

Getting to the Core: Using Digital Resources to Enhance Content-Based Literacy in the Social Studies

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With the implementation of the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*, teachers across the United States are expanding their integrated approach to social studies instruction and literacy studies. They are challenged to infuse text and narratives linked to projects that engage students in reading and writing and that explore topics meaningful to them. In this article, we present free, easily accessible, high quality digital resources that enhance content-based literacy in the social studies and highlight exemplary models of integration.

Among the many changes accompanying the transition to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is a shift toward having students read increasingly complex nonfiction or informational material to “build knowledge, enlarge experience, and broaden worldviews.”¹ Before the CCSS, more than 75 percent of reading in the early grades was fiction.² As a result, students in the middle grades may not have a well developed schema for different topics because of limited exposure to social studies content in elementary school. In the intermediate, middle, and secondary classrooms, the Common Core promotes discipline-specific literacy strategies that stimulate students’ curiosity, provoke questions, and supply evidence for historical accounts.

Award Winning Texts

The Common Core State Standards emphasize the process skills of the cur-

riculum as well as text types. Many educators, therefore, are seeking resources that expose students to different genres, build background knowledge and support content learning, explore diverse perspectives, and introduce students to specialized vocabulary.³ CCSS offers text exemplars, including stories, drama, poetry, and informational texts,⁴ but teachers will need to build upon these resource lists with additional high quality children’s literature in the social studies.

Identifying appropriate resources has been simplified in recent years with easy web access to lists of books reviewed and recommended by professional associations and agencies. When selecting books from these lists, however, teachers should be aware that the books may lack the characteristic text and linguistic features found in informational books. It is not unusual, for example, for books that use a narrative structure to appear

on content area trade book lists. Social studies informational texts have a primary purpose of conveying information about the natural or social world, and they include distinctive text structures, features, and language. This text ranges from newspaper and magazine articles to digital information to nonfiction trade books to textbooks and reference materials. Conversely, *narrative* text is primarily written to entertain or relate an experience, and follows a story structure with characters, setting, goals, plot or action, resolution, and a theme. There are also texts that include elements of both instructional and narrative books (e.g., biographies, poetry). When selecting from these web sources, teachers not only need to examine the books for informational text structures and features, but they also should review the books for content accuracy, currency, and bias (e.g., gender, ethnicity, ableness, socioeconomic status).

Scaffolding Texts and Introducing Multiple Perspectives

The Common Core encourages inquiry-based learning in which teachers facilitate scaffolded reading experiences, rather than delivering content through direct instruction. One strategy is to introduce students to reading materi-

Associations and Agencies that Award or Identify High-Quality Children’s Literature in Social Studies

Name	Selection Criteria	Website
Association for Library Service to Children Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Award	Most distinguished informational book published in the United States in English during the preceding year	www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/awardsgrants (click on Book & Media Awards, then click on Sibert Medal)
Boston Globe–Horn Book Awards for Excellence in Children’s Literature	High quality children’s and young adult literature in the categories of Picture Book, Fiction and Poetry, and Nonfiction	www.hbook.com/bg hb/
Carter G. Woodson Book Award Winners	Distinguished children’s books that depict ethnicity in the United States	www.socialstudies.org/awards/woodson/
Jane Addams Children’s Book Awards	Children’s books that promote the cause of peace, social justice, world community, and gender and race equality	www.janeaddamspeace.org/jacba/index_jacba.shtml
National Council for the Social Studies Notable Trade Books for Young People	High quality books for grades K-12 that address social studies themes	www.socialstudies.org/notable
National Council of Teachers of English Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children	Exemplary writing of nonfiction for children	www.ncte.org/awards/orbispictus
Society of Children’s Book Writers & Illustrators Golden Kite Award	Excellence in children’s fiction, nonfiction, picture book text, and picture book illustration	www.scbwi.org/Pages.aspx/Golden-Kite-Award

als that share a topic. “Grouping texts thematically helps students to see how information is connected, view information from different lenses, experience a variety of genres, and develop domain knowledge critical to comprehension development.”⁵

The thematic lists we present here provide literature recommendations focused on specific social studies topics for children and adolescents. Teachers may draw on these sources and group texts, linking easier texts with challenging ones. For example, to build background and individualize resources for students based on text difficulty, picture books may be paired with historical memoirs and newspaper articles.

One of the best ways to look at disciplinary literacy in the social studies is through point of view and multiple perspectives. Besides making sure that an individual text is challenging enough, teachers may enhance the level of content by introducing multiple sources of information. Providing multiple sources on the same topic can help students see a variety of perspectives, and it can help students adjust to

texts at varying levels of difficulty. By exposing students to various sources on the same topic, teachers add more depth and perspective to the lesson.

Free Digital Texts

The CCSS’s emphasis on using informational texts (in addition to literary works) to teach research, writing, and communication skills opens the door for extensive use of historical documents, speeches, biographies, and other works that provide students with a deep and meaningful understanding of the social studies. The following online depositories provide free, easily accessible, high quality digital resources that enhance content-based literacy:

Project Gutenberg

www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page
Project Gutenberg offers over 42,000 free ebooks that may be downloaded or read online.

Bartleby.com is one of the pioneering electronic text sites. Its strong points include a very useful search mechanism, a large collection of integrated refer-

ence works, plus a good assortment of edited classics, reference works, and poetry.

Children’s Books Online (the Rosetta Project)

www.childrensbooksonline.org/index.htm

This is a large online collection of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century illustrated children’s books that are reproduced as single-page, full-color image files, creating appealing replicas of the originals. The text-file translations of many of the stories into other languages are an added attraction.

Folktexts

Folktexts, compiled and edited by D.L. Ashliman, University of Pittsburgh, www.pitt.edu/~dash/folktexts.html, offers a variety of folklore and mythology texts, arranged in groups of closely related stories.

International Children’s Digital Library

<http://en.childrenslibrary.org/>
A digital collection of thousands of

Topic	Weblinks
American Immigration	<p>American Library Association Contemporary Immigrant Experiences in Children's Books www.ala.org/emiert/sites/ala.org.emiert/files/content/usefullinks/contempimmigrant.pdf</p> <p>Miss Rumphius: New to America, Living the Immigrant Life http://missrumphiuseffect.blogspot.com/2007/02/new-to-america-living-immigrant-life.html</p>
Bill of Rights and Constitution	<p>American Library Association Discovering the Bill of Rights through Fiction www.ala.org/offices/publishing/booklist/booklinks/resources/billrights</p> <p>Miss Rumphius: Constitution Day is Coming http://missrumphiuseffect.blogspot.com/2008/09/constitution-day-is-coming.html</p>
Character Education/Civics	<p>The Best Children's Books.org: Character Education Books www.the-best-childrens-books.org/Character-Education-books.html</p> <p>Books for Understanding: Public Policy and Civics www.booksforunderstanding.org/civics.html</p> <p>Institute for Humane Education: Character Education/Citizen Activism http://humaneeducation.org/sections/view/childrens_character_education</p> <p>Josephson Institute Center for Youth Ethics: Children's Books that Build Character www.charactercounts.org/booklist.php</p>
Children and Conflict	<p>American Library Association Children Caught in War www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/publishing/booklinks/resources/childrencaught.cfm</p>
Economics	<p>American Library Association Huffing and Puffing through Economics www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/publishing/booklinks/resources/huffingpuffing.cfm</p> <p>KidsEcon Posters Literature Connection www.kidseconposters.com/literature-connection/ Rutgers EconKids http://econkids.rutgers.edu/</p>
Geography	<p>The Best Children's Books.org: U.S. Geography Books www.the-best-childrens-books.org/united-states-geography.html</p> <p>American Library Association Picture-Perfect Geography www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/publishing/booklinks/resources/pictureperfectgeography.cfm</p> <p>Miss Rumphius: Reading Maps missrumphiuseffect.blogspot.com/2007/04/reading-maps.html</p> <p>National Education Association: 50 State Booklist www.nea.org/grants/13235.htm</p> <p>Miss Rumphius: Stately Knowledge missrumphiuseffect.blogspot.com/2008/07/stately-knowledge.html</p>
Global Perspectives	<p>American Library Association Children Caught in War www.ala.org/offices/publishing/booklist/booklinks/resources/childrencaught</p> <p>American Library Association Growing Up Around the World www.ala.org/alsc/compubs/booklists/growingupworld/GrowingUpAroundWorld</p> <p>University of Wisconsin-Madison Cooperative Children's Book Center: Global Reading www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/detailListBooks.asp?idBookLists=280</p> <p>Books for Understanding: International Topics http://www.booksforunderstanding.org/international.html</p> <p>Miss Rumphius: China, Here I Come! missrumphiuseffect.blogspot.com/2007/03/china-here-i-come.html</p> <p>Open Wide, Look Inside: School Around the Globe http://blog.richmond.edu/openwidelookinside/archives/30</p>
Labor	<p>University of Wisconsin-Madison Cooperative Children's Book Center: 50 Books about Labor www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/detailListBooks.asp?idBookLists=104</p>

Topic	Weblinks
Multicultural Characters and Tales	Book Links: Multiracial Characters booklistonline.com/media/booklinks/CommonCorePDFs/booklinks_ccss_jan13_multiracial-characters.pdf Book Links: Classroom Connections Multicultural Tales booklistonline.com/media/booklinks/CommonCorePDFs/booklinks_ccss_jan13_caldecott_multiracial-tales.pdf
Peace and Social Justice	University of Wisconsin-Madison Cooperative Children's Book Center: Peace and Social Justice www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/detailListBooks.asp?idBookLists=77
U.S. History	The Best Children's Books.org: American History Books for Kids http://www.the-best-childrens-books.org/American-History-books.html Books for Understanding: United States www.booksforunderstanding.org/usa.html Reading, Writing, and History: Bringing Great Historical Literature into the Classroom The pdf file from www.jfklibrary.org can be accessed at http://bit.ly/13SQKBn
World War II	University of Wisconsin-Madison Cooperative Children's Book Center: Global Reading www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/detailListBooks.asp?idBookLists=274
World History	Book Links: Classroom Connections Exploring Ancient China booklistonline.com/BOLPub/media/booklinks/CommonCorePDFs/booklinks_ccss_exploring-ancient-china.pdf The Best Children's Books.org: World History Books for Kids www.the-best-childrens-books.org/historical-fiction-books-world-history.html

historical and contemporary books from around the world, available in 61 languages.

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AmericanFolklore.net offers many folk stories from the USA, Canada, and Mexico as well as Native American folk stories.

Library of Congress

www.loc.gov/rr/rarebook/digitalcoll/digitalcoll-children.html

As part of its expansive repository of primary sources, the Library of Congress maintains a collection of classic children's books in its Children's Literature collection of its Rare Book section. These are available for online reading and download in pdf.

Aaron Shepard's World of Stories

www.aaronsherp.com/stories/index.html

A categorized collection of stories from around the world for online reading. The listings give the appropriate age for reading, length of the story and origin. Stories are text only, no illustrations.

Resources for Classroom Implementation

Fostering learning experiences for children across grade levels requires more than just selecting high quality texts. How teachers use these resources ultimately influences children's comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and literacy learning. Achievethecore.org has a

repository of free resources to aid in the transition to the common standards. It includes explanatory materials about the standards and teaching resources with written and videotaped instructional exemplars. Moreover, many of the state boards of education have designed websites as portals for professional development and dissemination of resources. For example, the Illinois State Board of Education Common Core Teaching and Learning Strategies for Grades K-5 and Grades 6-12 includes documents that guide student interaction with increasingly complex text.⁶ Strategy and lesson suggestions for close analytic reading and competency in the comparison and synthesis of ideas are outlined by grade level, along with assessment approaches.

Disciplinary specific reading strategies require building prior knowledge, specialized vocabulary, skill in deconstructing complex ideas, posing discipline relevant questions, and assessing the veracity of evidence to evaluate claims. Educators help students recognize and evaluate evidence of the discipline to support an argument with

content-specific knowledge. Teachers guide students through complex texts by using strategies that develop conceptual understanding of language, deepen content knowledge, and set expectations for transfer of learning to real world situations.

Examples of web portals that provide literacy instructional approaches to promote disciplinary literacy in social studies classrooms and offer strategies for implementation include:

Blueprint for History Education
<http://blueprintforhistory.wordpress.com/>

The History Blueprint is a resource for curriculum, assessment tools, student literacy support, and teacher professional development, aligned with the Common Core State Standards, designed to revolutionize history instruction, and increase student learning and literacy.

Edutopia's Guide
www.edutopia.org/common-core-state-standards-resources

A compilation of websites, articles and other resources to help teachers understand the Common Core State Standards and implementation strategies.

engage^{ny} English Language Arts
<http://engageny.org/english-language-arts>

The New York State Education Department has organized Common Core-aligned education resources, and instructional content to provide guidance to teachers in implementation. The English Language Arts Curriculum includes several grade-level modules that focus on social studies themes.

Kristen McDaniel's List: Social Studies Disciplinary Literacy
www.diigo.com/list/kmickeyd/social-studies-disciplinary-literacy

The social studies consultant for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has compiled resources

regarding disciplinary literacy in the social studies, including student competence in history literacy, economic literacy, geo-literacy, civics literacy, and global literacy.

National Center for Literacy Education (NCLE)

www.literacyinlearningexchange.org/ NCSS is collaborating with NCLE, a coalition of 30 leading non-profit organizations committed to improving literacy teaching and learning in all content areas, to transform literacy teaching and learning with discipline-specific applications.

Oregon Department of Education Common Core State Standards - Literacy in History/Social Studies

www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=3350

Resources have been compiled to guide teachers in meeting the Common Core literacy standards through history/social studies instruction.

PBS Teachers Social Studies
www.pbs.org/teachers/socialstudies

Provides access to free multimedia resources and professional development for educators.

Stanford History Education Group
<http://shег.stanford.edu/>

Lessons and curricular materials focus on application of reading strategies that promote historical inquiry.

Stanford History Education Group, Beyond the Bubble

<https://beyondthebubble.stanford.edu/> Beyond the Bubble draws from the vast digital archive of the Library of Congress to create innovative and authentic history assessments.

Conclusion

The implementation of the Common Core State Standards presents an opportunity for schools to integrate the social studies into their curricu-

lum in exciting and innovative ways. By using literature to teach social studies as an investigative process, educators will foster disciplinary literacy and engage learners. Achieving these shifts in teaching and learning starts with professional development and access to communities of practice that are easily accessible on the web. The ultimate goal is the transformation of instruction. Classrooms of the near future will emphasize student discovery and cultivate knowledge of details with discipline-specific concepts. Assignments with a real-world purpose that authentically apply skills of social scientists will not only engage learners but also foster their readiness for college, careers, and their roles and responsibilities as a citizen. ●

Notes

1. Common Core State Standards Initiative, *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010): 3.
2. Nell K. Duke and Susan Bennett-Armistead, *Reading and Writing Informational Text in the Primary Grades* (New York: Scholastic, 2003).
3. Catherine Gewertz, "Educators in Search of Common-Core Resources," *Education Week* 31, no. 22 (February 29, 2012): 1,12.
4. See Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards (2010).
5. Barbara Moss, "Making the Common Core Text Exemplars Accessible to Middle Graders," *Voices from the Middle* 20, no. 1 (2012): 63.
6. See www.isbe.net/common_core/pdf/ela-teach-strat-read-lit-k-5.pdf; www.isbe.net/common_core/pdf/ela-teach-strat-read-text-k-5.pdf; www.isbe.net/common_core/pdf/ela-teach-strat-read-lit-6-12.pdf; www.isbe.net/common_core/pdf/ela-teach-strat-read-text-6-12.pdf

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