

Bridging Children's Literature Together with Social Studies
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Overview

Rationale

Objectives

Strategies

Classroom Activities

Annotated Bibliography/Resources

Appendices-Standards

Overview

When I recollect my experience of social studies in elementary school, many memories come to mind. They are not positive memories. The memories that come to mind, are "It was dull and boring, "I hated it", "All we did was read from the textbook and answer questions at the end of each chapter", "The teacher wasn't excited about teaching it", "The textbook was out of date and not very interesting." I feel that students today have the same experience with social studies.

Social studies is 1) used as a filler subject that can be pulled in and out of the curriculum 2) In comparison with reading and math, social studies is viewed as the least important subject, 3) It is often usurped by assemblies, field trips and other special programs. As a result the social studies curriculum has been viewed by most children as unmotivating and uninspirational (Jarolimek 1990).

The scope and sequence for the Pittsburgh public school social studies programs are designed according to the following hierarchy: **Child/Self**: At this stage, usually initiated at the kindergarten level, students are given opportunities to investigate topics most familiar to them, including their persons, going to school, rules for safe living, and working together. **Families**: Here children are exposed to aspects of what families do, as well as the world beyond their own families. Topics at this level may include the relationship of the individual to the family, families and their needs, how families work, and families in neighborhoods. **Communities/Neighborhoods**: At this stage of the social studies program, students are introduced to neighborhoods and communities. Typical topics include transportation and communication, community services, celebrating holidays, how neighborhoods change, and rural and urban communities. **Cities/Country**: At this level, students are exposed to information on larger community concepts. Usually comparisons are made between communities and cities in terms of the parts of a city, life in early cities, local government, comparative cultures, country versus rural living, and locations of cities. **State/Regions**: This level of the social studies curriculum includes information on different sections of the United States as well as various geographical characteristics of selected states. Emphasis includes comparative studies on desert, mountain, plains, and forest regions of the United States and other selected areas within

our country. **Nation/United States:** The primary emphasis at this level is on the United States, although it may include references to Canada and/ or Latin America. Topics include the founding of our country, historical facts, geographical data, chronological, and our cultural and ethnic heritage. **World:** This level often includes a large number of topics dealing with either the western or eastern hemispheres or both. Areas covered include ancient civilization, Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. At this level the curriculum is very crowded and diverse.

I teach second grade at Madison Elementary. The Pittsburgh public school social studies curriculum has five major themes: location, place, human/environment interaction, movement and regions. The curriculum also focuses on providing students with a general knowledge of the city and people of Pittsburgh. One major understanding of the curriculum is the many ways they interact both socially and economically. The curriculum for the second grade begins with neighborhoods and communities. At this stage of the social studies program, students are introduced to neighborhoods and communities.

A neighborhood is defined as a place where people live near one another. A neighborhood may be large and consist of many houses and other community buildings, or it may be small, existing in a much larger community or apart from a large urban environment. Basically, large communities have many neighborhoods and small communities have a dearth of neighborhoods (Jarolimek 1990).

The most important concept for students to understand is that a neighborhood is a group of people and families who live close to one another. The closeness represents a sharing of responsibilities, rights and obligations. A neighborhood is a much more than an area with a group of houses. The neighborhood is place where people who know each other and support each other (Chapin 1992).

I hope to instill in them a sense of belonging. This will help my students grow into responsible citizen of Pittsburgh.

I plan to teach the curriculum with a “hands-on-minds on” approach. I want my students actively involved. My students will actively participate, actively make designs, and actively learn from first hand experiences. When students can manipulate information, instead of simply digesting data, learning blossoms tremendously.

The overall goal of my curriculum is to help teachers who are frustrated by a lack of sufficient social studies materials as well as requirements to use outdated or lack luster text. Teachers just like their students, may feel that social studies textbooks are less stimulating than other text, but are required to use them whether they like it or not.

In my unit I plan to show how to infuse the use of children’s literature into the entire elementary curriculum. Educators around the country are seeking ways to expand social studies and make it part of a truly integrated curriculum.

Social studies is viewed as a book –bound topic that is, the information, knowledge, and skills to be taught and learned come mainly from textbooks.

Children have problems reading social studies textbooks. Two problems young children have in reading elementary social studies textbooks stem from lack of experiential background and complex social studies content. (Metcalf 1980; Rowell 1978; Anderson and Armbruster 1984)

Students who have traveled or lived in many different places are often the students most genuinely interested in social studies. Students who have never left their

neighborhood or local community may see little point in learning about distant places. Students without a sense of personal or family history may find it difficult to relate to the historical settings found in their text.

The difficulty of the social studies content stems mainly from the heavy technical concepts of the social studies textbook passages. Technical concepts are one or two word “ideas” which have special meaning in social studies (for example: government, immigrants, labor and political party). These words may have little or no meaning for students. Social studies textbooks are know for heavy technical concepts. Hard-to-pronounce names of cities, faraway countries, and foreign language names contribute to the complexity of textbook content (Chapin 1992).

Books and reading are vehicles by which students can explore every dimension of their world. Teachers can facilitate those discoveries through a literature-based social studies program. I am hoping to show how literature based social studies curriculum will enhance the teaching of social studies. Children’s literature in the social studies curriculum should be a natural and normal part of student’s experiences with social studies. Literature also helps children develop a rich appreciation for the social studies concepts, values, and generalizations contained within good literature. Traditional methods of teaching social studies have prompted the memorization of names, places and dates. The use of fiction, nonfiction, narrative, and expository books throughout grades k-3 provides new possibilities for clarifying concepts, motivating students, and expanding the curriculum (Wachs 1974).

Rationale

The major mission of social studies education is to help children learn about the social world in which they live and how it got that way; to learn to cope with social realities; and to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to help shape an enlightened humanity. Social studies focuses specifically on citizenship education, which means learning to participate in group life. The outer edges of that participation for today’s child are the global community. (Haas, Mary and Sunal, Cynthia).

Students learn the characteristics of rural, urban, and suburban communities and how they are dependent upon one another and create a larger community the United States. The contributions of people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds and the rights and responsibilities of individuals within a community are emphasized. Community is a central theme in the social studies curriculum during the early primary years. This theme builds on students’ expanding knowledge of their own communities by allowing them to explore their own communities and also communities in other cultures, in other historical times (Barry 1971). The curriculum for second grade begins with neighborhoods and communities. Communities/neighborhoods: At this stage of the social studies program, students are introduced to neighborhoods and communities. Typical topics include transportation and communication, community services, celebrating holidays, how neighborhoods change, and rural and urban communities. I hope to instill in them a sense of belonging. This will help my students grow into responsible citizens of Pittsburgh.

Students will learn that they are members of a number of different groups including the school and local community. While exploring the identity of the schools and community, they will learn that communities have unique characteristics that are of

value and should be respected. They will learn that various communities have similarities and differences.

Objectives:

There are various objectives for this unit. I will state them in this section, which also will include identifying the standards. The objectives will be taught over a period of time.

The NCSS Standards are intentionally integrative and multidisciplinary. That is, several traditional social studies disciplines (sociology, history, political science, geography, anthropology, and economics) may be blended to form a more cohesive look at a topic or theme. This does not diminish the import of those disciplines, but rather provides classroom teachers with a plethora of extended teaching and learning opportunities throughout the entire social studies curriculum (Savage and Armstrong 1987).

- Students will know that people belong to groups such as schools and communities.
- Students will know that groups have similarities and differences.
- Students will know that communities have natural and constructed features.
- Students will know weather and seasonal changes influence a community.
- Students will identify and describe the components of a community.
- Students will value the contribution of the people working in the community.
- Students will demonstrate actions that reflect positive attitudes toward the school community.
- Students will identify and describe the roles of people within a community.

The students will achieve these objectives by participating in various activities that require them to speak to others, to listen to one another, and to cooperate with one another. They will also participate with hands-on- activities. These activities will help students recognize the importance of communities and that citizens have certain responsibilities. They will also recognize that communities and countries have histories, and be able to compare and contrast communities today with those in the past.

Communication 2, 3, 5 and 6.

All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.

All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.

All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.

All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication and separating fact from opinion.

Citizenship 7 and 8

All students demonstrate their skills of communicating, negotiating and cooperating with others.

All students demonstrate that they can work effectively with others.

All students demonstrate an understanding of the various roles they can play as citizens through participation in a community service project.

Classroom Activities

Activity: 1

Book Bibliography

In Coal Country by Judith Hendershot

Book Summary:

A child growing up in a coal-mining community finds both excitement and hard work in a life deeply affected by the local industry.

Theme: Neighborhoods and Community

Objective: After completing this activity the student should be able to increase his/her awareness of the make-up of the immediate community

Activity

1. Talk with students in a group setting about the community in which they live. Lead the discussion to draw on students' awareness of buildings, street, parks, or features unique to the community.
2. Plan and conduct a class field trip to observe the actual make-up of the community. Ask the students to make notes to help in constructing a mode of the community.

3. Return to the classroom to construct the model community. Ask the students to assist in drawing in outline form the streets or roads that comprise the community as they have viewed it. The plan may be first drawn on the chalkboard and then transferred to the butcher paper placed on the floor.
4. Direct the students to work individually, in pairs, or in small groups to make buildings from cereal boxes and art supplies.
5. Place the cereal boxes in appropriate spots on the street and roads drawn on the paper.
6. Make traffic lights, street signs, trees, flowers, grass, etc. from various art supplies to add realistic interest.
7. Provide time and opportunity for the students to talk freely about the model.

Activity: 2

Book Bibliography

Miss Rumphius by Barbara Cooney

Book Summary: Like her grandfather, Alice Rumphius longs to travel around the world and live by the sea. Her grandfather advises her that she must also do one other thing: make the world more beautiful.

Theme: Neighborhoods and Community

Objective: Children will interview a classroom visitor to learn about another community and discover what it has in common with their own.

Activity:

1. Create a take-home letter asking family members if they know of anyone who has recently moved to the area from another community who would be willing to share information about that community with the class.
2. Once you have contacted this person, suggest that he or she bring to class memorabilia of his or her former community: maps, picture post cards, photographs, newspapers, and so forth.
3. In preparation for the visit, have children think about questions they might ask their visitor about his or her original community. Explain that the questions should help them learn in what ways their community and the other community are alike and how they differ. As children volunteer ideas, write them on newsprint taped to the chalkboard.

Sample questions:

- What kind of community do you live in? A small town, city, or suburb?
- Does it have more people or fewer than our community?

- What do you have more of: trees, fields, houses, or big buildings.
- How big are the schools? How many playgrounds are there?
- What kinds of transportation do people use?
- What landforms are there? Is it hilly or flat? What bodies of water are there?
- What is the climate like? Does it snow in the winter? Is it very hot in the summer?

4. Have children interview their visitor in a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere. This might include supplying a comfortable chair and refreshments. If possible, have the children seated informally, for example, in a semicircle on the floor. Pre-select children to ask the questions you have prepared. You may wish to make an audiotape of the interview.

Activity: 3

Book Bibliography

Mr. Griggs' Work by Cynthia Rylant

Book Summary: Mr. Griggs has worked in the post office for many years. He loves his job so much that it is all he can think about. The story deals with the events that happen when he gets sick one day and cannot work.

Theme: Neighborhoods and Community

Objective: As a result of this activity, students will:

1. As a group, list many, varied, and unusual jobs that people might have.
2. Identify the purpose of the work done by their parents either in the home or outside of the home.
3. Become aware of and appreciate many different jobs that make a successful community.
4. Involve parents in a school learning activity.

Activity:

1. Make a list together as a class of the many jobs people might have.
2. Bring in a "tool of the trade" of one or both of their parents. The child should be able to explain the tool as a part of their parent's works. (Examples: wrench, computer paper, measuring spoon, pampers.)
3. Parents may come in to demonstrate their "tool of the trade."
4. The children will draw and write (or dictate) a story about a person using their parent's tool.

5. The children will draw and tell about what they might like to do when they grow up.

Activity: 4

Book Bibliography

Shaker Lane by Alice Provensen and Martin Provensen

Book Summary: Shaker Lane is peopled by an odd assortment of bucolic characters. They live simply, are always friendly, and require only the basic necessities of life. But a reservoir changes their life-covering it up, in fact-and another piece of rural America becomes a memory.

Theme: Neighborhoods and Community

Objective: Children will write short articles about events that have taken place in their neighborhoods and assemble the articles to neighborhood newsletters.

Activity:

1. Divide the class into groups of four or five. Tell the children that you would like them to be neighborhood reporters. Explain that a reporter who writes a news story always answers these five questions in the story: Who? What? When? Why? How? Write those five questions on the board.
2. Next, ask the children to think about newsworthy events that have taken place recently in their neighborhoods. To help children get started, you might want to mention some of these events: someone moved into or away from the neighborhood; someone brought a new baby home; someone ran for public office; someone was hurt, became ill, or recovered from an illness; someone got a new pet; someone won an award; someone took a neat trip; the neighborhood held a block party; everyone worked together to plant a community garden.
3. Tell the class that each child in the group should choose a different event to report, and then write a short story about that event. Remind everyone to include an attention-grabbing headline and to be sure to answer each of the six reporters' questions in their stories. Also encourage children to include a drawing or photo to illustrate the event for their readers.
4. Have each group assemble its stories into a newsletter, stapling the pages together and adding the title "Neighborhood News" to the first newsletter page. Then ask the groups to share their newsletters with the class, either orally or by putting the newsletter on a shelf where everyone can read them.

Activity: 5

Book Bibliography

Peter's Place by Sally Grindley

Book Summary: Peter lives in an ecologically rich place full of birds, seals, otters, seaweed, and shore grass. An oil tanker runs aground offshore and spills its cargo on the shore. Peter and his neighbors work tirelessly to rid the coast and its inhabitants of the oil, but only time can erase the scars from their environment.

Theme: Neighborhoods and community

Objective: Students will express a personal view of the land areas, buildings, schools, stores, and cultural events that make their community unique.

Activity:

1. In preparation for the activity, brainstorm with students a list of land areas, schools, stores, cultural events, or people that would “advertise,” or show off the best features of their community.
2. To help students in brainstorming, have available local newspapers, picture maps, or brochures that highlight geographical features or cultural celebrations held throughout the year.
3. Tell students that they can work in pairs or individually to design and create a “community Brochure” that would attract new residents or visitors to their neighborhood or community. Students can create the brochure by drawing and/or cutting and pasting images from existing publications.
4. Let students share their completed brochures with another class. You might also consider planning a hallway display of Community Brochures near the front office or in another visible area in your school.

Activity: 6

Book Bibliography

The Village of Round and Square Houses by Ann Grifalconi

Book Summary: In the Cameroons of Central Africa exists an isolated village named Tos. In that village the women live in round houses and the men live in square houses. The story of how this came to be is told through the eyes of a young girl as she shares a beautiful legend about community and its people.

Theme: Neighborhoods and community

Objective: Children will create helpful books about local businesses to show what resources are available to their community.

Activity:

1. Discuss with students the different types of businesses in their community. To stimulate children's thinking have them look at newspapers and advertising supplements for local establishments.
2. Make a list of children's contributions on the chalkboard. Help them list a variety of business establishments, medical centers, supermarkets, shoe stores, or restaurants.
3. Choose one of the businesses children name. Ask children to close their eyes and "picture in their minds" that place of business. Encourage children to visualize by asking such questions as:
 - What does the front of the building look like? Is there a window display? Is there a sign? What does it tell you about what it is like inside?
 - What does it look like inside? Are there desks? Counters? Special equipment? Things for sale? Special gadgets, like computers, cash registers, copy machines?
 - Who is inside? What work are they doing? Do they wear special uniforms?
 - Are there people inside who do not work there? What are they doing?
4. List children's answers on the chalkboard. Repeat the exercise with two or three other businesses.
5. Divide the class into small groups, and assign one business to each group. Tell children that they are going to make a book about each business. Assign one child to make the cover of the book by drawing and labeling an outside view of the business. Other children can draw one of the scenes in the list.
6. Have children write one or two simple sentences to describe each scene they drew. Bind the pictures and sentences together to make a book about that business.
7. Pair the groups and have them exchange their books, reading aloud their descriptive sentences. Encourage them to explore what is alike and different about the two businesses.

Strategies

The following strategies I discuss will be guidelines, from which children can grow in social studies. These guidelines will lay the foundation for children to make sense out of their world. By exploring with students what is in fact closest and most familiar to them: family, friends, school, neighborhood, a teacher can help students begin to understand the interconnections between the self and world.

1. Students need to be provided with a basic body of knowledge that will form the foundation. Being able to identify goods and services may be important in helping students gain an appreciation of the neighborhood in which they live. Meaningful social studies programs must move beyond these facts.
2. Children need to use social studies information in a practical and personal sense. Social studies instruction should give students the opportunity to put their knowledge into practice, to see social studies as a daily human activity, and to increase their appreciation of the world around them.
3. Students must take some responsibility for their own learning. They need the opportunity to make their own choices. Students, who are given choices, begin to gain control over their personal learning. They become more willing to learn just to learn.
4. Students need to understand the interrelationships that exist in the world. They need to comprehend the role social studies plays in those understandings. Students need to get “their hands dirty” in social studies. They should try out

Several approaches, look around, and get involved. This is part of the learning cycle.

5. Students need to be stimulated in different ways. Social studies are reinforced when students have multiple and varied learning opportunities.
6. Children should be able to put their knowledge into practice. They should use social studies information in practical and personal ways. Students can have the skills, but using them is the most important thing.
7. Children need to be engaged with critical thinking opportunities. This must take place in their world. This will allow them to set their own learning goals and satisfy through self-discovery (Wadsworth 1971).

This section will also include different teaching strategies. Strategies can assist children in forming concepts and generalizations. It's important for teachers to be aware of different teaching strategies, just as there are many ways to teach, there are many ways students learn. Therefore, teachers should be aware of the strategies and master a few strategies at a time, until they feel comfortable with all. No single strategy is always best.

I will describe the strategies according to the learning cycle. In the first part of a lesson, the exploration, and to the last part of a lesson, the expansion is described first. These strategies are appropriate for less teacher guided part of an activity. They include role playing, simulations, guest speakers, and field trips.

In role playing students role play situations with which they are familiar. Role playing helps students develop empathy, values and morals. Students are required to articulate and criticize the views and behaviors of the characters in role play, which helps students, become conscious of their values.

In simulations activities, they are similar to a real world situation or problem. The situation or problem is simplified for use by students in a short time period. Students are provided with descriptions of their tasks, roles, and the problem situation. Students apply their knowledge and skills as they solve the simulation's problem.

In guest speaking, the teacher needs to carefully prepare the speaker and students, to ensure the maximum learning is taking place. Guest speakers are always enjoyed with

great interest by students. Guest speakers don't just have to talk; they can bring collections and artifacts, and spend most of the time answering questions. Student should also spend time working with the speaker's topic prior to the visit.

With field trips, students can focus on an opportunity to meet with people, or an opportunity to explore a site. Field trips can be meaningful as long as they produce meaningful learning. Teachers should prepare for the trip by focusing on what, will happen before, during, and after the trip. Field trips, like guest speakers are most often included in the expansion phase.

The strategies most frequently used in more of the teacher-guided parts of the lesson are: direct instruction, questioning, learning centers, and games.

Direct instruction is accomplished through lecture mixed with teacher-students interactions involving questions and answers, review and practice, and the correction of student errors. This type of lecture is highly organized and focuses on a limited amount of clearly identified facts, rules, or action sequences.

There are many question strategies. A questioning strategy refers to the types of questions asked, including the complexity of the questions, their goals, and the order in which such questions are asked.

In learning centers, the opportunity to choose comes with the belief that students can best select the way to learn. Learning centers involve students in making choices among the activities they do at the center and in evaluating their progress.

Not only should teachers beware of the different teaching strategies and how they can assist in forming concepts and generalizations, they should know how to help students learn social studies content that is meaningful to them. This instructional research-base approach is called the learning cycle.

The learning cycle approach I will discuss focuses on teaching the content of social studies. The learning cycle approach can best be used as part of an instructional program. The learning cycle is an approach supported by research studies as effective and is used by many educators to help students restructure personal ideas so that their misconceptions are reduced ().

The underlying principle of the learning cycle focuses on helping the student generate personal knowledge and form accurate ideas that are based on the student's own investigations of materials and events.

Annotated Bibliography

Fredricks. *Social Studies through Children's Literature*. Libraries Unlimited, Inc., Englewood, Co. 1991

This text teaches how to infuse the use of children's literature into the entire elementary curriculum, especially social studies.

Cythia Szymanski Sunal and Mary Haas. *Social Studies and the elementary/middle student*. Harcourt Brace Jovanich, Orlando, Fl, 1993.

This book is rich in examples and illustration of how to teach social studies. It also provides examples of learning cycles for all grade levels.

Tom V. Savage and David G. Armstrong. *Effective Teaching in Elementary Social Studies*. Macmillan Publishing Company. , 1987.

This text shows a systematic approach for organizing instruction in social studies.

John Jarolimek. *Social Studies in Elementary Education*. Macmillan Publishing Company. 1990.

June Chapin and Rosemary Messick. *Elementary Social Studies*. Longman Publishing Group. 1992

This text exposes what is basic and specific to teaching the social studies in elementary grades. It also focuses on topics essential to elementary-classroom social students.

Boden, Margaret. *Jean Piaget*. New, N.Y. Viking Press. 1979

Wachs, Harry. *Piaget's Theory in Practice-Thinking Goes to School*. Oxford University: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974.

This text shows how we can prepare our children to develop their full potential as “thinking” human beings.

Wadsworth, Barry. *Piaget's Theory of Cognitive and Affective Development*. White Plains. NY: Longman Inc., 1971.

This text introduces Jean Piaget's work on cognitive and intellectual development and his studies on affective development.

Appendices-Standards

Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

- 1.1 Learn to Read Independently
- 1.2 Reading Critically in All Content Areas
- 1.3 Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature
- 1.5 Analyze and make critical judgments
- 1.6 Speaking and Listening

Academic Standards for Citizenship

- 1.7 Communicating, negotiating and cooperating with others
- 1.8 Working effectively with others.

Web Sites

<http://pbs.org/rogers/> This is a PBS site dedicated to the Mr. Rogers television program. It allows viewers to travel through his neighborhood and visit different individuals. There are many activities for children and adults.

<http://www.eyesofachild.com/>

Students can take a trip with 12 children as they guide viewers through their respective neighborhoods in New York City.

<http://www.kqed.org/tv/productions/hood/>

Visit the various neighborhoods in one of the great American cities-San Francisco. Lots of detail and cultural information is available on this site.

<http://r2.gsa.gov/fivept/fphome.htm>

This site provides an archeological history of an urban neighborhood in New York City. It shows artifacts from the area and a visual tour of the urban community.

<http://designltd.com/cats/houston/houston.htm>

In this site, two cats lead you on a tour of Houston, Texas. They cover all of the major areas and provide great pictures of a large urban area.

<http://www.centrepont.org.uk/start.asp>

This United Kingdom site is about homelessness. Here one can participate in a virtual homelessness game. In the game, students are asked to make decisions about how they would survive on the streets.

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/3cities/>

This is an incredible site that compares three cities: Alexandria in 1C.E., Cordoba in 1000 C.E., and New York City in 2000 C.E.

<http://www-geoimages.berkely.edu/GeoImages.html>

This site provides panoramic and photographs of cities around the world.

<http://www.indo.com/distance/>

At this site students can list any two cities in the world and the site will automatically calculate the distance between them.

