

## NCSS Social Studies Standards

### What Is Social Studies and Why Is It Important?

**National Council for the Social Studies**, the largest professional association for social studies educators in the world, defines social studies as:

*...the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.*

For social studies to perform its mission of promoting civic competence, students need both to learn a body of knowledge, and to be able to think flexibly and act responsibly to address civic issues in a diverse and interdependent world. The national curriculum standards for social studies represent educators' best thinking about the framework needed to educate young people for the challenges of citizenship.

**The ten themes of the NCSS curriculum standards are:**

## **1 CULTURE**

Through the study of culture and cultural diversity, learners understand how human beings create, learn, share, and adapt to culture, and appreciate the role of culture in shaping their lives and society, as well the lives and societies of others. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with geography, history, sociology, and anthropology, as well as multicultural topics across the curriculum.

- ***In the Footsteps of History is focused on the roots and continuation of world cultures, featuring diverse peoples, religions, inventions and ideas. For example, it delves into ancient civilizations of Central Asia, China, Native cultures of the Americas, Africa, and the Middle East. The Silk Roads were the byway along which trade, religion, and ideas traveled, spreading civilization, as well as wars and conquest.***

## **2 TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE**

Through the study of the past and its legacy, learners examine the institutions, values, and beliefs of people in the past, acquire skills in historical inquiry and interpretation, and gain an understanding of how important historical events and developments have shaped the modern world. This theme appears in courses in history, as well as in other social studies courses for which knowledge of the past is important.

- ***In the Footsteps* journeys bridge continents and centuries, bringing the past into today's world for students, helping them understand the roots of world cultures and movements of people throughout history. Inventions, religions and philosophies and trade connections are all explored in the journeys.**

**Critical thinking exercises throughout the program help students interpret and evaluate what they are learning, and serious research is encouraged through written and digital assessments.**

### **3 PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS**

This theme helps learners to develop their spatial views and perspectives of the world, to understand where people, places, and resources are located and why they are there, and to explore the relationship between human beings and the environment. In schools, this theme typically appears in courses dealing with geography and area studies, but it is also important for the study of the geographical dimension of other social studies subjects.

- ***In the Footsteps of History* places a strong emphasis on geographic knowledge of all regions under study. Natural resources are integral to a region's trade, culture, and art. How people use those resources to advance their culture plays an essential role in historical study.**

### **4 INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY**

Personal identity is shaped by family, peers, culture, and institutional influences. Through this theme, students examine the factors that influence an individual's personal identity,

development, and actions. This theme typically appears in courses and units dealing with psychology, anthropology, and sociology.

- ***In the Footsteps of History* seeks to determine the characteristics that help both explorers (past and present) and students today persevere, seek new horizons, strive to challenge themselves, and ultimately use those experiences to add to the betterment and knowledge of humankind. Personal growth and the inspiration to take on challenges are often encouraged in our units.**

## **5 INDIVIDUALS , GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS**

Institutions such as families and civic, educational, governmental, and religious organizations, exert a major influence on people's lives. This theme allows students to understand how institutions are formed, maintained, and changed, and to examine their influence. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, and history.

- ***In the Footsteps of History* focuses on the institutions of leadership and governance, religion, and education in the development of ancient cultures. Students are asked throughout the program to make connections from the past to the events, governance, trade, and cultures of the regions under study, in order to better understand those regions today.**

## **6 POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE**

One essential component of education for citizenship is an understanding of the historical development and contemporary forms of power, authority, and governance. Through this

theme, learners become familiar with the purposes and functions of government, the scope and limits of authority, and the differences between democratic and non-democratic political systems. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with government, history, civics, law, politics, and other social sciences.

- ***In the Footsteps of History* helps students look closely at the rulers and governing bodies of historical cultures, as well as those today. The Mongols and the khans of ancient China, Mansu Musa in Timbuktu, the power of religious leaders, the authorities that allow trade to flourish, and countries today that have absolute rulers and systems are prime examples of topics of study.**



## **PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND CONSUMPTION**

This theme provides for the study of how people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services, and prepares students for the study of domestic and global economic issues. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with economic concepts and issues, though it is also important for the study of the economic dimension of other social studies subjects.

- ***In the Footsteps of History* engages students with challenging digital trading games, looking closely at the resources available in a region and how people obtained goods that were unavailable to them in the ancient world. How did/do people live in the Arctic, where so few resources are to be found? How has the Silk Road of ancient times transformed into China's Belt and Road Initiative today, and what are the consequences for the rest of the world? Economics drives the progress of both the past and the present, as well as of the future.**



## SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY

By exploring the relationships among science, technology, and society, students develop an understanding of past and present advances in science and technology and their impact. This theme appears in a variety of social studies courses, including history, geography, economics, civics, and government.

- ***In the Footsteps of History* delves deeply into the technologies of ancient cultures, the pivotal inventions and specific uses of available resources, the great ideas that changed history, and the impact on architecture and art that those technologies presented. Students can trace the foundation of many modern inventions to those revolutionary ideas and experiments of the past.**



## GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

The realities of global interdependence require an understanding of the increasingly important and diverse global connections among world societies. This theme prepares students to study issues arising from globalization. It typically appears in units or courses dealing with geography, culture, economics, history, political science, government, and technology.

- ***In the Footsteps of History* helps students understand the globalization of trade, travel, technology, and settlement through assessments and extension activities that explore regional geography, development, and the arts. Environmental impacts affecting the global community are frequently addressed in the program.**

An understanding of civic ideals and practices is critical to full participation in society and is an essential component of education for citizenship. This theme enables students to learn about the rights and responsibilities of citizens of a democracy, and to appreciate the importance of active citizenship. In schools, the theme typically appears in units or courses dealing with civics, history, political science, cultural anthropology, and fields such as global studies, law-related education, and the humanities.

- ***In the Footsteps of History* encourages students to take both personal and group action to better their world. Research into issues such as animal extinction and geographic destruction are examples of the calls for action in the units. Extension activities suggest ideas for active citizenship on such issues.**

The revised NCSS standards offer a sharper focus than the original standards on:

- Purposes
  - Questions for Exploration
  - Knowledge: what learners need to understand
  - Processes: what learners will be capable of doing
  - Products: how learners demonstrate understanding
- ***In the Footsteps of History* lesson plans are based on inquiry, steeped in student-centered prompts and question formation, encouraging students to look at multiple points of view when exploring historical events. All lessons have scaffolded reading levels and various writing assignments, from journal entries and exit slips to creative writing and formal essays.**

- **Each unit offers opportunities for critical thinking and processing. Open-ended questions require thought and input, and students are frequently asked to write to expand their thinking and opinions, ideas and solutions.**
- **Assessments offer ideas for varied final products using both paper and digital apps, written work, artistic creations, exit slips, map making, debates, and other various forms of information processing that deepen understanding and that make learning engaging for students.**