

What is the Source of Inquiry?

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Welcome to a special set of online methods texts designed to support your construction of inquiry learning through primary source documents in social studies education! This elementary edition supports methods instruction for elementary-level classrooms. The secondary edition (a separate volume) supports methods instruction tailored for the middle and secondary grades. Both texts were generously supported by a Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) grant from the Library of Congress. NCSS is a proud member of the TPS Consortium, which is comprised of educational organizations nationwide to support high-quality teaching and learning using the vast and free public collections of the Library. We acknowledge the significance of the Library of Congress in supporting the needs of methods instructors and pre-service teachers nationwide by providing free access to its primary source materials, which are found throughout these chapters.

These innovative online texts represent several departures from more traditional methods texts common in social studies educator preparation programs. First, these texts were designed to exist as fully online resources. With the availability of primary documents changing—and expanding—rapidly in our digital age, we opted for online texts in which each chapter is independently accessible as well as being part of the pdf version of the entire methods text. We think the format will enable you to choose which chapters and sources are most useful to your methods class.

Second, while each chapter is a stand-alone resource designed to supplement existing methods resources you might use, each text can be used in its entirety to enhance your methods instruction. While the content of each chapter is different, they share a unique connective thread: that the consideration of which sources to use in lesson and unit planning—and specifically primary source documents—is a fundamental practice in good social studies pedagogy.

Third, as the texts evolved, it became clear that they are useful for all educators, regardless of the level of experience or grade taught. While we envisioned these texts as supporting methods instructors in teacher preparation programs, we believe that educators at all levels of learning and experience will benefit from using them. Methods instructors should find ample content and strategies to help pre-service teachers build a repository of lesson and unit plans—and curriculum inquiries—using primary source collections. Mentor teachers can follow up by supporting their teacher interns and the inquiry learning they experience in methods classes. All teachers and supervisors will find strong curriculum conversations and plans through a careful review of individual chapters of interest—or the entire text. We invite all social studies professionals to expand their pedagogical practice through these texts.

No matter where you are on your social studies teaching journey, we hope these texts support your passion and expertise in structuring an inquiry-based classroom through the use of primary sources. The texts are built on the Inquiry Arc for social studies learning developed in the [College, Career, and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework for Social Studies State Standards](#). The C3 Framework was released in 2013 and published by NCSS based on a partnership with hundreds of social studies educators and over a dozen social studies-focused organizations. It has since been adopted or adapted into the social studies standards by a majority of states and, thus, is a significant source of design and implementation of social studies curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development for grades K–12.

The C3 Framework and its Inquiry Arc were chosen as the organizational basis for these texts, both because NCSS is a proud and active supporter of professional standards and learning built on this Framework and also because the Framework models and supports how primary sources work in all four dimensions of the Inquiry Arc.

- *Dimension 1: Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries.* What questions can we consider for social studies inquiry in grades K–6 or grades 6–12?
- *Dimension 2: Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools.* What does interdisciplinary practice look like in order to prepare all students for college, career, and civic life? What is a case study that helps us structure interdisciplinary learning with primary sources?
- *Dimension 3: Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence.* How do we access and select specific primary sources to answer our inquiry question? What are proven strategies for working with primary sources? What accommodations, scaffolds, and considerations should we consider with primary source use? How do we supplement additional resources with our primary sources?
- *Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action.* How do we assess student learning through primary sources and through answers to an inquiry question? What do we do with our “answered questions”? In other words, how we can apply the concept of “informed action” as an action from our inquiry learning?

Each chapter has been carefully researched and written to provide stimulation for both forming your own compelling question and also for constructing your own curriculum inquiry that proceeds through the four dimensions of the C3 Inquiry Arc. The chapters culminate in planning for a conclusion within Dimension 4 to help students model and participate in an informed action activity. We feel that Dimension 4 is an unintentionally overlooked or misunderstood part of the inquiry process, largely due to time constraints in the instructional day. These texts seek to clarify the central role of Dimension 4 in social studies inquiry by highlighting ways to leverage primary sources within your constructed inquiry to provide opportunities for informed action.

The chapter writers are mindful that even the strongest primary source collections may be works-in-progress due to the general availability of the sources themselves or sometimes due to the fiscal and human resources required to find and properly curate them for educational

use. While this project is largely grounded in accessing and using the vast primary source collections of the Library of Congress, chapter authors also draw from other primary source collections as appropriate and acknowledge the limitations that can arise when sourcing documents, depending on the inquiry question being asked in the curriculum. (One limitation is that, unfortunately, photographs are impossible to find before the mid-19th century, for an understandable reason!) Thus, each chapter includes the context for the content and theme, a rationale for classroom practice, a walk-through inquiry development in all four Dimensions of the C3 Inquiry Arc, and a conclusion on the importance of the topic for teaching social studies inquiry through primary sources. Each chapter also provides annotated resources from both the Library of Congress’s vast collections, from NCSS, and from other reputable sources and educational organizations.

Let’s get ready for social studies inquiry!

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