

Our conversation with you about “Effectively Integrating Literature and Social Studies...”



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There's nothing better than discovering a wonderful book.

We would recommend using literature in the service of social studies,¹ even if the time allotted to social studies were not shrinking at the elementary level.² But, because language arts and math have been getting the lion's share of instructional time since the advent of No Child Left Behind, we believe that the integration of literature and social studies is an option worthy of consideration.

There are dangers in using literature for the dual purposes of teaching social studies and language arts; integration often results in language arts being the focal point of lessons, while less valuable, even trivial, aspects of social studies get addressed, often in a scattershot way.³

On the other hand, literature can offer young readers visual images that make social studies concepts more concrete. Literature-based accounts presented from multiple perspectives allow students to extend their understanding of the personalities and events that have shaped our world. Integrating literature into lessons can be a positive way to teach social studies, but only if it is done with social studies concepts at the center of curriculum and instruction. The authors in this issue have done just that.

An article at the early childhood level by **Victoria B. Fantozzi, Elizabeth Cottino, and Cindy Gennarelli**, “Mapping Their Place: Preschoolers Explore Space, Place, and Literacy,” highlights a mapmaking activity that fosters emergent literacy in our youngest students.

Monica Zenyuh's article, “Crisis = Opportunity: Civic Literacy in the Wake of a Hurricane,” describes how using the newspaper as a text not only increased students' awareness of the world around them, but propelled them into a humanitarian cause.

An article and Pullout by **Ellen Ballock and Ashley Lucas**, “Going Beyond Maps and Globes: Exploring Children's Literature Using the Five Geographic Themes,” illustrates that geography can be used to add depth to children's experiences in reading and writing and that every book can be a geography book.

In “Immigration, *Any Small Goodness*, and Integrated Social Studies,” **Michelle Bauml, Sherry L. Field, and Mary Ledbetter** show how the rich, descriptive language of a novel on immigration can help students empathize with people in circumstances that may be different from their own, and give them the tools to participate capably in our multicultural democracy.

In “Social Studies is a Story: Developing Critical Analysis Skills Through Children's Literature,” **Ann T. Ackerman, Patricia H. Howson, and Betty C. Mulrey** share a checklist to assist teachers in assessing, selecting, and critically analyzing appropriate texts. The checklist can remind teachers and students, alike, to examine texts through a social studies lens, attending to setting, accuracy, and perspective.

Andrea S. Libresco's book review, “A Powerful Biography of a Powerful Partnership,” of Penny Colman's *Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: A Friendship that Changed the World* reminds us that highly proficient children in upper grades deserve to have engaging, thoughtful, and challenging works to read.

These articles provide examples of classrooms where literature is integrated with social studies in ways that do not treat social studies as the poorer cousin of English/Language Arts.

So...how do YOU try to integrate literature and social studies?

- To what extent do you believe that any piece of literature can be used in the service of social studies?
- What books do you already use that have social studies concepts embedded in them?
- How do you select texts that will do double duty—as both social studies and literature? How important is it to select books that will foster empathy in your students?
- To what extent do you use literature to jump-start a social studies unit?

continued on page 4

- What books do you use in the service of geography? economics? civic action?
- Are there any pieces of literature that you have shared with your students that you believe had a powerful effect on their thinking on a social studies issue?
- How do you handle a book that is a beautiful piece of literature but has historical inaccuracies?
- In addition to literature, what other sources do you use (songs, artwork, plays, storytelling, puppetry, etc.) in the service of social studies?
- Which of these strategies that serve both literature and social studies do you employ? What other strategies do you employ?
 - Create a sociogram of the characters in the book.
 - Make a timeline of the events in the story.
 - Sketch a map of the story's setting.
 - Generate a list of questions sparked by events or characters' choices in the book.
 - Re-write parts of the book from different characters' points of view.
 - Craft different endings for the book to explore what is either possible or desirable.

- Discuss the author's motive for writing the book— what the author says about how we should behave, relate to one another, and make difficult choices.

We look forward to the thoughtful conversation at *NCSS Connections* about how to use literature most effectively in the service of social studies. Please join us! 🌐

—Andrea and Jeannette

Notes

1. Andrea S. Libresco, Jeannette Balantic, and Jonie Kipling, *Every Book is a Social Studies Book: How to Meet Standards K-6* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011).
2. James S. Leming, Lucien Ellington, and Mark Schug, "The State of Social Studies: A National Random Survey of Elementary and Middle School Social Studies Teachers," *Social Education* 70, no. 5 (2006): 322-327; Jennifer McMurrer, "Choices, Changes, and Challenges: Curriculum and Instruction in the NCLB Era," *Center on Education Policy* (2007), www.cepdc.org; Katherine A. O'Connor, Tina L. Heafner, and Eric Groce, "Advocating for Social Studies: Documenting the Decline and Doing Something About It," *Social Education* 71, no. 5 (2007): 255- 260; Jeff Passe, Tracy C. Rock, Tina L. Heafner, Katherine A. O'Connor, Sandra Oldendorf, Amy J. Good, and Sandra Byrd, "One State Closer to a National Crisis: A Report on Elementary Social Studies in North Carolina Schools," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 34, no. 4 (2006): 455-483; Phillip J. VanFossen, "Reading and Math Take So Much of the Time... ' An Overview of Social Studies Instruction in Elementary Classrooms in Indiana," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 33, no. 3 (2005): 376-403.
3. Janet Alleman and Jere Brophy, "Is Curriculum Integration a Boon or a Threat to Studies?" *Social Education* 57, no. 6 (1993): 287-291; Janet Alleman and Jere Brophy, "Trade-Offs Embedded in the Literary Approach to Early Elementary Social Studies," *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 6, no. 3 (1994): 6-8.

Teaching Reading with the Social Studies Standards: Elementary Units that Integrate Great Books, Social Studies, and the Common Core Standards

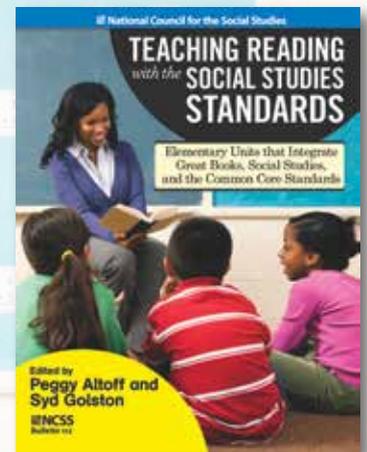
Edited by Syd Golston and Peggy Altoff
 NCSS Bulletin 112, 118 pp., 2012

This book has been designed for elementary teachers who want to meet the Common Core Standards for Reading Literature as they teach social studies.

The class activities recommended in this book for each grade level allow teachers to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Achieve specific learning expectations outlined in the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies.
2. Achieve specific objectives outlined in the Common Core Standards for Reading Literature (as well as selected other Common Core Standards)

This book's opening chapters lay the groundwork for the effective teaching of standards-based social studies through the use of literature. Most of the volume consists of reviews and annotations of outstanding children's books for the elementary grades. The contributors examine seven outstanding children's books in depth (one for each grade from pre-K through 5) and recommend scores of other suitable books.



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