structure and lesson strategies.	/3
<p>Challenges Spaces of Marginality</p> <p>Does the curriculum integrate sources and resources created by historically marginalized people throughout its units and lessons?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Includes primary and secondary sources and artifacts created by the communities and cultures being investigated.<input type="checkbox"/> Represents historically marginalized people and communities through their strengths, skills, and knowledge rather than perceived flaws or deficits.<input type="checkbox"/> Represents historically marginalized people's perspectives and expertise on a wide range of subjects in the social sciences.	/3

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC
UTILIZES STANDARDS-BASED INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

	What should you look for?	
<p>Aligns Units and Lessons to Disciplinary Indicators</p> <p>Do units and lessons align to C3 Indicators and/or state standards to build content and skills across the disciplines of History, Civics, Geography, and Economics?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Integrates multiple social studies disciplines within each unit – and all disciplines across a curriculum year.<input type="checkbox"/> Aligns lesson objectives to grade-appropriate C3 Indicators for History, Civics, Geography, and Economics.<input type="checkbox"/> Aligns lesson objectives to grade-appropriate, state-specific disciplinary standards.	/3
<p>Develops C3 Framework Inquiry Skills</p> <p>Do units and lessons provide authentic opportunities to develop supporting questions, evaluate sources, and take informed action?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Prompts students to generate, reflect upon, and answer their own supporting investigation questions throughout a unit.<input type="checkbox"/> Provides opportunities to practice protocols for evaluating disciplinary sources and arguments.<input type="checkbox"/> Inspires students to solve a real-world problem in response to the compelling question of the unit.	/3
<p>Aligns Units and Lessons to CCSS ELA Indicators</p> <p>Do units and lessons align to the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts & Literacy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Provides lesson objectives aligned to grade-appropriate CCSS ELA Standards.<input type="checkbox"/> Embeds the practice of ELA and disciplinary literacy skills within the context of a sustained investigation of social studies content.<input type="checkbox"/> Includes texts that are discipline-specific and scaffolded for grade-level understanding.	/3
<p>Provides Coherent Assessment System</p> <p>Do units and lessons contain diverse formative and summative assessments that monitor progress toward social studies standards mastery?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Embeds formative assessment throughout units to evaluate student learning and inform social studies instruction.<input type="checkbox"/> Supports assessment through the use of specific, observable, and measurable look fors that demonstrate understanding.<input type="checkbox"/> Provides summative assessments that allow students to demonstrate understanding of social studies concepts and tools through different modalities.	/3

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC
CONNECTS TO HIGH-QUALITY, DIVERSE SOURCES

	What should you look for?
<p>Updates Sources for Quality and Accuracy</p> <p>Are sources in the curriculum accurate and up-to-date, with a clear process to ensure continuous improvement?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Provides contextualized, factually-accurate sources across format and type.<input type="checkbox"/> Reflects current scholarship and best practices in social studies.<input type="checkbox"/> Includes a clear, transparent, and articulated process to update sources in response to feedback. <p style="text-align: right;">/3</p>
<p>Incorporates Diversity of Voice and Authorship</p> <p>Does the curriculum include primary and secondary sources from diverse authors that relate the expertise, contributions, and perspectives of diverse people and cultures?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Integrates the perspectives of people of diverse races, classes, genders, abilities, ethnicities, and sexual orientations throughout the curriculum.<input type="checkbox"/> Includes primary and secondary sources that reflect the voices of the people and cultures being represented.<input type="checkbox"/> Represents the expertise and scholarship of diverse peoples across a wide-range of topics and disciplines in social studies. <p style="text-align: right;">/3</p>
<p>Provides Variety in Format and Type</p> <p>Does the curriculum differentiate learning through the use of a wide-variety of source types?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Integrates sources on different platforms, including varied websites, outlets, and publishers to develop authentic media literacy skills.<input type="checkbox"/> Presents primary and secondary sources in different formats and types (text, videos, images, etc.).<input type="checkbox"/> Includes sources from different genres and subgenres to engage different readers and viewers. <p style="text-align: right;">/3</p>
<p>Vets Sources for Representation and Bias</p> <p>Does the curriculum provider use a multistage review process to vet sources for accuracy, representation, and bias?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Vets sources through a process that is transparent and available to the public.<input type="checkbox"/> Examines sources through a multistep process of review, feedback, and revision.<input type="checkbox"/> Includes clear processes to revise curriculum after publication in response to public feedback. <p style="text-align: right;">/3</p>

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC
PROVIDES INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS AND CONTINUOUS PD

What should you look for?

Supports Planning and Preparation

Does the curriculum include actionable steps and specific resources to help teachers prepare for units and implement daily lessons?

- Supports unit planning by providing representations of unit structure and flow.
- Provides specific and comprehensive descriptions of resources provided and preparation required for all lessons.
- Includes resources that support communication between classroom and home, and classroom and community.

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Provides Tools to Differentiate Instruction

Does the curriculum provide tools and resources to differentiate instruction for all learners?

- Provides multimodal learning opportunities within lessons (visual, discussion, etc.).
- Integrates diverse participation, discussion, and collaboration strategies to prompt all students to participate, respond to, and engage in investigations.
- Includes scaffolded versions of assessments to gauge student understanding and monitor progress.

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Integrates Curriculum-Based Professional Learning

Does the curriculum support comprehensive professional learning to build instructional capacity?

- Embeds professional learning within the curriculum to build capacity for inquiry-based social studies practice and culturally-responsive instruction.
- Provides resources, tools, and training to support and strengthen the effectiveness of on-site instructional leaders.
- Includes resources and support for Professional Learning Communities to guide collaborative analysis of curriculum implementation and student learning.

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Utilizes Digital Tools to Support Instruction

Does the curriculum utilize technology to support teacher implementation and enhance student experience?

- Allows teachers to customize the content of units through the selection of alternative lessons, experiences, and performance tasks that meet the unique needs of their students.
- Provides teacher-friendly, easy-to-use digital instructional materials.
- Integrates with widely-used Learning Management Systems.

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