

MAJOR ENDURING THEMES IN SOCIAL STUDIES

Major Enduring Themes refer to general topics or issues that have been relevant over a long period of time. Educators should consider enduring themes when planning curriculum and instruction. Themes provide an opportunity to transfer knowledge and understanding across learning experiences. A consistent set of themes can serve as a framework within which other concepts, topics, and facts can be organized. The four options below allow schools and school systems to select the set that best matches the philosophical and instructional needs of their students and teachers. Each option offers different emphases. Schools and (preferably) school systems should take a comprehensive, K-12 approach to selecting and using any one set of enduring themes.

In addition to transferring understanding across learning experiences, themes can be used:

- as a set of concepts that, like standards and performance indicators, represent content to be learned within a class or course;
- for discussion, lectures, writing assignments, and projects within a class or course; and
- as a framework to guide the selection of content for a unit, class or course.

MAJOR ENDURING THEMES – OPTION #1

This set of themes was developed by the National Council for the Social Studies. It is perhaps the most comprehensive list of themes that span the breadth and K-12 scope of social studies. Many of the themes provide opportunity for cross-content curriculum and instruction. This set of major enduring themes is appropriate for K-12 social studies curriculum and instruction with the possibility of integration with other content areas at some or all grade spans.

National Council for the Social Studies: Ten Thematic Strands

1. Culture
2. Time, Continuity, and Change
3. People, Places, and Environments
4. Individual Development and Identity
5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
6. Power, Authority, and Governance
7. Production, Distribution, and Consumption
8. Science, Technology, and Society
9. Global Connections
10. Civic Ideals and Practices

For more information, in-depth descriptions, and professional resources go to:
<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>

MAJOR ENDURING THEMES – OPTION #2

The Comprehensive Social Studies Assessment Project (CSSAP) developed the set of themes below. Phase I of the CSSAP project engaged 25 states in developing a framework and assessments for civics, economics, geography, and history at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The themes are specific to social studies and are best utilized in a curriculum that is driven by individual units, classes or courses in civics and government, economics, geography and history. While some themes transfer among the larger content area of social studies (for example, principles and ideals of democracy in the U.S. may be appropriate for civics, economics or history), this list is more subject specific and offers fewer options for cross-content connections.

CSSAP Consensus Framework: Themes

Civics

1. Civic life, politics, and governance systems
2. Purpose, structure and functions, of governments in the U.S.
3. Principles and ideals of democracy in the U.S.
4. Roles, rights, privileges, and responsibilities of citizens in the U.S.
5. Relationships among governments and people that cross national boundaries

Economics

1. Limited resources and choice
2. Markets
3. Economic systems
4. Economic interdependence

Geography

1. Places, regions, locations
2. Physical systems (spatial perspective)
3. Human systems (spatial perspective)
4. Environment and society (spatial perspective)

History

1. Change and continuity in political systems
2. Interactions of people, cultures, and ideas
3. Economic and technological changes
4. Comparative history of major developments

For more information and in-depth descriptions go to::

<http://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/publications/se/6306/630610.html>

MAJOR ENDURING THEMES – OPTION #3

The third set of major enduring themes is more conceptual but the themes fit the definition of being “relevant over a long period of time” (*Learning Results: Parameters for Essential Instruction*, 2007). H. Lynn Erickson is well published in the area of curriculum integration, the structure of learning, and the transfer of knowledge. Her concepts are timeless, universal, and share common attributes among content areas. Note that many transfer to the content areas of science, literature, mathematics, and the arts. This set – and Erickson’s larger body of work – are an option for K-12 social studies curriculum, cross-content curriculum, and building level curriculum integration.

H. Lynn Erickson’s Social Studies Concepts

Conflict/ Cooperation
Patterns
Population
Systems
Change/ Continuity
Culture
Evolution
Civilization
Migration/ Immigration
Interdependence

For more information please see:

Erickson, H. L. (2007). *Stirring the head, heart, and soul: Redefining curriculum and instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Erickson, H. L. (2002). *Concept based curriculum instruction: Teaching beyond the facts*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

MAJOR ENDURING THEMES – OPTION #4

Within the framework offered by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, mastery of core subjects and 21st century themes are essential for all students. Core subjects include:

- English, reading or language arts
- World languages
- Arts
- Mathematics
- Economics
- Science
- Geography
- History
- Government and Civics

It is interesting to note that four of the nine core subjects are traditionally assigned to social studies. In addition to these subjects, schools move beyond a basic competency in core subjects to promote in-depth understanding of academic content by weaving 21st century interdisciplinary themes into core subjects. The first three themes below are central to social and civic education and make them good choices for K-12 social studies curriculum and instruction. The set of themes is highly interdisciplinary and would work well for a K-12 social studies curriculum or for building and/or system content and social expectations, if all four themes are used. They are highly recommended for a high school environment.

Partnership for 21st Century Skills: 21st Century Themes

Global Awareness

- Using 21st century skills to understand and address global issues
- Learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work and community contexts
- Understanding other nations and cultures, including the use of non-English languages

Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurial Literacy

- Knowing how to make appropriate personal economic choices
- Understanding the role of the economy in society
- Using entrepreneurial skills to enhance workplace productivity and career options

Civic Literacy

- Participating effectively in civic life through knowing how to stay informed and understanding governmental processes
- Exercising the rights and obligations of citizenship at local, state, national and global levels
- Understanding the local and global implications of civic decisions

Health Literacy (optional for Social Studies)

- Obtaining, interpreting and understanding basic health information and services and using such information and services in ways that are health enhancing
- Understanding preventive physical and mental health measures, including proper diet, nutrition, exercise, risk avoidance and stress reduction
- Using available information to make appropriate health-related decisions
- Establishing and monitoring personal and family health goals
- Understanding national and international public health and safety issues

For more information, in-depth descriptions, and professional resources go to:

http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=57&Itemid=120

http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=254&Itemid=120

<http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/>