Better Social Studies: Increasing Content Knowledge & Reading Simultaneously

Ellen Rae Weaver
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Degree Type
Open Access Senior Honors Thesis

Department
Teacher Education

First Advisor
Jacqueline LaRose

Keywords
social studies, reading, common core, state standards, education

Subject Categories
Education

This open access senior honors thesis is available at DigitalCommons@EMU: http://commons.emich.edu/honors/371
Better Social Studies: Increasing Content Knowledge & Reading Simultaneously

By

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A Senior Thesis Submitted to the

Eastern Michigan University

Honors College

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation

with Honors in Teacher Education

Approved at Ypsilanti, Michigan, on this date December 9, 2013
Better Social Studies

"Reading without reflecting is like eating without digesting."

--Edmund Burke, Statesman/Author

Abstract

When considering the impact of the new set of educational standards coming into effect across the nation, commonly known as The Common Core, it becomes necessary to reevaluate the emphases given to the different subject areas being taught. These new standards are heavily steeped in the empowering act of reading in education. I believe that reading, instead of overwhelming content with its different instructional needs, can instead be used to rejuvenate subject areas. Since the content area dubbed social studies is a diverse and greatly varied teaching subject it has a multitude of applications in education; yet, due to the extreme focus on Language Arts and Mathematics instruction, the potential of social studies instruction is not pursued effectively. One aspect of this paper is to give an overview of standards past and present; the use of literature, both fiction and nonfiction and across genre, will also be examined. A comparison of attributes associated with texts in regard to their use in the elementary classroom as they apply to both reading and social studies together will be featured.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to the Eastern Michigan University Presidential Scholarship Program for giving me my education, and my loving family for giving me everything else.

Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without the support and guidance of Dr. Jacqueline LaRose of the Teacher Education Department. She has all my thanks.
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**Introduction**

"*Man reading should be man intensely alive. The book should be a ball of light in one's hand.*"

---Ezra Pound, Poet/Critic

John Dewey (1916), the noted educational philosopher, thought of education in terms of creating critical thinkers as active participants in a democratic society. One subject area, social studies, is commonly assumed to provide students with education on democracy and citizenship; but, its potential as a multidisciplinary facet of education expanding across a repertoire of information on the past, present, and future is curbed by the emphasis given to the more highly tested areas (Heafner, Fitchett, 2012). In an era of schooling which requires state and nationally mandated accountability in terms of academic achievement, sacrifices have been made to ensure that content areas like English and mathematics are given priority of instruction over areas which do not appear on most standardized tests. These sacrifices include the reduction of instructional time devoted to social studies and the multidisciplinary subject matter beyond history which social studies includes.

Social studies is a content area, a course of study devoted to a particular subject or set of subjects, closely tied to the ever crucial realm of reading and literacy; this is a subject area that necessitates a healthy range of interests and covers a wide range of genres, both fiction and nonfiction. When comparing the relationship between social studies and reading, it can be concluded that when paired together effectively, they can be used to enhance student acquisition in both reading skills and social studies content material. This apparent symbiotic relationship must be examined to show how the
connection between reading and social studies can rejuvenate the subject area and support a vast array of reading experiences in grades K-5.

Researchers are now providing conclusive evidence showing that students largely benefit from receiving reading instruction within content classes (Hall, 2005). Research also shows that self-efficacy is one, if not the strongest, predictor of achievement (Badura, 1977; Gallavan, 2003). If our students need to feel confident as readers and in their abilities to pursue their education, then it is obvious that they will require continuous support and opportunities to read both within and outside of classroom content instruction. With the use of, and instruction in, multiple types of reading skills and genres, students of all different levels, skill sets and interests can explore content with far less limitation. In order to use reading effectively to explore a topic, students need guidance, resources, the opportunity to explore materials, and time to read (Hiebert, Pearson, 2013). The more varied the student’s choice of material in a content area, the higher the success of the student comprehending the subject matter. Also, the more a student reads, and the more types of reading a student pursues, the better they are as a reader; the better the reader the more self-efficacy they achieve, and the better their chance to cultivate a rise in scholastic achievement (Johnson, Blair, 2003).

As we shift, nationally, into the educational structure of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which holds that its goal is to produce students who are “college and career ready in literacy”, the emphasis on producing better readers will continue to increase. Since these standards are rather unlike our past standards, in Michigan known as the Grade Level Content Expectations and otherwise respective to each state, they represent a time of innovation in teaching practices. Social studies, a broad expanse of
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diverse topics, requires a knowledge of reading that can span those topics and supply the reader with the means to interpret, communicate, and connect what they have read (Ross, 2006). Social studies and reading are easily intertwined and if given life through a variety of educational experiences, there is the possibility of thrusting the entire content area into a new era of appreciation.

Rather than looking specifically at content and addressing particular standards, the focus of this look at the relationship between social studies and reading serves to explore the influence one has on the other, and how that influence can be used to positively affect both sides in education. Delving in to examine the way reading is used when working with content specific information is important. Reading experiences with textbooks and nonfiction texts traditionally used in classrooms will be profiled alongside reading tasks using supplementary narrative texts and fiction. The support of a wide selection of genre is beneficial in a great many ways, not the least of which is a segue into children taking control of their own learning.

I believe one of the keys to great social studies instruction is providing reading experiences that build and develop critical reading skills without diluting the subject content. It is important that the focus is not solely on the acquisition and completion of reading experiences, but that the students are given the opportunity to connect with the information and apply it to the greater schema of their education. With a subject area that is applicable in a multitude of contexts, students can profit from valuable reading and content experiences that are mutually beneficial. Once a teacher can identify the value of purposeful, authentic social studies instruction they can introduce readings which supplement social studies learning and promote literacy skills.
The Question of Social Studies

"Today a reader, tomorrow a leader."

—Margaret Fuller, Journalist

Content Confusion

In order to establish the relationship between reading and the content area known as social studies it is important to come to some conclusions about what is traditionally included in the content area itself. Social studies, a simple title, masks the complexity that has come to characterize the variety of social and academic subjects considered in the process of creating and implementing content instruction to educate students on different levels. Social studies, in essence the study of all humans and their interactions, has traditionally included an eclectic range of academic subjects beyond history and geography. Critical Issues in Social Studies Research for the 21st Century (2001), a collection of essays addressing the past and future of social studies, claims that all of the following areas of study are viable for addition in social studies curriculums:

| SOCIAL SCIENCES | Anthropology, archeology, economics, geography, political science, psychology, sociology |
| HUMANITIES | History, law, literature, philosophy |
| INTERDISCIPLINARY FIELDS | The history and philosophy of science, religion, literary criticism, critical race theory, ethnic studies, sexuality studies, multicultural education, women’s studies |

Figure 1. Areas of Social Studies.

This conglomeration of disciplines can make social studies vulnerable to political attack and manipulation based on current events and the societal desires of the time (Evans, 2004). In his article in the International Journal of Social Education, Ian Wright
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(1998) aptly states, “The field of social studies has long suffered from conflicting definitions, an overlapping of functions, and a confusion of philosophies.” He goes on to characterize social studies as having an indeterminable definition due to the variability of social belief, needs, and the inadequacy of language to encompass that variability at any given time. Not only the definition then, but the purpose of social studies has been an ongoing source of debate since its recognition as a subject in 1916 by the National Education Association (Ross, 2006).

As social studies is a conduit of subjective material, information which is selected in relation to the time, place and interest of curriculum developers, focused on the study of people, it is highly influential on the people who study it. When the societal perspectives change, the material can change. When that material changes, the learners’ perspectives can change. Literature used or introduced in the classroom can be the avenue through which those perspectives are explored and understood. In Rick and William Ayer’s book Teaching the Taboo: Courage and Imagination in the Classroom (2011) they note, “A vibrant democracy would place at the center the broader concerns of society, the needs of the individual in balance with the collective good, the common interest, and the many intersections of interest.” Social Studies, commonly held as the diverse subject in which students develop their voice and their concept of their roles as citizens in a democratic society and diverse world, is a subject area so full of potential, the negligence of it in schools is unacceptable and unnecessary.

Social Studies’ Standing in Education

Perhaps due to this conflicting image of the “what” and the “why” of social studies there has been an established lack of insistence that it is in fact a curriculum area
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worthy of significant attention. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), the
guiding force of social studies standards across the country, in its position statement
about powerful teaching and learning in the social studies, has this to say (2008):

The last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty
first have seen a marginalization of social studies curriculum, instruction,
and assessment at all grade levels. In many state houses, in departments of
education and in school districts across this great nation, education for
citizenship has taken a back seat to education for career and college.

This decline can be attributed in part to the shift in focus caused by the No Child Left
Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), a culminating event in the past twenty five years of
standardized education reform which has omitted social studies from the nationwide
accountability system (Schmidt, 2007; Winstead, 2011).

Traditionally, social studies instruction has always been heavily amalgamated
with the realm of language arts, in that its instructional structure has heavily relied on the
grade level specific textbooks adopted by each respective state or district. Additional and
supplemental plans that are generally made available are based, usually, on the same
national and state curriculum standards as those same text books. Although each state in
the past has been autonomous in most respects in regard to the decision of what is taught
when and to what extent, they were influenced by the suggestive standards set down by
the NCSS in 1994. These were intended as an adaptable guide to establish curriculums at
the school, district, or state levels. The ten interdisciplinary themes around which the
framework of an effective social studies program should be built then remains unchanged
today (Morin, 2003).
The Ten Themes of Social Studies (Altoff, P., Golston, S., 2012)

1. Culture
   The study of culture and cultural diversity

2. Time, Continuity, and Change
   The study of the past and its legacy

3. People, Places, and Environments
   The study of people, places and environments

4. Individual Development and Identity
   The study of individual development and identity

5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
   The study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions

6. Power, Authority, and Governance
   The study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance

7. Production, Distribution, and Consumption
   The study of how people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services

8. Science, Technology, and Society
   The study of relationships among science, technology, and society

9. Global Connections
   The study of global connections and interdependence

10. Civic Ideals and Practices
    The study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic society
The NCSS insists that the qualities of powerful, authentic social studies instruction include the critical use of processing skills, creative scaffolding of prior and acquired knowledge, and value-based activities with concepts that are active, integrative and meaningful. They advocate the acquisition of decision making, interpersonal, intellectual, and data-gathering skills. With social studies receiving little time for instruction, student activities have been largely reduced, in the recent past, to repetition exercises (Schmidt, 2007) that lack the authenticity which marks a great social studies program. In order to revive social studies as a content area and rebuild its potential as a valued part of the curriculum, changes have to be made in how the subject is taught and maintained.

As the majority of our fifty states focus their thinking on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), there has been limited attention by practitioners to renovation of overarching goals for social studies content in elementary grades. Although NCSS has recently released the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards, this release has been shadowed by the continuing emphasis on CCSS. The C3 Framework, available online for easy and updated reference, is not a mandated set of curriculum guidelines and remains a set of polished suggestions for upgradable curriculums. Since many K-5 educators are responsible for teaching every subject and may not have a particular passion for or extended education in social studies, the C3 Framework, a national construct, is not predominant over state mandated standards.

Instead of establishing standards in the traditional field of study for grades K-5, from elements of social interaction to the three branches of government, the CCSS standards bypass the content area; instead, it is addressed only in terms of literacy, in
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terms of informational text and literature. Content standards, the specific information and goals addressed by the curriculum, are not provided for social studies by the CCSS for grades K-5. The only standards applied to social studies by the CCSS are those pertaining specifically to literacy. In this way, social studies is significant only in the pursuit of using content as a tool for promoting literacy experiences.

This attention to literacy acquisition in content areas further highlights the highly integrated nature of reading and social studies while increasing the need for teachers to be ever more conscious of what and how their students are reading in terms of social studies content. Since the new standards are designed to boost literacy, college and career readiness in addition to standing education requirements, it is essential to reevaluate social studies standing in education beyond reading. The lack of emphasis on social studies education in elementary grades will not be alleviated through the newest set of standards due to the dependency of the CCSS on existing content standards. Teachers now have the unique opportunity to link new literacy standards to current content standards and advance social studies through reading experiences supportive of the goals of the CCSS.

The Standards: Reading and Social Studies

“Education...has produced a vast population able to read but unable to distinguish what is worth reading.”

--G. M. Trevelyan, Historian

Grade Level Content Expectations
When considering social studies it is pertinent to consider content and curriculum separately (Ross, 2006). Standards and benchmarks are used to provide clear goals for student achievement in learning pre-determined skills and knowledge, the complexity of which increases with each grade level. In the past, states have developed standards autonomously with consideration for national policies and associations. In Michigan, the standards are known as Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs). In terms of social studies, the GLCEs were refined in 2007 from the K-12 standards and benchmarks which the Michigan Department of Education set for history, geography, civics, economics, public discourse, and citizen involvement within the Michigan Curriculum Framework originally adopted in 1995 (Anderson, 2011).

When considering reading in education, it becomes obvious that it is an area which has been given a high level of attention and has always been a predominate facet of education. Reading is used in every other subject and of course is something used frequently in our print-heavy day-to-day lives. The English Language Arts (ELA) subject area generally contains standards for reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Being such a primary concern, reading instruction has gone through many extensive reforms from basal reading texts to the integration of the ever-expanding role of technology in the classroom.

Social studies and ELA standards are traditionally complementary of one another across grade levels. According to the GLCEs for social studies “effective social studies instruction and assessment incorporate methods of inquiry, involve public discourse and decision making, and provide opportunities for citizen involvement” which leads to
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practice acting and thinking as historians, geographers, political scientists, and economists. These expectations include:

- The acquisition, organization, and presentation of social studies information
- Conducting investigations on social studies questions
- Analyzing public issues in our various communities
- Engaging in constructive conversation around social studies topics
- Composing cohesive essays expressing a position on public issues
- Participating constructively as community members

Each of these require speaking, listening, reading and writing extensively and across topics and grade levels to be performed effectively. To fulfill the social studies GLCES, teachers must facilitate these experiences for their students, each of which has connections to the ELA CCSS.

**The Common Core State Standards Initiative**

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), available wholly online at www.corestatestandards.org, are easily accessible for teachers, students and parents alike and have been adopted in forty-five states, the District of Columbia, and four territories. They are dedicated to “preparing students for the future” so the long term focus of implementation is readying students to succeed in college, careers, and ultimately to assist the nation as it competes in the global economy. These standards are designed to build upon the foundation of the individualized state standards already in place and
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provide many opportunities for real world applications. They have been developed by representative organizations like the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) with input from teachers, school administrators, experts and even parents nationwide. Part of the process in creating the CCSS also included researching the educational expectations of high performing countries around the world.

Currently only ELA (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) and Mathematics, the subjects most often integrated in other subject areas and assessed for accountability, have been standardized for each grade level K-12. History, the social studies, science, and technical subjects are addressed as standards only in terms of literacy for grades 6-12. There are efforts spearheaded by major national organizations to establish, align and revise current and new CCSS only in science, world languages and the arts. The development of these standards in other academic subjects at different grade levels is not taken upon by the NGA or the CCSSO and relies on coalitions of different associations with similar goals. Once adopted, these additional and revised standards will further the goal to “provide clarity and consistency in what is expected of student learning across the country”.

The CCSS initiative is highly focused on the integration and development of literacy. These standards are also specifically designed to allow flexibility for teachers, not dictating how literacy should be taught but instead defining what knowledge and abilities students are expected to achieve at each grade level. Teachers are expected to implement and select intervention methods and materials beyond what is suggested by the standards. Foundational skills, exposure to wide ranges of literature of increasing
complexity, and the use of informational texts have been standardized for grades K-5. In terms of social studies, there are no dictating standards so the existing standards will remain the prominent guide for educators; this allows considerable customization in terms of reading experiences for different grade and reading levels.

The switch to the CCSS is widely held to be a monumental educational reform movement. In her book, *Leading the Common Core State Standards: From Common Sense to Common Practice*, Cheryl Dunkle strongly defends the need for innovative and passionate teachers of the states and territories which have adopted the CCSS to come forward to transform our schools by carrying the CCSS from idea to action. Conventionally, changes in education can be, as Dunkle puts it, messy, and rely immensely on the collaboration of those attempting to implement it. Teachers now have the opportunity to integrate literature and reading effectively with social studies to boost overall attainment.

In this time of change, as the CCSS are newly implemented, subject to change, and less limiting than some standards, K-5 teachers who actively compare them to the existing standards for social studies can adapt their instruction to redistribute education values. Although required texts vary by district and state, there is always room for additional texts and reading options both for lessons and to simply make available for young readers. The CCSS wants developing student readers to: demonstrate independence; build strong content knowledge; respond to demands of audience, task, purpose and discipline; comprehend and critique; value evidence; use technology/digital media strategically and capably, and come to understand other perspectives and cultures.
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Social studies can provide the flexible medium for students working with varying text complexities.

The NCSS holds that there are five essential literacy skills when using texts in social studies. These happen to align naturally with the CCSS reading standards (see Fig. 2 for examples), and are influential in teaching and emphasizing different aspects of literacy needed when teaching social studies content and skills (Altoff, Golston, 2012). They are: 1) *Chronology and Sequence*, the arrangement of events in the order in which they occur and the logical series of steps used to complete a task; 2) *Cause and Effect*, in which it is determined why an event occurred and the results of that event are identified; 3) *Similarities and Differences*, used to increase student understanding and achievement through comparing and contrasting; 4) *Descriptions of People, Places, and Environments*, the explanation and account of people, places, events or ideas and the connections between and among them accurately and with appropriate detail; and 5) *Define and Apply Conceptual Vocabulary*, involving the importance and educational emphasis of vocabulary acquisition necessitating explicit instruction for understanding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Council of Social Studies Literacy Skills</th>
<th>K/5 CCSS for Reading in Content Areas: Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chronology and Sequence</td>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.2 With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.5 Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause and Effect</td>
<td>With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarities and Differences</td>
<td>With prompting and support, compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in familiar stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of People, Places, and Environments</td>
<td>With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Define and Apply Conceptual Vocabulary</td>
<td>Ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronology and Sequence</td>
<td>With prompting and support, identify the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Social Studies</td>
<td>main topic and retell key details of a text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cause and Effect</strong></td>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.5 Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Similarities and Differences</strong></td>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.K.1 With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.5 Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Descriptions of People, Places, and Environments</strong></td>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.K.3 With prompting and support, describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.3 Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Define and Apply Conceptual Vocabulary</th>
<th>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.4 With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.4 Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 5 topic or subject area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2. NCSS/CCSS Comparison for K & 5.*

These literacy skills involve and can be applied to each of the levels of Bloom's taxonomy of higher order thinking (see Fig. 3). They can each inspire hands-on literacy activities to engage students in the learning process and target or outline a purpose for the reading students are doing in social studies. By combining these literacy skills with content objectives, there are goals and standards in ELA, literature, and informational text of the CCSS that can be achieved alongside the fulfillment of meaningful subject interaction. Recalling and connecting events, people, places and ideas, comparing and contrasting, elaboration, and vocabulary development are all evident in the CCSS and highly relevant to the pursuit of social studies education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increasing Cognitive Complexity</th>
<th>Bloom's Revised Cognitive Taxonomy</th>
<th>CCSS Organization (Literature/Informational Text)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remembering:</strong> Retrieving, recognizing, and recalling relevant knowledge from long-term memory.</td>
<td><strong>Understanding:</strong> Constructing meaning from oral, written, and graphic messages through interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing, and explaining.</td>
<td><strong>Key Ideas and Details</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Applying:** Carrying out or using a procedure through executing or implementing.

**Analyzing:** Breaking material into constituent parts, determining how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose through differentiating, organizing, and attributing.

**Evaluating:** Marking judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing.

**Creating:** Putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganizing elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning, or producing.

*(Anderson, Krathwohl, & Bloom, 2001)*

*Figure 3. Cognitive Taxonomy/CCSS Comparison.*

The CCSS currently only provide standards for history/social studies for grades K-5 embedded within its reading standards. This supports the relationship between reading and social studies in terms of supplying goals for the application of and achievement in literacy skills, but should not overshadow the importance of student’s attainment in the content area itself. What students are reading and how they are reading it go hand in hand (Johnson, Blair, 2003). As noted earlier, there is a vast amount of content incorporated in social studies. The exploration of content in social studies will invariably support development of reading skills. Students who have a wider range of knowledge score better on reading tests because they have information already about what they are being asked to read (Altoff, Golston, 2012). To succeed as readers, students must also cultivate a love of reading that can carry them across genre and purposes for reading. Social studies can provide a stunning array of reading experiences with both
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fictional and nonfictional texts, helping students cultivate that love of reading as they interact with the range of content made possible through social studies.

Reading in Social Studies

"Any book that helps a child to form a habit of reading, to make reading one of his deep and continuing needs, is good for him."

--Maya Angelou, Poet

By the time students reach the fourth grade they are expected to learn from content area specific texts. Without the literacy skills required to do this, there is an increased potential for students to continuously struggle as they further engage in informational texts and move on to higher grades. If not only social studies content knowledge, but content area literacy is neglected as well, the combination can result in a lack of development, not only for individual students, but for the "civic health of the country" as well (Halvorsen, Brugar, Block, Strachan, et al. 2012). Content area texts are designed to teach designated information tailored for specific grade or reading levels and in social studies these reading materials generally take the form of different nonfiction texts, commonly biographies or historical documentation, and textbooks.

Nonfiction

Using nonfiction in the classroom primarily provides students with information. Expository texts are used to explain, so the use of expository texts in a social studies classroom is to provide students with factual representations of events in the past and present; they can also be used to make inferences about the future. It is important for students to be given more than one source of textual information to circumvent bias, increase accessibility and provide a basis for accuracy. Students who experience this
variety will be increasing their reading skills, interest, and confidence when using nonfiction texts, while interacting purposefully with texts to build meaning.

Good nonfiction texts can be found by a teacher who looks for credibility in the information, the author(s), and the publisher of the text, and who also assesses the accessibility of the text for the grade and reading level of the students for which it is intended. Each type of nonfiction book offers distinct possibilities for a variety of learning experiences and elementary teachers need to choose supplementary books which align with state standards and can accomplish or support learning objectives; this includes explicit teaching books, and materials which are simply made available for students in the classroom or from the community. A typical elementary social studies curriculum provides standards in topics under the headings culture, history, geography, civics, and economics. Each of these themes encompasses a variety of subjects which can be discussed and wonderfully illustrated in and through nonfiction texts.

Reading nonfiction increases students’ background knowledge, the accumulation of which becomes crucial in later elementary grades and continuing education as content-specific texts become more prevalent in the curriculum (Young, Moss, & Cornwell, 2007). Before students begin using standard textbooks they have limited familiarity with captions, headings, maps, charts and graphs: those text elements often found within a nonfiction text (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2009). These elements contribute important, relevant information useful for building the background knowledge students need. The CCSS increase the emphasis on reading nonfiction with increasing complexity and students who effectively build background knowledge have higher achievement levels, a gap of as much as 33 percent (Marzano, 2000). Thus, the more exposure a student
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receives from different nonfiction sources, the greater their opportunity to expand their background knowledge and boost their positive interaction with content materials. This is facilitated by students working with those text elements that range beyond narrative text formats (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2009).

Fewer than 10 percent of ELA texts are nonfiction (Duke, 2004). Studies have found that students spend time reading nonfiction texts outside of school for less than four minutes a day (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010), that fiction outsells nonfiction by more than 4 to 1 (Milliot, 2012), and that lower-income students accrue less exposure to informational reading during the average school day (Duke, 2000). Since 2001, the time dedicated to reading instruction has doubled in many cases, but the time students are actually given to read has increased only by about 15 percent. There has also been a longstanding imbalance between literature and informational text education and United States students who, when tested on reading achievement internationally, are worse at reading informational text than literary text (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007). As the CCSS require a more equal representation of nonfiction text in classrooms and evidence that students can handle specific levels of text by the end of each school year, teachers have to provide and teach the literacy of nonfiction texts at every level as the complexity of these texts increases (Shanahan, 2013).

Biographies

One genre, biography, has been a staple in social studies nonfiction. Although the obvious benefit of reading biographies in elementary schools is creating connections to faraway times, places and people, they also serve the purpose of looking at social and
historical change over time. Students can use biographies to identify with people and their circumstances while also coming to an understanding that history is not an inevitable chain of chronological events. Students interacting with biographies are also learning about more than a person, they are gleaning details about entire societies during different eras. Biographies, the profile of a person's life or work, purposefully or inadvertently convey information about the social atmosphere of the time. Gender, religion, government, race and culture are all factors which lend to the attitudes of any given time. Students can use this information to draw conclusions about the past, make inferences, and develop questions about their present day world (Fertig, 2008).

Many biographies tell the stories of people or events that changed something about their own lives and the lives of others; this can be very empowering for students who in turn may take more interest in taking part in their communities and in our diverse world—principles that are important to an effective social studies curriculum. There is also a significant need for students to understand that it is not only the person as an individual, but the collective reaction of the society, those reactions which are outside of the societal norm, that play a huge factor in historical change (Fertig, 2008). Biography can be a challenging read, but with the right motivation and purposes for reading, students can create meaning beyond the history of one life.

**Textbooks**

Social studies textbooks have a reputation for being expensive, hyper-scrutinized, culturally skewed, and biased to the keyword marketplace (Schmidt, 2007). Although they are great organizers of information and good time savers, as an instructional tool the
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textbook is limited in terms of in-depth study and inquiry. With so much content to
cover, it becomes necessary to minimize the depth of topics to maximize the amount of
information published. Also, when relying on textbooks as instructional tools, there is
always the risk that without additional materials students are exposed to only one voice,
one portrayal of events, which are "tidily edited"; these texts can also have little variation
in text features, creating a stagnant literary experience (Callison, 2003). A textbook
should be used primarily as a means to structure some elements of learning, rather than
be used as a default for teaching.

Nevertheless, contemporary textbooks can be excellent tools for visual learners
and are often formatted in a way reminiscent of a web page, for example their use of side
bars, and veritably packed with information (Schmidt, 2007). Textbooks provide concise
details for reference, dates and pertinent information that can be used as building blocks
for inquiry into social studies topics. The use of a textbook as a third-level summary of
history can be used to make more sense of historical topics for students than might be
found by having them decode the information from primary sources (Callison, 2003).
Using a textbook as a guide and a resource, rather than as primary or singular
instructional tool, establishes the foundations for a social studies curriculum that
surpasses the divide between teaching the text and establishing an effective literacy
learning environment.

The use of textbooks in the social studies classroom requires students to have
experience reading nonfiction basal texts and their text features and structures. To
comprehend the text, students need to be taught what the purposes are and how to use the
text's features which include the table of contents, bulleted items, diagrams, headings, subheadings, and the index. They also need to familiarize themselves with common text structures so they know how to recognize and best use texts that are written in differing styles; styles which commonly include exemplification (concept/definition), compare/contrast, cause/effect, problem/solution, and sequential order (Frey & Fisher, 2007). Informational texts are characterized by their authenticity and accuracy, but without the literacy skills necessary to fully utilize these materials, students who would otherwise make use of textbooks could instead be lost in decoding the text.

By utilizing social studies textbooks in the classroom as literacy tools and resources, rather than primary teaching tools, teachers can enhance literacy and content attainment. Textbooks have unique features which must be practiced to be used fluently; some literacy skills are specific to informational texts. These texts can be tools for literacy and content in conjunction with standards and state or district policy. Rather than rely wholly on the textbook to supply information, teachers can apply the text to the subject more comprehensively alongside additional resources supportive of multiple intelligences.

Primary & Historical Sources

A genre of study which encompasses all of humanity and its interactions, past and present, requires the review of evidence from those events. By interacting with historical materials, students have the opportunity to make connections individually, academically, and in a social sense as they critically evaluate that information. These can be primary or secondary sources which, through interaction and discussion, create a direct line into the
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focus of study. Instruction in the types of literacy necessary to use those resources allows students to benefit from their applications in the classroom, and later in further education or in the pursuit of information for a future career, for pleasure or otherwise (Young, Moss, & Cornwell, 2007). Students can be given the opportunity to learn firsthand what a time period or a person was like, how records are kept, and make comparisons about how the world has changed.

A large part of investigating social studies topics includes the use of those primary sources. These are usually divided into three categories, one of which includes the study of physical objects and images like architecture and photographs or newsreels, while the others encompass a wide variety of written documents, both eye witness accounts and otherwise. These can include memoirs or autobiographies, diaries, letters, laws, newspapers, recipes, speeches, maps, advertisements, travel guides, census records, and many more possibilities. Each of these documents would be formatted in a different way and provide additional textual evidence about the study of the past and present undertaken by students (Schmidt, 2007).

Having these materials in the classroom, either physically or virtually (through the use of technology not limited to web searches), would allow students to interpret events on a variety of levels and give them practice reading nontraditional learning texts. Students can use these materials to draw inferences and make connections, deepening their understanding of social studies content. Another aspect of using resource materials is the potential to incorporate current events and technology into the classroom. A newspaper article or map is formatted uniquely online and presents a new challenge for
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literacy education. Many news sources for children publish online with interactive
elements or have articles available for download.

Fiction

There is research which shows that the addition of related reading materials to a
hands-on curriculum, like science, ultimately results in greater content, as well as
literacy, learning than the hands-on experiences alone (Wang & Herman, 2005). This
logic is applicable to the field of social studies. By increasing the amount of literature
available to students they are more likely to engage in the content material and make
meaningful connections. When reading narrative texts students are presented with
information on cultures, places and times in a drastically different method than what can
be expressed through a textbook. A fictional text is more visual and can create a dynamic
experience across perspective and emotions that an elementary student has never
experienced before (Altoff, Golston, 2012).

There should never be an assumption that students, by reading a fictional text,
have achieved a social studies objective. These texts are most effective when paired with
nonfiction and other materials to enhance the reading with factual content. Since fictional
stories are more adventurous by nature, there is a higher rate of engagement inherent
when using them in the classroom but they have the added effect of tying into their
nonfiction counterparts for fact checking purposes. Although there is a renewed push for
more nonfiction texts in the classroom, the prevalence of fiction makes it a genre that is
casier to find for students of varying abilities than its factual counterpart. Nevertheless,
historical fiction is a difficult genre to write with accuracy, so choosing good historical
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fiction is a critical element in providing narrative reading experiences in social studies. Selections of contemporary realistic fiction appropriate for lower elementary grades can be even harder to find for students on particular subjects due to their often starkly realistic nature. Both of these fiction literacy genres can be invaluable to the social studies reading experience.

**Historical Fiction**

These texts, accounts which provide a more relatable avenue into the study of certain eras and historical or cultural events can generate new interest in social studies topics. NCSS Elementary Teacher of the Year, Tarry Lindquist (2002) uses historical fiction to pique curiosity regardless of prior exposure to topics, detail a rich understanding of the time period at a greater depth and from alternate viewpoints, and to connect social studies across the curriculum. Historical fiction should accurately portray realistic characters in authentic settings without jeopardizing historical records. They can be used to teach children about difficult topics and initiate additional research as students compare texts and historical resources. By utilizing this genre teachers can effectively enhance both literacy instruction and social studies. The NCSS, in cooperation with the Children’s Book Council, annually publishes a list of reliable historical fiction called “Notable Children’s Trade Books in the Field of Social Studies” as well as a column in their quarterly magazine *Social Studies and the Young Learner*.

The blend of fact and fiction in historical fiction can be confusing to readers, but establishes an emotional connection along with factual information in a more accessible format than textbooks (Moss, 2003). There are four primary types of historical fiction
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which readers encounter: fictionalized memoirs, fictionalized family history, fiction based on research of a specific time period, and time travel, in which characters in the present day travel back in time to experience historical events (Youngs, Serafini, 2011).

Students who are reading narratives are immersed in a story, rather than just an outline of events; thus it is important that they have practice with authentication based tasks when reading historical fiction. They need to be able to determine if they believe the story, and if it makes sense in connection with everything else they know on the topic, which ties in with their critical literacy skills (McTigue, Thornton, & Wiese, 2013).

Historical fiction can take different forms, broadening intrigue in the genre. Diary formats, first and third person, even multiple perspective stories can be integrated into the social studies curriculum. There are picture books, beginning readers, and chapter books for all ages, much like biographies. Historical fiction picture books should be accommodated by the inclusion of additional information on the subject to build sufficient background knowledge and decipher the images. When selecting historical fiction for elementary students the perspective of the author is important to consider, as well as the characteristics of the protagonists in their given era. If the time periods are accurate, their historical input can be misinterpreted by protagonists who continuously break social norms. These can be exciting stories, but should be balanced by historically rounded accounts (McTigue, Thornton, & Weise, 2003).

Contemporary Realistic Fiction

These are the types of books students can use to understand our world for their ability to profile the societal issues of the time. Often catered to the adolescent ages,
there have been forays into younger children’s literature to show alternate points of view, and modern-day social issues like nontraditional families. Characters in these books answer questions and present the humanities and inhumanities of society through a sensitized medium (Hayward, 2005). They have honest, real life thoughts and feelings. Of course, this genre is written for the time period in which it was published, so it is an ever evolving genre that, instead of only recreating experiences otherwise lost to future elementary students, can be applied to students or their peers in current, similar situations.

Text-Based Instructional Strategies

**Self-Selected Reading, Text Sets & Reading Groups**

Social studies reading material is highly customizable. One student may be interested in biographies while another craves an action-packed time travel narrative. With attention to standards, books can be found and provided to engage each student in a variety of potential reading experiences within and outside of their comfort zones. Vocabulary, characterization, story structure, text comparisons, all of these elements of working with literature are available to a well-rounded social studies reader. When provoking interest in particular subjects, there has to be a selection of material to choose from and the time to select and interact with that material. The experience, both in the context of the reading and the essence of what was read, is even richer when students have the chance to discuss and share their ideas and conclusions. The process starts with the introduction of material that supports the fulfillment of both reading and social studies standards.
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Self-selected reading, the opportunity for a student to make a proactive selection of a particular text to read, could be especially effective for opening students to social studies content. Motivation to read stems from purpose and interest and is part of the process and the product when getting students reading; they have to be motivated to start and be motivated to continue. Children will choose to read texts which would otherwise be determined as too difficult for them, and do so with success, if they find that text interesting. We, as adults, will choose what we read based on its value to us and our interests; but, we also continue to read material that is difficult or uninteresting to fulfill needs for jobs or educational purposes (Johnson, Blair, 2003). When given the choice of reading materials students take on responsibility, independence, and are building their understanding that there are different purposes for reading.

One key to the successful integration of literacy and social studies is to collect a group of texts at different levels, of different genres, and from multiple viewpoints on a topic to maximize potential interest. In this way students are exposed to a variety of text styles while immersing themselves in the content and even enjoying the process because they have some freedom of choice in what to invest themselves in reading. Recognizing the value of reading material and that there is purpose in reading for information is a critical lesson in improving motivation to read. Providing students with choices within topic areas, a teacher can promote acquisition in literacy and content areas simultaneously.

Text sets, a mix of five to ten materials, provide the opportunity to pair and make available books on the same theme, topic or person that are both fiction and nonfiction
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and at different levels of readability; this is a practice which supports the fulfillment of
standards at different grade levels (Giorgis & Johnson, 2002). By providing a variety of
texts which all support a central theme or era, a teacher can accommodate the inevitable
range of reading and interest levels. A text set can simply be placed in the classroom for
general use during a topic of study for perusal or be integrated directly into lessons or
read-alouds. Social studies text sets can be used during time allotted for social studies or
be utilized during reading workshops for English language arts.

Literature circles and guided reading groups are used as instructional approaches
which increase literacy in terms of reading comprehension and social skills through
discussion. While the former allows students to choose and discuss their own material,
useful when chosen from a provided selection based on social studies topics, the latter
relies on the teacher working directly with a small group who demonstrate a similar skill
level in literacy (Brabham, Villaume, 2000). These methods allow students to take
ownership of the reading process and encourages students to read more, and more often,
increasing their interaction with the subject material and text. Boosting interest in a topic
is not always a simple matter, but creating an environment which supports not only the
acquisition of information in a text but using the text itself can be invaluable.

Social studies is often concerned with certain eras or themes, so giving students
the choice of which book to read on that topic, and thus which book group they will
become a part of, will give them a chance to delve without depriving them of additional
viewpoints. Each group can share their reading experience with every other, heightening
the overall interaction socially and academically. By constructing text sets and making
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them available to students, a teacher promotes the acquisition of content through self-selected texts and inquiry activities centered on the reading of those materials and bridging gaps created by interest, text complexity and time constraints.

Read-Alouds

By engaging students with a read-aloud which pertains to, or supplements, social studies content, teachers can circumvent some of the time constraints imposed by the pressure to teach the more highly tested subject areas. They can be used to introduce new topics, authors, or literature styles, and initiate discussions. Students often show an elevated interest in reading the text, or similar texts, individually after the teacher finishes reading it to the class. It is also a “primary transmitter of cultural capital and gives students access to cultural literacy” (Greene Brabham, & Lynch-Brown, 2002) and is a literary experience that surpasses literacy limitations, whether due to individual ability or to differing exposure to language and books in their respective lifetimes. Although the effectiveness of a read-aloud depends on how the book is read and how it is chosen, benefits range from significant vocabulary gains to content information retention and the application of new strategies used when reading independently (Greene Brabham, Lynch-Brown, 2002).

Books that can be used to support social studies content acquisition through read-alouds can be content specific or adaptable from a variety of non-content specific stories which reach across the picture book to chapter book gap. A picture book would take less time to read, but can carry a significant message nonetheless and can be used effectively across grade levels. For example, in *The Butterfly* (2000), a children’s picture book by
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Patricia Polacco, the fear of the Nazi era is profiled around the play of two girls who jeopardize their families' safety with their secret friendship; thus, an often brutally depicted world war is approached in an accessible format for children. The chapter book *Seedfolks* (1997), by Paul Fleischman, profiles thirteen different participants of a spontaneous community garden in a rundown, urban area breaching cultural, gender, socioeconomic, and age barriers. A book like that is multifaceted for improvising social studies instruction in terms of sociology, or race, gender and ethnic studies.

Reading aloud stories that profile difficult or edgy subject matter gives control to the teacher and creates structured interaction with the material and theme. The book can be read at a higher level than the lowest performing readers can readily read on their own and be used to fully model good fluency and reading habits. In this way, teachers can teach reading and literacy skills as they circumvent disparate skill levels. Read-alouds should be used frequently in the classroom regardless of the subject matter being read. This provides a natural context for those cultural and social reading experiences to find their way into the hectic school schedule.

**Project Based Learning**

Social studies is a subject area that meshes easily with project based learning experiences. Project-based learning (PBL), a technique which boosts content learning and problem solving (Geier et al., 2008), is highly a communicative and collaborative process. It is a child centered method of teaching which promotes authentic, investigative activities that range across mediums and culminates in a realistic product or presentation. Students assume different roles to accomplish specific goals in unique,
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hands-on activities structured to allow students the autonomy to make decisions about how to use new skills in an authentic setting. PBL experiences require students to learn central, curriculum focused, concepts through the project itself which uses a question or problem to direct students on a path of discovery (Thomas, 2000).

PBL has students, individually or in small groups, delve into a topic in greater depth over a longer period of time and can give them control over their own learning experience. A rubric can be established to monitor the progression of the projects and maintain the performance expectations of the teacher (Markham, 2011). Activities focus on investigation, finding answers to questions, and using resources from the school, fieldtrips, the internet, and members of or establishments in the community (Callison, 2006). Researching social studies topics can be accomplished through all of these formats, from touring local monuments to locating and studying texts on a feature of local, national or global economy. Because of the range of social studies themes, the customizable nature of PBL is lucrative to using research methods across medium and interest.

Students participating in PBL experiences are responsible for their own contributions to the project and the creation of a final project which displays their mastery of a concept. This mastery comes from the collection and organization of information from a variety of printed sources. In this way, project based learning is an involved process of finding, studying, and using reading materials for specific purposes. These projects can be used with a focus on literature of different genres, and immerse students fully in the content which they are studying. Whether geography, a historical
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event or any other variation of social studies topic, students can benefit from PBL opportunities to engage them in social studies content through reading.

**Technology**

In the future there is reasonable potential for the widespread inclusion and use of e-readers in classrooms. Although at present there are doubts that these ever evolving devices are worth the trouble to teach, use, and maintain in a classroom setting, there are exciting possibilities when considering their use in terms of text sets and as a novelty reading opportunity (Barack, 2011). A device could be loaded with books, tabbed websites, photos, and documents pertaining to particular eras, events, notable people throughout history and more. Current event publications designed for children could be on one device, or several. Students could take notes directly on the text, look up definitions with a touch, and carry a multitude of texts with them at one time. At-risk students may find the relative novelty of an e-reader as a starting point for approaching material they would otherwise avoid. As the popularity and capability of these e-readers accelerates, so shall their adaptability for use in the classroom.

Technology, whether through Smartboards, ELMO’s, the internet, or shared devices, offers more than just new platforms to teach literacy. They can be used to create a shared event, and make accessible types of media which could otherwise be difficult to present to the social studies classroom. There is also a stunning array of possibilities for students to view, create and interact with online literacy activities. Regardless of the medium, literacy is taught through practice and exposure. Providing reading experiences which utilize technology prepares students to continue their education in an increasingly
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... technological world and authenticates learning experiences. By considering e-readers and internet sources as valuable literacy contributors the methodology of teaching social studies expands.

**Current events**

Getting students involved in current events is a critical step in increasing their roles as citizens of a diverse world by initiating responsibility to be aware of what happens in their communities and those abroad. This builds on democratic citizenship and encourages participatory discussion. Through the use of magazines, newspapers and internet sources, students can pursue interests and develop reading habits which include an interest in the world. Many accredited news sources like *Time* magazine and *National Geographic* have publications in print along with interactive websites tailored specifically for children at different age levels. *Scholastic News* magazine can be ordered in four languages and most publications in print are available as e-book style or PDF documents.

**Recommendations**

"A truly good book teaches me better than to read it. I must soon lay it down, and commence living on its hint. What I began by reading, I must finish by acting."

--Henry David Thoreau, Author/Philosopher

A proactive, social studies mindful teacher can renew the subject area with a well-stocked and maintained classroom library, through hands on reading experiences, and by integrating social studies opportunities across the curriculum. Reading, the educational focus of a highly literacy mindful new set of standards now coming into effect across the
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country, can be integrated seamlessly across content areas and skill levels. It can be used as a supplemental tool or as a featured part of instruction and can be selected to fit individual and whole class needs. By utilizing the school and community libraries and resources, the internet, and conscientiously acquiring materials, permanently and otherwise, for the classroom, a teacher can exponentially increase the engagement of students in subject matter through reading.

The Classroom Library

One of the best resources for students when engaging in new or additional literary pursuits of a subject area is the classroom library. The classroom library can incorporate materials from the school and feature community libraries by advertising what is available, or bringing in materials to the class on loan. It can also be built over time to cover a variety of genres and literature types tailored by grade level and standard requirements. The classroom library can be adapted to contain some reference for how students can find more books and literacy opportunities in specific genres, on content specific subjects; this could be a poster or handouts containing websites, or information on local libraries. There can also be a recommendation section in the library where students can leave notes about specific books, subjects, or resources they found particularly interesting, useful or engaging to encourage student interaction.

Moss (2003) states, "About half the collection should be devoted to engaging information books and biographies, and this percentage should increase as children move through the grades. Some books should be pertinent to classroom topics of study, while others should have a broader appeal. Students can use these books for voluntary reading,
in inquiry study, reference, or browsing" (p. 63). Finding these books can take time, but supplementing the classroom library with books from the school and community library can alleviate some of the disparity between nonfiction and fiction books. It is important for students to find not only books that appeal to them, but align or expound upon the standardized topics across grade levels to ensure that their interest continues over time.

The library's social studies-friendly section has to be accessible and interactive. Early on in the school year students should be introduced to the library, the selection available, and how the collection is by no means stagnant. Using well-labeled bins, books can be organized by author, like social studies aficionado Jean Fritz, or by genre (biography, historical fiction, guidebooks, diaries, folktales, songbooks, recipes, etc.). Simply having these reading opportunities out in the open creates the initiative for students to further their interaction with social studies content outside of explicit teaching moments. A teacher who shows their interest and mindfulness through social studies favorable texts will increase the likelihood that their students will be infected with the same interest.

An additional benefit which comes from compiling an interactive classroom library is the opportunity to initiate class activities to supplement material. Social studies lessons can be brief and fit into daily schedules dominated by math, English language arts, school events and transitions between other classes. The report and discussion of current events, undertaken by the teacher, a parent or a student, can be a simple medium for working with content in a short amount of time. Creating a class book of news clippings, articles, or summaries collected by students or provided by the teacher or
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parent volunteers can be a gradual, yearlong activity that not only adds to the library but also fosters interest in the world abroad inspiring additional inquiry into social studies topics. Past compilations can be kept and shared with future classes, giving comprehensive reviews of time and how the beliefs and needs of our society change over time.

Social studies is a subject that is closely tied with reading, and should be supported by giving students an array of reading experiences and opportunities. These experiences should not be isolated but purposeful, from the selection of material to the discussion of subject matter informally and structured within a lesson or guided reading group. Materials must be provided, used, and commented upon, and methods to find and use additional materials should also be taught to expand the literacy growth of elementary students. A classroom library can be a living thing that is tailored to encourage the inquisitive natures of elementary students and make available material that is readable at all levels to support content acquisition through the ever required, ever wondrous act of reading.

Conclusion

"Reading is a basic tool in the living of a good life."

--Joseph Addison, Author/Politician

The combination of reading and social studies, supported by NCSS and CCSS standards alike throughout K-5 education, is inevitable. How reading and social studies are linked, how they can be used to support one another, is up to the educators who take an interest in using the two effectively together. Excellent reading opportunities do not
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have to downplay the subject matter. Even state or district mandated textbooks can be used effectively when paired with different text sets of varying genres and through interaction with resource materials. A new era of social studies is possible with the addition of purposeful reading experiences that have the possibility to create not only socially aware students who are good, confident, and experienced readers, but life-long readers with an interest in the broader world.

Social studies is a subject area that can be integrated into other subject areas; it is a versatile area of study and not just old history. Rather than slipping in social studies content through infrequent lessons, texts of all sorts, historical and current, can be provided to engage students within their general ELA instruction. By working with social studies themes in literature circles, reading groups, read-aloud sessions and as an option for self-selected reading, students can pursue social studies content within and outside of hectic classroom schedules. The act of reading is a focus in all curriculums and across all content areas, it is a critical part of education; but, attaining greater levels of literacy can be accomplished through the use of a content area as reliant on text as social studies.

Better readers are made from readers who are given the time and motivation to read. Critical thinkers, college and career ready students must be versed and practiced in all elements of literacy; our new standards on this point are clear. This only highlights the use of social studies as a vehicle which supplies fictional and nonfictional texts, media types which range from historical documents to online articles and to passages of textbooks. By applying social studies content to reading experiences, students are given
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instruction not only on text features and different approaches to reading diverse genres, they are immersed in the standards which are so often secondary to other academic areas. Students who receive meaningful social studies instruction through reading are applying themselves to literacy and the content area without subverting one over the other.

An essential part of education is the representation of multiple disciplines. In a time of shifting standards which demand more focus on reading and reading nonfiction texts, social studies content can be used to deliver a wide range of literacy events to satisfy reading standards. At the same time, reading standards can parallel social studies standards as the pursuit of those reading experiences establishes meaningful associations with social studies content. The focus on reading in social studies does not have to be the act of reading and all the facilities thereof; instead, reading can be used to enliven a subject area that is not equally represented in schools. It is not the reading for the sake of reading undertaken in the classroom, but the reading undertaken in pursuit of higher comprehension and deeper involvement in topics of study which can renovate student and teacher understanding of social studies.

In the CCSS for English language arts & literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects there is a category of standards titled “Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity” which apply to grades K-5 (see Fig. 4). To fulfill these standards, texts must be selected by teachers to ensure that students are provided with particular text complexities in varying genres and with different levels of support at each grade level. In these terms, the attentiveness and engagement of the reader both individually and in groups, the purpose and type of the reading, and the proficiency of the student while
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reading texts at an appropriate level must all be taken into account by the teacher when selecting texts. There are a multitude of tools available through the CCSS for teachers to accommodate literacy practices effectively and comprehensively for their students.

"In the Standards, qualitative dimensions and qualitative factors refer to those aspects of text complexity best measured or only measurable by an attentive human reader, such as levels of meaning or purpose; structure; language conventionality and clarity; and knowledge demands." Appendix A

"The terms quantitative dimensions and quantitative factors refer to those aspects of text complexity, such as word length or frequency, sentence length, and text cohesion, that are difficult if not impossible for a human reader to evaluate efficiently, especially in long texts, and are thus today typically measured by computer software." Appendix A

"While the prior two elements of the model focus on the inherent complexity of text, variables specific to particular readers (such as motivation, knowledge, and experiences) and to particular tasks (such as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the questions posed) must also be considered when determining whether a text is appropriate for a given student. Such assessments are best made by teachers employing their professional judgment, experience, and knowledge of their students and the subject." Appendix A

Figure 4. CCSS Model of Text Complexity.

By remaining conscious of social studies as its own unique and powerful academic entity, a teacher can create teachable moments and promote literacy within the parameters of any given classroom. Although social studies is a content area of many interests, students require guidance to access the subject in a way that makes sense to the individual and the group as a whole. This variability can easily be expressed through the many texts associated with social studies instruction. It is the duty of teachers of every
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subject to teach reading, and in social studies pointedly selected readings can teach social studies just as purposefully. Reading should not smother the content, it should embrace it and create additional, ever scaffolding knowledge that spans across topic and theme. Social studies and reading are symbiotic; they support one another with positive gains to both sides, as long as they are paired effectively.

Recently in education there has been a movement to support the development of the whole child; not only the mind, but the character or creative spark (Miller, 2008). Social studies is a content area devoted to social awareness which builds character and promotes global responsibility and responsiveness. As adults we do not recreationally choose to read texts that do not interest us or read so that we can write a summary or bubble in the answers on a multiple choice test. We read to fulfill our natural curiosity and if in the elementary grades we can facilitate the acquisition of reading attitudes supportive of the ideals inherent in social studies education, then teachers cannot help but produce generations of mindful, proactive readers. Due to the exposure of students to materials beyond a handful of textbooks and narratives and reaching across all literary mediums, goals of career, college and future readiness on a national and global scale can be attained.

It is clear that social studies is a subject area overlooked in favor of highly tested educational goals in literacy; but, it is undeniable that this eclectic range of content is a nearly irresistible source of academic, social, and global exploration and growth which necessitates literacy in many forms. As educational reforms continue to adapt our curriculums teachers have renewed opportunities to customize their learning experience and the education of their students to support social studies and reading together.
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Combined, these subject areas are more powerful than alone. Each, supporting the other, efficiently addresses educational goals while providing a multitude of services for young minds.
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