

Preparing Students to Engage in --- College, Career, and Civic Life



In 1822, James Madison wrote, “Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.”

At Studies Weekly, we believe that students need many tools to navigate their world and that the toolbox is filled with the knowledge about civics, economics, geography, history, and culture that can be found in our publications.

Knowledge of the social studies domains brings not just academic, but also practical rewards. A firm grounding in social studies literally prepares students for the future – for “college, career, and civic life,” as explained in the [C3 Framework of the National Council for the Social Studies](#).

One example is the concept of civic engagement. In their work to promote social equity, [researchers Ausberger, et al.](#) assert that civic engagement by young people “has the potential to benefit both youth and the community.”

Their research specifically mentions a “sense of control in decision making processes” and “feelings of enhanced self-esteem, empowerment, and self-efficacy.”

In fact, [researcher Chan Chitat](#) looked at

how civic engagement affected ethnonational identity by having Hongkongers post captioned photos on Facebook then pick five to present to one of the facilitators. During the study, facilitators encouraged Hongkongers in one group to include more exceptional or neglected aspects of their lives in their digital stories. The participants in this group showed higher self-esteem and critical thinking disposition and lower ethnocentric views, while those in the control group became

more closed minded. Thus, the very activities in which social studies engages, enriches, or thickens, a student’s narrative about the world to increase their tolerance and equitable perspective.

Furthermore, an understanding of “how cultural practices, social movements, and conflicts have combined with political institutions to

shape American life from the earliest colonial period to the present, investigat[ing] which moments of change have most defined the country, and build[ing] understanding of how we, the people, working in concert, have changed American society and political institutions” is key to preparing students to participate in positive institutional and social transformation, according to [Educating for American Democracy](#).

“**Now more than ever, students need the intellectual power to recognize societal problems; ask good questions and develop robust investigations into them; consider possible solutions and consequences; separate evidence-based claims from parochial opinions; and communicate and act upon what they learn. And most importantly, they must possess the capability and commitment to repeat that process as long as is necessary.**”

— *the C3 Framework*

Providing this grounding in social studies is dependent, however, on access to content ideas that are carried through educational materials and the accompanying discourse needed for both rigorous and enduring understanding. Good elements of universal design for learners calls for multiple means of engagement, representation, action, and expression, according to a [CAST 2018 article](#).

Engaging Students in Learning

Studies Weekly, by its very nature, provides opportunities for multiple modalities and means of engagement. Lesson plans direct teachers to opportunities for close reading strategies within the Teacher's Edition, and are based on the work of reading researchers such as [Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey](#).



As a consumable newsprint edition, Studies Weekly allows students to physically engage with the text. The individual sheets encourage interaction because they can annotate and complete close reading activities directly on the publication. The periodical format also allows for an instant at-home connection, as students can share the result of their

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school work with family members outside of the classroom. With traditional textbooks, students must use notebooks to annotate and complete activities, and they often are not allowed to take textbooks home.

Close reading is vital to developing successful readers who are prepared for civic engagement, but it is not the only stepping stone. Scaffolding helps students use the background knowledge they already have and prepares the reader's schema for understanding new information. This enhances reading comprehension, especially in students who speak a first language other than that of the reading material. In a [study in 2013 by Ibrahm Alfaki](#), he found that "background knowledge activation, through text previewing, is effective in enhancing reading comprehension."

Studies Weekly provides multiple ways of building background knowledge and then activating that knowledge to prepare students for comprehending effectively.

For example, the online learning platform includes videos that tell stories, show and explain historical artifacts, describe events, show locations, and interview people, so students gain stronger context for their reading about economics, civics, geography, history, or culture.

Scaffolding and Differentiating Learning

“In a differentiated classroom, the teacher proactively plans and carries out varied approaches to content, processes, and product in anticipation of and response to student differences in readiness, interest, and learning needs” explains [Carol Tomlinson in a 2006 study](#).

Studies Weekly supports differentiated learning through multiple modalities as well as providing support for all learners within teacher lesson plans. Both the print and online platform include rich and extensive supplemental materials such as interviews, contextual videos, photos, illustrations,



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Our aim as teachers is to give our student as firm a grasp of a subject as we can, and to give [them] as autonomous and self-propelled a thinker as we can — one who will go along on [their] own once formal schooling has ended.”

— *J.S. Bruner*

graphic organizers, and diagrams that help students understand concepts and connect ideas. Photos or paintings of historical figures help anchor these people to events or a timeline and establish them as real people who affected history, and not just names. These scaffolds help students prepare for and extend their learning.

While reading is a fundamental component of the learning environment, sometimes students need additional scaffolding to understand textual concepts. When using the online platform, students have access to high-quality real-person audio support that sync-highlights the text for easy tracking. Students can also adjust the audio speed for better overall comprehension.

Most of the Studies Weekly content is also available in Spanish, but regardless of language proficiency, building academic discourse strategies through academic conversations is important to rigor and deep learning.

J.S. Bruner explains in his article [The Act of Discovery](#) how students learn more deeply and are prepared for expanding and explaining their ideas when teachers use content-rich questions to guide the exploration of content. As researchers [Zwiers and Crawford](#) explain, the ability to define one’s reasoning and defend a position in a collaborative context is highly prized by a wide variety of careers.

Conclusion

As teachers of social studies, we must provide the cognitive technology for students to think critically and look deeper. By giving students the framework of economics, civics, geography, history, and culture, we empower them to engage with the world around them and participate in the “critical social analysis” – an important element that [Patrick Camangian](#) describes as a path to “healing fractured collective identities.”

Children are part of a network of homes, communities, and schools where they are

“hearing and internalizing messages all around them and trying to make sense of their racial identity,” as Camangian and Ruchi explain.

The teaching of social studies provides students with the tools needed to be successful in school, in a future career, and as members of local, state, national, and global communities. Studies Weekly is proud to be a part of this important work.

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