

Teaching Social Studies Effectively



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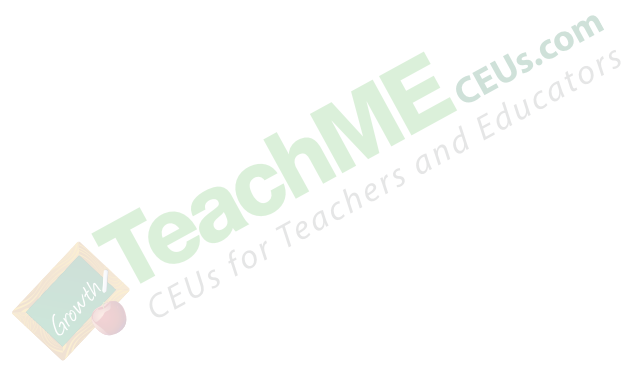
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Introduction

Today's students are getting less social studies instruction than in the past even though it's an increasingly integral part of their academics.

Social studies is often passed over or reprioritized in favor of other, more concrete or testable subjects. However, it's one of the academic areas of study which will most directly influence the way that the majority of your students will live their lives—and, just like math, science, music, or art, social studies can inspire students to pursue fulfilling careers in sociology, social work, social science, teaching, political science, as well as many other areas.

Many tend to reduce social studies to a mere memorization game; others don't even know what the subject fully encompasses. Social studies brings together many areas of focus, allowing students to gain insight and perspective across many fields of study. In turn, the knowledge that students gain when taking their social studies courses helps them realize where they are in the world, what it means to be living during the current time, and what humanity has done in the past—and could go on to do in the future.

More practically, social studies helps students become familiar with the details of history, economics, and political science that could directly influence the decisions they make as voting citizens and people who shape their communities. Finally, in social studies, students learn to hone their communication and logical thinking skills, practice arguing, researching, and presenting information well, and start forming some of their own opinions about the way the world works around them.

In this course, we'll discuss why social studies is important, the potential benefits it can pass on to students and society, and ways to teach it effectively (including methods for implementing it with other subjects).

Section 1: Why Social Studies Is Important

Social studies tends to get overlooked by students and teachers alike, but it's a vital part of a young student's education. Why is this? We'll start with a helpful definition.

What is the subject of social studies?

Social studies encompasses several different sub-disciplines and can vary a great deal depending on the school, program, grade level, and even the geographic region in which it is taught (Morin, 2020).

Despite this ambiguity, social studies remains one of the four core classes generally emphasized for elementary students (the others being math, language arts, and science). However, many people equate social studies with a simple mix of history, geography, and current events. The subject has the potential to be much more than just that (Morin, 2020).

In fact, the National Council for the Social Studies has issued a framework which details 10 distinct themes or sub-topics that every social studies program should work to incorporate. These themes, the themes that make up a comprehensive and complete social studies curriculum, include (Morin, 2020):

- **Culture:** With a comprehensive social studies background, a student will have an overarching familiarity with the languages, behaviors, and values of groups of people who believe different things. A social studies student will also look at how groups of people have historically formed these beliefs, as well as how cultural beliefs and behaviors have changed over time.
- **Time and Change:** Social studies students explore the effects of history on groups of people — for example, studying the initiating events that precipitated political movements or economic events. This will incorporate history and anthropology, but the emphasis is more on how historic events affected the people of the time (and how downstream effects still impact us today).
- **Environments and Places:** A social studies student will work to understand how geography and the discovery of natural resources have influenced how cultures work together. Sub-topics that could contribute toward this understanding include immigration policies and the economic relationships between countries as they have developed.
- **Identity Development:** A social studies student will also look at the effects that society, culture, geography, and history have had on individual persons. Contributing disciplines that a social studies student might interact with include sociology and psychology.
- **Group Development:** After a social studies student has become familiar with the idea that each individual human's personal philosophies and values have been shaped by their unique environments, that student can appreciate further how groups of individuals progressively form political, religious, and social beliefs. A social studies student will examine the formation of various institutions over time,

and how those institutions have changed in response to historic events and changes in technology.

- **The Passage of Power:** A social studies student will learn about the history of governance, as well as the specific ways that modern (and historic) governments work (or have worked). This branch of social studies can also provide the basis of examination of the competency of governments as well as the rights and duties of citizens.
- **The Consumption and Distribution of Goods:** A social studies student should work toward a basic understanding of how global trade and exchange works, as well as how the flow of the exchange of goods between countries, cities, and communities has helped form the way we look at modern society. An offshoot of this field of study could involve an examination of the way the discovery of new resources has influenced policy change and innovation in technology.
- **The Influence of Science on Society:** Social studies students will work to gain an understanding of basic sciences elsewhere in their school's curriculum; in social studies, a student will learn about how the technological and scientific discoveries cultures have made over the centuries impacts every other facet of daily life, from politics through policy change, economics, legislation and religion.
- **The Connected Modern World:** A social studies student will work to understand how the different ways that we have communicated over the centuries have influenced the way we approach the dissemination of information.
- **Ideal Civic Practices:** Finally, a social studies student will work toward an understanding of what the ideal practices for citizens, communities, and governments are. A student will learn about voting, free speech, respect for unfamiliar ideas, and other ways that modern societies seek to work well together.

These diverse concepts come together under one generalized umbrella as the subject of 'social studies'. The aim of a comprehensive social studies program is to help students form a logical perspective on historical and current events by drawing on a variety of disciplines. As a result, a young person who has gone through this study should be able to make informed decisions for the good of the global community (Kids Academy, 2018).

An effective social studies education does not exist in a vacuum. A student needs exposure to and strong teaching within other disciplines, such as history, literature,

science, art, and many other subjects. However, social studies works to draw from those subjects to lend a unified perspective to each student that does not come readily from simply studying each individual subject (Kids Academy, 2018).

Another aim of social studies is to help students develop their sense of civic competence. This ability refers to how individuals can serve as a productive member of their communities. Examples of actions that a civically competent young adult might prioritize include (Hostos, 2021):

1. Knowing how best to obey the federal, state, and city laws that apply to them—as well as the rationales for those laws and the consequences associated with breaking those laws
2. Voting in the elections in their area as well as national ones—and doing so based on logical, well-researched beliefs
3. Pursuing employment in a field in which they are qualified and which they believe does something to benefit their community
4. Managing their personal finances in a way that allows them to be a healthy, happy, contributing member of society
5. Co-existing peacefully with the other diverse persons who live in their community
6. Maintaining their home safely and well
7. Appreciating the many different cultures that make up today's modern world, and nurture an ongoing pursuit of empathetic understanding regarding the experience of cultures other than their own

The seeds for these actions are often sown very early on, in early social studies education (Kids Academy, 2018) (Morin, 2020).

When it comes to understanding why each of these aims is important as well as how to complete each of them to their fullest extent, social studies links together concepts from other subjects to provide a foundation for acting in an informed, empathetic, and logical way throughout a student's entire life.

Why is social studies important?

Today, due to globalization and the advances made with technology, our world is more connected than ever.

However, today's children might not have the training they need to become responsible citizens of that ultra-connected world. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that, over the past two decades, the bulk of the time that teachers spend teaching has been dominated by language arts and mathematical subjects. Why? These are the types of topics generally covered in standardized tests. Increasingly, teachers are experiencing pressure to teach to the test. This results in a lopsided focus on math and language arts (Kids Academy, 2018).

While there is no downside solely to prioritizing numeracy and literacy, if that is the result, the fact that there is resultant less time for other subjects including social studies does present a problem. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that social studies is taught less today than it has been at any point over the past 30 years (Kids Academy, 2018).

If trends continue, social studies instruction may continue to be erased away. This would be a loss for tomorrow's students, as there are metrics that point to specific benefits of high-quality and consistent social studies instruction.

These cited benefits include:

- **The creation of better future citizens.** One of the civic missions of a school is to help children on their way towards becoming adults who can be positive, productive members of our communities. There are those who argue that we can't prepare children in this way if we don't help them learn, from an early age, about the topics that are present in modern political and social discourse. Experts tend to believe that social studies is a powerful tool that can help children understand how to change the world for the better. In social studies, children can receive very practical lessons about the roles of different professions in a community - for example, what EMT personnel do, the responsibilities and job duties of firemen and first responders, and even what trash collectors and recyclers take care of. They can also learn about their local city council, different governmental roles, and the concept that their town is one of many in their state and country (Kids Academy, 2018).
- **Increased knowledge and familiarity with world affairs.** The National Council for the Social Studies made a recent statement that explained that the purpose of social studies in elementary school "is to enable students to understand, participate in, and make informed decisions about their world." This skill might not be tested in assessment form, but will aid children at home and outside of

school when it comes to making thoughtful, rational, and value-based judgments about their actions. The details accompanying some social studies sub-topics, such as departments of various governmental bodies, can be complicated. However, learning about the various conflicts, political alliances, and other formative events throughout history that influence today's policy changes can help children have a holistic understanding of how the world works from an early age (Neely, 2019).

- **Increased skill with reading aims.** While schools already tend to prioritize literacy, there are educators who believe that social studies adds a productive, relevant, and highly useful angle to literacy that can increase a student's interest and motivation. The integration of social studies provides a context for practical children to apply literacy skills (such as reading comprehension and communication) in areas that they can see will have a real impact on their lives. In addition - much like we are seeing that mathematics is 'good' for every student, not just future mathematicians - social studies helps a child's whole brain grow when taught synergistically with other subjects. Understanding the ethical, personal, political, and economic factors that impact many of the decisions we make - on a familial, community, country, and global level - imparts an innate sense of perspective in a child that they may not find easily anywhere else (Neely, 2019).
- **Increased aptitude with critical thought and logical thinking.** Social studies can help students gain confidence in making good decisions quickly. One of the ways social studies facilitates this ability is by helping students evaluate and critique the decisions that world leaders have made to shape nations in the past—and the ways that world leaders are acting now. Today's students have the advantage of learning from the mistakes of the past—an advantage that every student should be excited to have (Arrow Montessori, 2017).

Moreover, today's experts tend to believe that social studies can have benefits for more than just students. When teachers help young children learn about social studies, they're helping their communities become stronger and safer. At the very least, providing a strong social studies education is increasing the number of students who will go on to specialize in mental health, social work, or other realms of social sciences including public health and sports sociology. These professionals dedicate their lives toward ensuring that social health and happiness levels are as high as possible—and that all of the individual services that make communities work like clockwork are always

up and running. However, social studies goes even above early professional formation (InspirationFeed, 2019).

Here, we'll discuss at least a few levels of benefits to entire communities that social studies can bestow (InspirationFeed, 2019):

- **Social studies can save lives.** In a recent research initiative, psychologists working at the University of Liverpool figured out several ways to make common working environments much safer. By doing so, they were able to reduce mortality rates at several companies across their country. Their methods were geared at not only increasing the strategic nature of the precautionary measures that were recommended for the companies as a whole but also increasing the amount of safety and health education for the workers themselves. They began initiatives where they taught the front-line workers about safe and unsafe work practices; they thought about ways to teach these workers to go about their tasks as a community, looking out for each other as they went about their day. This is obviously a microcosm working in action, but the same ideas apply to researchers who study means of effective crowd control, event management, and community planning.
- **Social studies can increase neighborhood safety and security.** There are some people who believe that if you eliminate crime in your community or neighborhood, it will simply move to another location, as if crime is a constant that cannot be eradicated. Recent studies out of Nottingham Trent University have shown that this concept of a crime pattern is not necessarily true. The researchers involved with these studies have developed a blueprint for eliminating crime entirely in the future. These studies, completed by sociologists, were able to analyze historical data to detect the existence of patterns that law enforcement was not able to see. This enabled the local first responders to stop losing time and wasting energy on guesses based on outdated crime models. The new pattern detection method has become known as situational crime prevention, and it's maintained by people who work at the intersection between sociology and crime prevention. These social studies experts dedicate their lives to making criminal behavior more difficult—which makes our day-to-day activities a little safer.
- **Social studies can help make the world a little better every day.** Common sense and sociology surveys tell us that just about everyone agrees: They want the world to be safer, they want more people to enjoy basic human rights, and they

want to make everyone feel happier and healthier in their homes. Social scientists are the ones who work to study how those endeavors are progressing—and are the ones who help us work toward the goal of continually improving human welfare. Social scientists work alongside UN organizations, social services, the government, and media to make life better for all of humanity. What's more, they're bringing about real results. Recently, social scientists from the Delhi School of Economics studied and influenced the new legislation and implementation of cultural change for minimum wage increases in India. The legislation made it more possible for women to gain financial independence—and, as a direct result, fewer laborers went hungry or had to deal with overly-hazardous work environments. Several improvements in overall well-being were accomplished by people working together—some of whom were social scientists fighting for positive change.

It's clear that teaching social studies effectively to very young students can have some significant long-range beneficial results for both students and their communities. However, in order to achieve these lofty ends, social studies must be taught in a purposeful, value-driven, and effective way.

Next, we'll look at a few of the existing standards and ideals that drive a purposeful social studies education.

What are the ideal goals for teaching social studies efficiently in elementary schools?

The above standards listed by the National Council for Social Studies can sound quite ambitious - and sporadic. There are those who think it may be a better idea for a young student in elementary school to focus on numeracy and literacy, and allow that student the freedom to choose to study these types of subjects later in high school, as more of a niche focus.

However, there are those that say that social studies, as the connective tissue that tends to hold together other subjects and cement a firm foundation of civic responsibility, needs to be a staple of elementary education everywhere. Social studies helps young students see the relationship between people, items, governments, and types of thought. It helps give them the background they need to solve problems well and make helpful decisions. It provides perspective and a framework and can even help ignite further interest in other fields of study, as it can provide purpose—a necessary

motivating factor for today's practical child (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017).

Unfortunately, social studies can also be seen as an easy-out type of course that doesn't provide students with the needed information or rigor. To help disallow that possibility, experts have proposed several common elements that a meaningful and compelling social studies curriculum should encompass, as well as several practical recommendations to make that happen (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017).

To wit, educational experts note that an effective social studies education needs to be value-based, challenging, active, integrative, and meaningful. We will briefly explore each of these facets below before discussing practical measures to achieve these aims (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017).

- **An effective social studies curriculum must be meaningful.** Teachers need to work to understand where their students are coming from, and craft lessons to build upon their students' pre-existing knowledge banks and natural interests. As one of the aims of a good social studies education is to expand a child's worldview, it's necessary first to understand what a child's starting viewpoints are in order to provide relevance. Ensuring that social studies students are given a variety of methods and ways to understand the topics at hand is one way of achieving this, as is a mixture of 'fun' social studies activities (e.g., a study of the different culinary traditions across the globe) as well as more practical ones (e.g., a study of the formation of governmental practices).
- **An effective social studies curriculum must be integrative.** As can be seen simply by looking at the National Society for Social Studies' aims for the subject, social studies is naturally a very integrative subject. Through social studies, a student can discover that even the most disparate or diverse of their studies (science, art, music, politics) are all interconnected or have an influence upon each other. However, it needs to be taught in a unified way for students to understand this. One way to do this is to actively integrate social studies content into other specific subjects (much as a good literacy education includes reading comprehension practices across different areas of study). We will look at specific strategies to meet this goal in Section Two.
- **An effective social studies curriculum must be value-based.** One of the purposes of a good education is to produce productive members of society. Children are not too young to understand that their participation in local government or in the

welfare of their community is important. Moreover, if a child is made to understand that contributing in this way is essential for the good of a community, that child will be more likely to honor this responsibility in the future. To ensure that elementary school children receive a value-based social studies education, their teachers should create assignments to mimic problem-solving activities that happen in the real world. Teachers should explain the costs and benefits of the decisions that underlie current events, and help children understand how to make logical yet empathetic arguments.

- **An effective social studies curriculum must be challenging.** In order for social studies lessons to lead to good citizenship and lifelong knowledge, they need to be sufficiently stimulating and challenging. One way to do this is to make sure that social studies lessons are inclusive and are based on student participation. Students need to learn how to debate effectively, how to question each other and challenge new information, ask practical and probing questions, and make quick decisions that are supported by the thoughtful and knowledge-based way they view the world.

This is an admittedly tall list of requirements for a solid social studies education. If you're interested in learning about ways to make your elementary social studies lessons more purposeful and powerful, read on for a short list of vital recommendations to help achieve this end (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017).

- **Ensure that elementary school teachers receive good preparation for social studies coursework, and give them the opportunity to benefit from professional development.** One of the goals and insights of a social studies course is to allow the students the opportunity to improve. It stands to reason that the teachers providing this education need the opportunity to improve as well. It is, in fact, critical that elementary school teachers receive ongoing support and education in a variety of teaching skills and methods, assistance with sourcing the right materials and activities, and updated information about the best pedagogy practices for children of many different types of learning modalities. In addition, teachers need to be well-equipped to bring social studies to life for their students. That means that teachers should have some idea of current events, some appreciation for the way that social studies brings all subjects together, and constant communication with teachers in other subjects to help the educational team supporting the students have a dedicated way to connect all of their studies. Some examples of professional development that could work well for

teachers include formal courses, conferences, and institutes as well as podcasts, informal talks, and meetings with mentors and colleagues to discuss instructional strategies.

- **Devote a decent amount of time in a student’s daily or weekly schedule to provide thorough social studies instruction.** Social studies often gets shoved to the side to make room for subjects that are prioritized on standardized assessments (such as math and language arts). Advocates for social studies suggest that social studies should be allocated an equivalent amount of time as math or language arts. As social studies often provides a context or framework that can illustrate a practical purpose for English and mathematics’ aims, it’s critical to see this as time well spent and worth it, instead of time wasted.
- **Educational teams need to work hard to collaborate on a social studies curriculum that is high-quality and thorough.** Teachers also need to advocate for high-quality social studies opportunities and education for all students. Crafting comprehensive curricula that match the national standards for social studies, using assessments that are geared to assist teachers to help students learn more, and prioritizing dedicated school time for these lessons will be key for social studies success.

These three aims are among the most important to help prioritize social studies and make it as effective as it should be. However, we’ll look more closely at other practical ways to teach this subject efficiently and engagingly in Section Three.

How does social studies support the civic mission of schools?

It’s important to realize that schools do support their communities and train tomorrow’s citizens—so they have an innate civic mission. This requires dedicated training and the realization that we need to talk, sometimes, about uncomfortable or hot-button issues. One professor of social studies education noted that “Ultimately, we can’t prepare children for living in a rich, diverse democracy if we don’t expose them to the controversial topics inherent in our democracy” (Gonser, 2018).

Often, these types of topics are downplayed or avoided entirely because teachers don’t feel comfortable or competent teaching social studies—as it’s an overwhelming, ever-changing topic. Teachers might feel, rightly so, that professional development for social studies education, in particular, is distinctly lacking, especially when compared to similar resources available for numeracy and literacy education (Gonser, 2018).

In places where schools aren't currently providing avenues for formal professional development, teachers and local action groups are taking it into their own hands. For example, one such instance is the many anti-racism groups that currently provide informal training for teachers (Gonser, 2018).

Unfortunately, the lack of systemic, professional, and widely-available social studies support and formation opportunities is poised to have a real impact on our students and our societies.

What impact does the lack of effective social studies education and formation have?

According to several social studies experts, when social studies isn't emphasized as a subject in school, the impact can span through generations. Today's teachers may even feel the repercussions of past decades' lack of focus on social studies, making them uncomfortable with teaching the subject now (Gonser, 2018).

Another such repercussion is simple: Because today's teachers may have received a lackluster social studies education, many current educators can make the assumption that a very piecemeal social studies education is enough for their students—for example, instead of actively teaching the subject, simply using social studies materials as the basis for reading comprehension exercises or other integrations. While these strategies may be better than nothing, it's clear that social studies will require its own time and place in a student's education (Gonser, 2018).

Conclusion

Social studies is a subject in modern schools that has the potential to be enormously formative for each individual student. However, it often doesn't get the time it needs to be as effective as it could be, for a variety of reasons. We're seeing the detrimental, domino-ing effect of lowering social studies standards, but we have an opportunity to help our students reap the benefits of this subject—as long as we start to give social studies the time and active attention it deserves.

The good news is that this doesn't have to be difficult. In the next section, we'll look at ways to effectively integrate social studies with other subjects in ways that actively assist with learning aims in each area of study.

Section 2: Social Studies and Your Curriculum— Integrating Social Studies with Other Subjects

The idea that social studies is integral for helping your students piece together an accurate framework with respect to the way the world works around them is crucial for helping build future civic engagement. Unfortunately, social studies is often pushed to the side to make way for other subjects. There's only so much time in a student's day—and other subjects need to be taught, too.

While social studies will require its own dedicated time for instruction, it's also possible to integrate social studies aims with other courses. In this section, we'll discuss possibilities for linking social studies with other academic subjects.

How is the subject of social studies linked with other academic subjects?

We have mentioned that one of the primary aims of social studies is to link together other subjects to provide each student with a priceless perspective. However, it may be easier to see that natural connection between social studies and some academic content areas—for example, language arts—and less so with others; for example, the niche sciences, or fine arts studies (Hostos Community College, 2021).

As a teacher, you know that the nuts and bolts of education depend on daily interaction with your colleagues—colleagues who each have specific strengths and specialties. Your network of colleagues comes together as a whole to become a multifaceted educational staff larger than the sum of its parts. You help each other, you inform each other, you share talents. On a very practical level, you share lesson plans and teaching methods, as well as helpful resources you find or make (Hostos Community College, 2021).

This collegial approach to education makes teaching social studies (and incorporating it across the curriculum) easier and more valuable. If you're a teacher who provides instruction across several content areas (as may be traditional for early childhood and elementary school teachers, for example), this multipurpose approach will allow you to target several content areas with one lesson. For example, in an early math lesson, you may be asking students to sort objects of different shapes and colors. This might simply seem like an early geometry skill, but it's also an opportunity to talk about how numbers work, why there might be more of one color than another, and otherwise launch into more nuanced and sophisticated conversations that will pave the way for similar discussions in later years (Hostos Community College, 2021).

Similarly, when you're teaching about scientific concepts, you can weave in both history and social studies aims by talking about when revolutionary concepts were discovered, the contexts which led to their discovery, and how those concepts—e.g., the discovery of electricity, the race to the moon, or more current initiatives like the search for a cure to cancer—affect the populations involved. Mathematical concepts can involve studies of logic, rhetorical arguments, or population statistics; physical education can even lead to conversations surrounding the availability of good nutrition in different geographical communities, or the ways that people have taken care of their bodies through time (Hostos Community College, 2021).

Ultimately, social studies courses constitute opportunities for connecting different content areas, pursuing deep logical conversations, and providing students with practical perspectives. By leveraging any ways in which you can use a specific assignment in a particular subject to connect to a current or historical event or ask your students to perform research and present persuasive presentations, you'll be working on your student's overt or underlying social studies competencies (Hostos Community College, 2021).

Next, we'll go through a few different areas of instruction prioritized for modern students and provide a few practical examples of ways that we can incorporate social studies aims with those subject areas.

Incorporating Social Studies and Language Arts or Writing Initiatives

Social studies often isn't given a lot of time to flourish on its own because areas such as early-childhood numeracy and literacy take precedence. While this makes sense, it's important to see that social studies provides important context and information to help children use their numeracy and literacy skills as they grow into productive citizens (Hudson, 2018).

However, as a teacher, you don't necessarily need to choose between literacy studies and social studies; you can figure out creative ways to make school time count for both disciplines. This is great for a few different reasons. Firstly, think about the type of content often covered in social studies: Power struggles throughout history, the ecological effects of volcanoes, the type of government that the ancient Egyptians had - and how we either experience similar issues or have grown past them today. Taken by themselves, each of these fascinating subjects should be very interesting for young children. We can use that inherent interest to help children become more adept at

reading comprehension and writing drills, instead of simply putting children through reading and writing exercises for their own sake (Hudson, 2018).

Secondly, consider the way that we as adults interact with social studies, literacy, and writing opportunities today. As adults, we hear about current events through the news, social media or conversations with friends. We then use the lens of our experience to create a unique stance on a subject, use that viewpoint to influence the way we take in new information, and write, speak or create with that foundation in mind (Hudson, 2018).

Children need to have the opportunity to do exactly the same thing. Further, integrating social studies with other subjects (such as language arts) is an excellent way to make sure that social studies and its benefits don't get lost in higher-priority learning initiatives (Hudson, 2018).

Interested in constructing engaging lesson plans that successfully integrate social studies and language arts? Here are a few strategies that could work for you and your students (Hudson, 2018):

1. **Prioritize building a great library full of books of different genres, focuses, and skill levels.** Studies are showing that kids tend to read fiction more than nonfiction, as an initial preference. One good way to bridge that gap is to find fiction books that have strong historical or social messages behind them and place them in a well-lit, attractive place along with high-quality nonfiction texts. Allow your students time to choose books that interest them from your collection, start reading discussion groups, and ask them to suggest titles to add to your library to give them a sense of ownership over the initiative. It is also a good idea to make your students aware that there are great nonfiction books for any subject they like, from space to women's history to sports statistics and more.
2. **Start a classroom news show, and have the students in your classroom rotate through being the news anchor.** Your student can select a few local or more global news stories each morning, perhaps with the help of a mentor, and share them with your classroom during the course of the morning (or at another time, such as just after lunch). This tiny 'news program' can also include information about events that are occurring in your community or at your school, to ensure that the news feels relevant to your students. By mentioning events that are happening at a national or global scale, however, alongside much more localized

events, you're subconsciously helping your students get the idea that all of these things impact their lives (albeit in different ways).

3. **Think outside the report.** It is common practice to have our students write reports or pieces of strictly informational writing when learning about social studies topics or about current events. This is a very useful and helpful way to integrate this type of study into language arts; however, there's room to encourage your students to write more creatively about social studies topics as well.
4. **If appropriate or possible, subscribe to a social studies classroom magazine instead of assigning one social studies textbook for your class.** Social studies topics should change based on what's happening in your community and around the world. The issue with textbooks in this discipline is that they can feel outdated very shortly after they're printed. Instead of using a traditional textbook, focus on building up your dynamic, interesting nonfiction library, use free online resources to teach your children about governmental bodies and other non-changing (or lesser-changing) mainstays of social studies, and subscribe to a classroom magazine to introduce a fresh rota of social studies content into your classroom.
5. **Have your students practice their interview skills.** This is a life skill that will be enormously important for your students to be able to accomplish, no matter what type of career they choose. Have them interview their relatives to gather and compare oral histories, have them interview community members (such as firemen, first responders, or other teachers) who come in to give presentations to your class, and even have them interview you while you put on various different historical personas (e.g., have them ask you a series of interview questions to see how long it takes them to realize that you're King Tut, Shakespeare, or Abraham Lincoln). This will allow you to have your students focus on the social or historical context of the interviews as well as the mechanic of asking high-value questions in a low-pressure environment.
6. **Proactively build your students' vocabularies.** This isn't necessarily linked solely to social studies, but the world of global communication, government, and social issues does have a vocabulary all of its own. Use your fiction and non-fiction libraries and other teaching tools to help your students learn new words frequently—and learn the backstories and contexts for those new words. This will help your students learn more topics, including social studies ones, more easily later in life.

7. **Use primary sources as much as possible.** This is another step away from using social studies textbooks, which often serve as a reader's digest of historical sources. All too often textbooks generalize and lose some of the fascinating details and nuances that primary sources contain. While textbooks and their supplementary materials can be helpful for covering a variety of high-level information very quickly, their information and format may also take away from the personal appeal of history and social studies. Find newspapers from important historical eras, source journals that people have written from the other side of the world, use letters that historical figures wrote to paint pictures of what they were doing and how they felt—and use old photographs, as well.
8. **Get your students up and moving with historical role play.** Many students want to be actors; and, in any case, reading lines or improvising scenes based on letters or photographs is often much more interesting than sitting and reading from a book. Moreover, role play is an excellent way to bring many language arts skills to life—including research, listening well, speaking clearly and even writing, if you ask your students to research a specific subject and write accurate dialogue. This type of activity can appeal to many more outgoing students, but if your students are more introverted and the idea of acting scares them, see if you can ease them into the concept by having them write dialogue, serve in a critical or directing capacity, or act in smaller roles.
9. **Put together a class timeline.** Social studies is a gargantuan topic; in any specific semester, you could be learning about far-flung ancient history or events that happened in your community over the past week. Start your semester off with a basic class timeline - a visual, physical one would be best, such as a blank timeline that goes around the top of the walls in your classroom (if you're teaching in person) or a shareable, modifiable interactive version that you update regularly online and send to the class. At the beginning of the year, the timeline should have a few milestone events on it; as you learn about other developments throughout the year, you should populate the timeline. This will help your class have some level of perspective about historical information, and can also help your students appreciate the longevity of certain ideas—for example, how the seeds of our modern democracy were planted thousands of years ago, or how relatively young the United States is as a country.
10. **When assessing your students via pop quizzes or tests, try to assess their thinking rather than their retention of basic facts.** Many social studies tests tend

to resemble historical trivia quizzes or vocabulary flashcards—e.g., with questions asking when a specific war began, or for a definition of the United States government. It's more difficult and requires more time, but it might be worth it to design shorter exams or fewer test questions that—instead of basic memory and recall—test actual comprehension.

11. **While there are many strategies for incorporating social studies into language arts initiatives, it's also a good idea to weave it into other parts of the curriculum.** For instance:

Incorporating Social Studies and History/Geography (Klieman, 2019)

- **Consider emphasizing the value of learning about human relationships through space and time.** The initial concepts that later make up social studies start at home. Students begin to realize where they are in relation to other people they know, the institutions that bring them together, and the differences between their communities and other communities around the world. Learning about how networking can facilitate relationship-building is a way to help your students relate to other people throughout time and around the world. By gaining awareness about other communities around the world and throughout time, students can understand how better to support and connect to their own communities.
- **Help your students understand that we all enjoy global citizenship—and the responsibility of global interdependence.** It can be all too easy to localize our sense of community on a microcosmic scale. In today's digital age, with the many issues that are currently affecting every member of the world's population, it's becoming clearer and clearer that we need to see that we're all in one metaphorical boat. Social studies is one of the ways we can communicate this message clearly to our students while empowering them to make good choices both for their own benefit and for that of their global neighbors. When we teach social studies alongside geography, it can become easier to see how geography and culture impacted the way that societies grew over time—and the way that the world's structure impacted alliances and dependent nations. We're now living in an age where, perhaps, geography is seen as less of a barrier—which should enable us to feel a sense of community with any other member of the world's population.

- **Help your students realize what goes into the complex art of city planning.** It's easy to think that there's little rhyme or reason that goes into mapping out roads, designating which businesses work next to each other, and which geographical parts of our cities should be residential. Historically, geography has dictated (or influenced strongly) where people have decided to plant their roots. By studying geography along with city planning, students can learn more about the why behind their own community's location—and understand why communities have developed, flourished, moved, and disappeared throughout eras past. This study can also lead to a successful career in architecture or city planning for students especially interested!

Incorporating Social Studies and Science (Klieman, 2019)

- Help your students learn about the influence of nature and climates on how cultures are shaped. Every country and community in the world is unique—and much of that has to do with each country, town, community, and family's relationship with their own specific environment. Learning about the world that has surrounded different cultures for millennia and delving through history to see how humanity has taken on a role as caretaker of its natural environment—this can spark an interest in conservatism, can cause children to wonder about the relationship between earth and mankind, and even make students want to travel more to learn more about the connection with different types of nature that we all have. We can also learn about how the history of human beings and our global movements have produced direct effects upon the earth—for example, the Sahara Desert and the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.
- Help your students study the influence of different types of natural disasters and weather patterns. Communities start, succeed, and fall apart based on dramatic weather disasters. These types of catastrophes reveal a great deal about the innate values that society fosters. They can also yield insight into the ways that governments plan for disasters, the economic fallout of a large, resource-destroying storm, the technological advancements that have allowed us to track storms, and even the locations where cities have sprung up over the centuries. There's an abundance of rich scientific information to study there—as well as top-tier social studies discussions to be had.

Incorporating Social Studies With Math

Social studies is a perfect lens through which to add interest and perspective to mathematical concepts. When learning math or early numeracy concepts, students may struggle to appreciate the relevance of word problems that mostly involve imaginary people. Instead, use both historical and current events to inject some life into otherwise boring math problem sets. For example, when learning about measurements, challenge your students to figure out which local buildings are as tall as famous historic monuments (is your school as large as the Sphinx?). When you're learning about averages, use your school's attendance data to figure out how many students walk your school's corridors on a daily basis - and if there's a day of the week that students tend to call in sick. (This is probably information that's worth having, anyway!) (TFD Supplies, 2020).

Ask your students to calculate the monetary value of a historic or imaginary country, figure out how the budget for the civil war was spent, or challenge your students to pay taxes as a feudal lord. Pose a problem to your students such as the need to provide clean water to your classroom's imaginary country, and ask them how much the initiative would cost in today's dollars. You can even ask your students to help with real-world planning projects, such as managing the budget for school dances, to help them see how very relevant a basic familiarity with numbers truly is (TFD Supplies, 2020).

Another fun project that infuses math, social studies, and even some basic biology skills is to run a community garden. This will require putting together a practical budget, estimating how much land is needed per plant, estimating the time to growth and the number of people your class might be able to feed with a certain amount of area (TFD Supplies, 2020).

Incorporating Social Studies With Art

If you have any avid or burgeoning artists in your classroom, you should know that you can harness that interest to help students learn more about social studies. Social studies tends to benefit from art integration in a very practical, specific way because it deals with a lot of vague, general concepts. By challenging your students to create visual representations of these concepts, you can help them exercise their critical thinking skills and get an idea of their comprehension of the subject (TFD Supplies, 2020).

Studying the art that has come out of various periods of time can also greatly inform students about the ways communities have formed over the past centuries. Art from the

past (and present) is often imbued with political meaning, or with contemporary social agendas. Pairing a civics or history module with the (seemingly-unrelated) art created during the relevant time can give students a more lateral picture (literally) of the social environment of the era (TFD Supplies, 2020).

Incorporating Social Studies With Music

Finally, music is a natural medium for learning the differences and similarities between different cultures across the world. Geography and history have shaped the kinds of music that different peoples have generated. Anything from the resources that communities had (which influenced the types of instruments they were able to purchase or invent) to the struggles they suffered through (which necessarily influenced the tone of their music) can be connected to any piece of music throughout time (TFD Supplies, 2020).

Music can also help us feel connected to people from other cultures or eras. If a piece of music from the eighteenth century speaks of suffering or happiness, there's a good chance that we can find more contemporary pieces that mirror those exact words or sentiments in a more modern way. Examining the ways that cultures have communicated with each other or preserved their experiences through music is a fascinating study—and one that might especially attract the interest of many young students in your classroom (TFD Supplies, 2020).

Conclusion

Whether your personal interest, experience, and training as a teacher is in the arts, math, history, or sciences, you'll be able to find ways to incorporate social studies aims into any and all of the subjects you teach. By doing so, you'll find that you can enrich all of your lessons with an infused sense of gravity, context, and perspective. You can also use social studies aims as an interesting 'hook' to attract your students' interest in drier subjects. It takes creativity and energy, but the end effect will be well worth it; it's all part of engaging students well and teaching your myriad of topics efficiently and effectively.

To that end, in the third section of this course, we will brainstorm several different methods for engaging your students in social studies courses, as well as practical tips for weathering specific teaching obstacles—such as teaching remotely or having to rely on technology to achieve your teaching aims.

Section 3: Engaging Your Students and Teaching Social Studies Effectively

Social studies can be an inherently interesting topic, but we have to teach it well in order to attract the curiosity of our students. This is not unique to social studies, of course—but the specific nature of social studies presents opportunities for helping your students spark an interest in their studies, as well as an interest in aiding their own communities.

First, we'll discuss a few characteristics of great social studies teachers, and then we'll discuss practical aims to pursue when teaching social studies in a variety of didactic environments.

Characteristics of Effective Social Studies Teachers and Learners

Becoming a Truly Great Social Studies Teacher

As has been made clear, social studies is an overwhelmingly comprehensive topic. Teachers may wonder at the qualifications required to be an effective social studies teacher. Fortunately, teaching this all-important subject well is often less about the breadth of your own knowledge and more about implementing good teaching strategies. Additionally, it is helpful to be able to recognize characteristics and signs of students who seem to be integrating and understanding this subject well.

In order to be an effective social studies teacher, concentrate on the following attributes of your teaching style (WGU, 2020):

- **Patience.** Remember, social studies is often about creating perspective, and less about memorizing specific definitions. This is a much more nuanced aim than other, more concrete subjects. To teach this subject well, you'll need to have the patience to approach social studies from several different angles to meet each of your unique students where they are.
- **Empathy.** One end goal of social studies is to help children understand that the world is a diverse space, made up of wildly different people with an expansive range of backgrounds. We also seek, as teachers, to help our students cultivate a curious, empathetic reaction to cultures different than our own. This is definitely a space in which you'll need to showcase that skill in your own words and actions in order to help your students grow in this regard.

- **Flexibility.** You'll be working with many students who come from different backgrounds. One teaching strategy will likely not work for everyone—and different social studies concepts will lend themselves to being taught in many different ways. To help your students most effectively learn this challenging subject, you'll need to be able to adapt and think on your feet during many lessons.
- **Objectivity.** To teach social studies well, you'll need to be skilled at presenting diverse world-views and experiences that differ from your own without a bias. You'll also need to be able to assess each of your students in a clear light to be able to help them in the most efficient way. It'll be your job to present a wide array of information and provide a safe space for your students to analyze and discuss potentially hot-button issues.
- **Communication.** While you're being objective, flexible, and empathetic, you'll also need to be able to present this information in the clearest way. Even though many social studies subjects are extremely complex and extensive—and your students might be very young—you'll need to be able to communicate the topics well to your specific audience. Additionally, as one of the aims of a comprehensive social studies education is for a student to be able to argue effectively, present well, and analyze efficiently, you'll need to model those skills to help show your students how to accomplish their goals well.

Signs that Students are Learning Social Studies Effectively

We've discussed the common characteristics that may identify teachers who are poised to teach social studies well. As you're progressing through your social studies curriculum, it would likely be helpful to have a set of benchmarks or characteristics to look out for to know whether your students are absorbing the subject well.

Specific skills that accompany students that are learning social studies effectively include (Bennett, 2018):

- Increasing comfort critically analyzing primary (or secondary) sources.
- The ability to understand and interpret a wide array of media across technology platforms.
- Familiarity with basic timelines of historical (and more recent) events.

- The ability to compare and contrast new pieces of information and present a basic, logical analysis of both fact and fiction.
- An understanding of the relationship between cause and effect when it comes to events that have shaped the course of humanity.
- An understanding of the spatial relationship between communities and countries on a global scale.

Students who are skilled at social studies do not need to have all of these skills perfectly incorporated into their everyday toolkit, but they should show increasing familiarity with these activities. Your goal as an efficient, engaging social studies teacher is to help your students reach these levels of understanding in an entertaining, inclusive, and empathetic way (Bennett, 2018).

Teaching Logical Thinking Effectively

Before we cover ways to teach social studies well in today's circumstances, there's one more meta-skill that we'd like to touch on: Logical thinking. As your social studies students will be working toward comfortability with critical analyses and effective arguments, they will need to be able to think logically and well. Much like social studies is a subject that can (and should) be integrated across the rest of your students' learning experience, logical thinking should permeate everything you teach in your social studies modules (Wabisabi Learning, 2019).

Here are a few quick tips and tricks to help your students learn how to think logically. As you're brainstorming ideas and developing social studies lessons, see how many of the following basic practices you can incorporate (Wabisabi Learning, 2019):

1. **Start your lessons with a question.** As teachers, we tend to get caught up in the idea that we need to come from a place of knowledgeable authority. Because of this, we often start our lessons with a definition. It can be much more creative and open-ended to begin with a question posed to your students - even something as simple as 'what is social studies'? You'll be able to prompt an exploratory conversation, and you'll be able to get a much better picture of where your students are coming from than if you routinely start your presentations by telling your students what they need to know.
2. **Give your students the information they need to solve problems.** Being able to effectively perform research to answer questions is an important skill—but it's

not the same as thinking critically. Thinking critically often happens after students have compiled all of the information they need. Your students will need to be able to complete both activities well, but critical thinking often gets left by the wayside in favor of building comprehensive research skills. See what happens when you give your students all of the data that they need to answer a question, whether it be a specific text, a previous homework assignment, or a set of statistics or other data. This will force your students to analyze what they have before them instead of assuming the answer lies elsewhere.

- 3. Establish a country to use as an example throughout your social studies endeavors.** It's true that much of social studies lies in familiarizing your students with the state of the actual non-fiction world. However, it can be easier to have non-polarized discussions about the building blocks of a country if you start your own. At the beginning of the semester, invite your students to band together and come up with the name for their very own micro-nation. Over the course of your curriculum, apply lessons you're learning from politics, civics, geography, and history to your own country.
- 4. Limit your students to one sentence.** Challenge your students' command of the English language as well as their perception of the topic that you're learning about by asking them to provide comprehensive, explanatory answers in very simple language, or in only one sentence. For a fun exercise, ask a group of students to define a complicated topic in this way, and see how everyone's sentences differ. You can use this same concept by asking students to give presentations as a group, each reciting one sentence before passing the (metaphorical) microphone to the next student for another sentence. This will challenge your students' understanding of the subject, their familiarity with the English language, and their presentation and clear communication skills in one fun activity.

While logical thinking is a net output of a wide range of subjects, social studies presents specific practical ways to use logical thinking—for example, by performing a critical analysis of a politician's recent actions or breaking down the argument from another classmate on an issue relating to the growth of your classroom's imaginary country. By structuring your social studies lessons in ways that help students grow in their ability to think logically, your students will become more well-rounded in all of their subjects (Wabisabi Learning, 2019).

Next, we'll discuss ways to make social studies appear more interactive and engaging, particularly when seeking ways to work with very young students on the subject.

Outside-The-Box Strategies for Engaging Young Students in Social Studies

If you're looking for outside-of-the-box solutions to helping students get excited about social studies, you might need some help: It can be hard to make community-driven solutions and worldwide conditions relevant and accessible from your classroom.

Here are five ways that we've found work well to help encourage children to do well with social studies:

- **Ask the local police force, emergency service technician, or fire department to stop by.** Your class should have an idea of how valuable the resources in your community are, and shining a light on first responders is a good way to start. You have a few options here: You could ask community members to pay a visit to your classroom, you could take your class on a field trip, or, in a remote learning situation, you could video-chat with individuals with this type of relevant experience to tell your students about what they do. This type of classroom activity could go a long way toward helping your students learn about community safety, but also helps students gain an appreciation for community participation on a wider level (Kids Academy, 2018).
- **Play games to help your students learn about civic engagement.** Games drive a student's sense of competition and fun, which often helps if the topics at hand are more esoteric or difficult. In a game, these harder subjects are integrated seamlessly for students who are playing along. Jeopardy or trivia games to help test your students' memory of national symbols and community leaders, matching games to test retention, and even simple movement activity ideas, such as having your students move to specific locations of the room to indicate whether they think the answer to a trivia or quiz question is yes or no, are all great ideas. This helps get their blood moving, which can keep them awake during class and also help with the retention of concepts later on (Kids Academy, 2018).
- **If you're able, plan a field trip to the historical sites that are available in your area.** No matter where you live, there are going to be interesting markers of historical events nearby. (Tip: If you're driving down the highway, many of these will be marked by brown signs, instead of the more typical blue or green). At the beginning of the school year, make a pact with your students to find out all of the local markers of historical sites within a certain radius of your high school, or all

the markers of a certain type, if there are many. If you're teaching remotely, you could ask individual students to go to a site over the weekend or in the evening, if that works with their families' schedule, they can report back to the rest of the class what they saw via video chat in a later class. Sites of various battles, monuments, and even local sites such as the location where your town's charter was created or places your city's founder worked and taught, could all be interesting contenders for this type of engagement (Kids Academy, 2018).

- **Hook your students in with a surprising or interesting fact right at the front of your class.** Consider starting your class by having your students guess the percentage of the world's population that lives on less than \$2 a day, or \$5 a day; talk about what ancient Egyptians had for breakfast, or tell a quick story about the day in the life of a spy serving in the Vietnam War. These fun trivia tidbits don't take much time for you to search and list, but they serve as a way to grab your students' interest off the bat—and for them to remember both the trivia and the larger topic later, when they're going through their notes (Let's Cultivate Greatness, 2021).
- **At the end of each lesson, make a direct connection between the topic of the lesson and an event going on today in the news.** The beauty of social studies is that for every subtopic you focus on in class, there is guaranteed to be something interesting, related, and relevant going on in the world today. In addition, helping your students get used to the idea that keeping tabs on the daily news should be a part of their daily routine will help them become more engaged, productive citizens. You will have to select news stories carefully based on how old your students are, of course; but even the idea that something is actually happening in the real world will appeal to even the youngest of your inherently practical students (Let's Cultivate Greatness, 2021).

Younger students and older students alike will benefit from these entertaining, engaging methods to learn social studies in a more active way. However, it isn't always feasible to have an entire classroom of young students together, participating in a communal, active lesson. In the next sections, we'll look at ways to spark that same interest while using technology to teach social studies, as well as strategies to use when teaching social studies remotely.

How to Use Technology Effectively to Teach Social Studies

One challenge that many modern teachers face is to figure out how to effectively use the technology available to them to help their students learn to work together, to engage well, and to think deeply. Using the tools available to us is integral: Increasingly, students need to know how to be good digital citizens; digital literacy will be a required component of most jobs in the future, and many students are already familiar with the major tech platforms, making onboarding easy and efficient (Britannica Digital Learning, 2017).

However, we need to strike a balance, as introducing technology into the classroom can also have consequences. Each device or platform has limitations, bugs, hiccups, and requires ongoing maintenance and (in some cases) increasingly large budgets. That being said, it's important to see technology as a critical tool that teachers must learn how to wield well (Britannica Digital Learning, 2017).

Here are five ways to use classroom technology to increase the efficacy of social studies education (Britannica Digital Learning, 2017):

1. **Capitalize on the collaborative feel of digital annotation.** With programs like Google Drive (and other available platforms), students can add notes to text as they read. This may feel like a trite, small thing, but to young students, this can mean the difference between taking in a text passively and feeling like they're involved with the ideas that the text is putting forth. With online collaboration platforms, students can even annotate the same version of the text - which can elevate a simple reading exercise into an analytic one with an easy-to-incorporate discussion element. Challenge your students to underline words they don't know, ask questions of the teacher or of classmates in the text, or add any thoughts that they have in the margins as they work toward the comprehension of social studies texts.
2. **Use technology to help primary sources spring off the page.** It's easy to think of many historical figures as dusty statues or as individuals who represent uninteresting blocks of text. With technology, we have the option to step away from textbooks and dive into the real words that people wrote. We can find documentaries that feature re-enactments or tours of battlefields; we can watch interviews with people from times gone by or take children on virtual field trips to far-flung locales. Particularly with social studies, it can sometimes be difficult to conceptualize topics like currency and GDP, and civics, economics, and other

subjects can often be considered dry. When possible, use technology to help your students reenact or experience these issues in as personal a way as possible - or give them a problem that they can solve with online resources that feels like a real issue or a fun treasure hunt, instead of simply a block of confusing text to read.

- 3. Rely on technology to remove barriers to learning depending on what each student needs.** Technology has given us the ability to personalize each student's learning experience based on what that student requires in order to relax and learn in the best possible way. For example, a fix as easy as letting students control the text size of their reading material can reduce issues for students who have a hard time reading. Alternatively, if you have several students in your class who are behind or ahead of the others, you can easily send those students harder or less complicated texts that still work around the same central aim as the rest of the class. If you know one child needs a video, another needs to write out what they're learning, and another needs an audio transcription of the text, you can easily source those different materials and send them out to each student individually. This helps build student-teacher trust, increases the efficacy of learning time, and also helps all children learn to recognize what they need out of their education.
- 4. Find ways to pair other things that your students are learning or enjoying - particularly, engaging pieces of literature - with social studies.** Because social studies lessons can vary wildly from day to day, it can help students to have a through-line or common topic of interest to keep them engaged. Taking advantage of any pop culture artists or pieces of media that your students are already interested in can be a savvy way to ensure that the students pay attention to educational content. You can see what your students are studying in literature to see if any connections to social studies aims already exist, and team up with your school's literature department to plan discussions or re-enactments that help your students delve deeper into both literature and social studies topics. This same idea can exist outside of literature; for example, if your students are learning about electricity in their science courses, work with the science department to stage a fun experiment and then discuss how history and culture changed dramatically - and is still changing dramatically - as different communities have embraced these types of modern inventions. You can use technology to make this sense of collaboration and discovery more efficient. Help your students stream pieces of relevant music, encourage them to send each

other videos that relate to the literature that you're learning, and send your students live-streams of scientific experiments that add dimension to historical events you're helping them about.

Strategies to Teach Social Studies Remotely

In today's day and age, remote learning is becoming more and more of a consistently-chosen option. Spurred by the pandemic of 2020, the pre-existing trend toward remote learning has forced teachers and school administrations to figure out ways to connect with students who are learning from a distance.

If you're currently challenged by how to make social studies relevant and interesting to students through a screen, you'll find that with a little bit of creativity and ingenuity you can make this often-esoteric subject come alive in many different ways - no matter how far from your students you may physically be (Ferlazzo, 2020).

Here are a few tips and tricks that may be helpful for educators seeking to teach social studies effectively in a remote learning situation (Ferlazzo, 2020):

- First, make sure that the first thing that you do, whenever possible, is check in with your students' emotional and social needs prior to delving into the lesson you have planned for the day. This builds a student-teacher connection, helps your students learn to trust you (a crucial foundation that will increase your educating efficacy), and helps you potentially identify any issues that you might have more easily been able to see were you and your students in the same building.
- Secondly, think about shifting your focus to project-based learning while you are educating in a remote capacity. Presentations for remote students, while sometimes necessary, can be an ineffective and even soporific way to get information across. Instead, see if you can integrate social studies ideas with other classes in multi-purpose projects; for example, asking your students to solve a real-world, relevant problem together while you monitor their progress. One salient example might be asking students to pretend that they are government officials in a small country, and it's their job to figure out how to distribute resources equitably during a small-scale disaster. Less pointed examples might simply include having students team up to mock-up faux business plans or re-create famous social experiments, then giving a small presentation to the rest of the class about the impacts of what they learned.

- Embrace creative strategies for outreach concerning your younger students. Older students may have the learned discipline and motivation to be able to take on some of the responsibility of getting things done themselves. Younger students may require more help.
- Remember that the true essence of a good social studies education is a foundation for human interaction - and a recognition of the need every human innately has to know where we've come from, who we are, and where we're going to be. There are some social studies experts who prefer to think of the discipline as an art; a way to sow seeds of logical thought and as the basis for rational lines of inquiry in their students that are informed by the way the world works around us. As social studies is largely dependent upon social interaction, it's important that we take the time to create personal connections even when we are apart. The good thing? That need to know what keeps us together and the forces that pull us apart and make us who we are will remain constant in us, no matter what. You can begin by helping your students find ways to capitalize on that and build connection despite the distance. For example:
 - Find ways that students can impact their communities from afar (writing to or visiting local politicians, viewing live streams or tweets of meetings of community or school boards)
 - Help your students find localized ways to volunteer in their communities from a distance, in parallel, together—for example, doing canned goods drives, or picking up litter at parks near their homes.
 - Ask students if they have stories they'd like to tell - the basis for a beloved, handed-down-over-generations family recipe, for example; or other similarly diverse (but not necessarily divisive) shared experiences.

Feel free to take a step back from required, granular assignments - particularly for something like social studies, which has fewer associations with standardized exams and required national assessments. Instead, focus on helping your students gain an appreciation for where we've come from as a human race—and how we can work together to set the stage for a productive, happy future for us all (Ferlazzo, 2020).

Conclusion

Social studies is a multifaceted subject that requires a deft hand and creative thinking to teach effectively and well. The benefits for each student, if this is done, are profound. By

teaching social studies effectively, we have the direct opportunity and privilege to shape the leaders of the next generation. Giving our students the inspiration to do good in their communities, the practical knowledge they'll need to make logical choices in their future, and the perspective that will help them become productive, empathetic members of our global community is a priceless initiative. Through growing in our ability to be good social studies teachers, we gain the ability to hand our students the tools they need to most directly make the world a better place.

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