



# **Social Studies**

## **Overview**



# Why Study Social Studies?

In social studies classes students confront questions about the wonder and excitement of humankind in the world. How have humans defined themselves and made meaning of the world? How are we connected to and different from those who have come before us? What does all of humankind have in common? Who are we as a nation and what are our values and traditions? How did we get to be the way we are? How have we found unity in the midst of our diversity? Which individuals and groups contributed to our development? What are our great achievements as a nation? Where have we failed and what do we need to change? What are our responsibilities to ourselves and to society at large? What will we be like in the future? What is our place in the world? In short, social studies classes help students understand their roots, see their connections to the past, comprehend their context, recognize the commonality of people across time, appreciate the delicate balance of rights and responsibilities in an open society, and develop the habits of thoughtful analysis and reflective thinking.

In helping students answer these questions, social studies courses engage students in the study of history, geography, economics, government, and civics. Instruction draws on other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, political science, psychology, religion, law, archaeology, philosophy, art, literature, other humanities subjects and the sciences.

Courses of study should give students the knowledge, intellectual skills, civic understandings, and dispositions toward democratic values that are necessary to function effectively in American society. Ultimately, social studies instruction should help students assume their role as responsible citizens in America's constitutional democracy and as active contributors to a society that is increasingly diverse and interdependent with other nations of the world. For example, students should be able to use the knowledge and skills acquired through social studies courses to solve problems and make reasoned decisions in their daily lives. Social studies courses should provide students with the background to conduct research in order to cast informed votes, with the skills to place conflicting ideas in context, and with the wisdom to make good judgments in dealing with the tensions inherent in society such as the enduring struggle to find the proper balance between protecting the rights of the individual and promoting the common good.

---

## Dimensions of Teaching and Learning

As a prelude to stating the standards which define the overriding goals of social studies, it is important to define critical dimensions of teaching and learning that should be used to develop curriculum and instruction based on the standards. These dimensions can be used to establish criteria for selecting the historic, social, cultural, geographic, economic, and political understandings that students might investigate. The first two dimensions are the most critical because they define, more explicitly than the standards, the intellectual skills that students must develop.

The dimensions challenge what we teach, how we teach, and how we assess student learning. To ensure rich, engaging, and meaningful social studies programs, they should be an integral part of all social studies curriculum and instruction. The eight dimensions are:

- intellectual skills
- multidisciplinary approaches
- depth and breadth

- unity and diversity
- multiculturalism and multiple perspectives
- patterns to organize data
- multiple learning environments and resources
- student-centered teaching, learning, and assessment

## 1. Intellectual Skills

The development of students' intellectual skills and their ability to think reasonably, rationally, logically, and reflectively is central to each of the standards for social studies in the State of New York. Giving students a sound knowledge base goes hand in hand with expanding their intellectual skills and their ability to engage in analytical thinking. Instruction based on these standards should require social studies students at all levels to use a variety of intellectual skills to master content, probe ideas and assumptions, ask and answer analytical questions, take a skeptical attitude toward questionable arguments, acquire and organize information, evaluate data, draw conclusions, and view the human condition from a variety of perspectives.

In developing thinking skills in social studies, students should combine the disciplinary methods and processes of history, geography, economics, government, and civics with interdisciplinary approaches as they examine the past, study the present, and speculate about the future. They should learn to consult and interpret databases and a wide variety of primary sources, such as original documents, speeches, cartoons, artifacts, photos, art, music, architecture, literature, drama, dance, popular culture, biographies, journals, folklore, historic places, and oral histories.

Drawing on a variety of sources, students should take and defend positions on past and contemporary issues and controversial events by evaluating evidence and formulating rational conclusions. Furthermore, social studies classes should offer many opportunities for research activities. Students should conduct research by posing questions, identifying problems, collecting evidence, developing generalizations, presenting interpretations, and defending conclusions.

## 2. Multidisciplinary Approaches

Social studies courses must help students understand both the specialized processes and approaches of certain academic disciplines and the connection of ideas, information, issues, and perspectives across the disciplines. In drawing on history, the social sciences—particularly geography, economics, government, and civics—the humanities, and, to a lesser degree, the sciences, social studies provides a perfect opportunity for curriculum integration. But too often instruction presents people and events in isolation, without context.

The standards in this framework have a discipline focus combining content and process, but in each standard and its performance indicators there is provision for synthesis and connecting ideas and knowledge from one discipline to another. These synthesis statements should lead to instruction that provides a rich context of the subject and increasing intellectual proficiency.

## 3. Depth and Breadth

The broad scope of subject matter and the amount of material that could be included in social studies is a serious concern for social studies educators. All agree that selection of what to study is a major issue in planning instruction. The challenge for social studies curriculum developers and teachers is to design instruction that “emphasizes depth of development of important ideas within appropriate breadth of topic coverage.” (Taken from “A Vision of Powerful Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies: Building Social Understanding and Civic Efficacy,” *Social Education*, September 1993, p. 216). The content selected should represent worthwhile, “important ideas for understanding, appreciation, and life application.” (ibid, p. 216). Finding a

justifiable balance of depth and breadth is a great challenge. The standards and sample performance indicators establish broad goals. However, the K-12 scope and sequence that follows specifies concepts and content in more detail. This scope and sequence will be used to develop State social studies examinations. Curriculum needs to reflect the reality that some events are more important than others, that some have had more influence than others, that some beliefs and practices, are more defensible than others, and that knowledge and scholarship need to be reflected in the curriculum.

#### **4. Unity and Diversity**

Social studies classes that focus on local, state, and national subject matter should examine the concepts of unity and diversity in American society. Students should see how most inhabitants of the United States are united by certain shared values, practices, traditions, needs, and interests, some of which have evolved over centuries. They should understand how the nation's political institutions developed and created many of these traditions. Students should examine democratic ideals such as the dignity of humanity, the value of diversity, limited government, equity, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom to pursue economic opportunity, government by consent of the governed, rule of law, and popular sovereignty. They should also understand America's political institutions including the independent judicial system, political parties, and governmental mechanisms by which to redress grievances. The changing nature of these institutions should be studied and analyzed by focusing on the interactions among individuals, groups, and society at large.

Students should also understand diversity and the multicultural context of American society. This includes the study of the various immigrations which have created the diverse nature of American people from the earliest Native American groups to the landing of the first European settlers to the forced migration of enslaved Africans to the waves of immigrants from all regions of the world, many of whom came seeking the "American Dream" of economic opportunity, political freedom, and religious toleration. Migrants from Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas brought with them rich strands of racial, religious, ethnic, and linguistic traditions that created and continue to influence American society. These people have made the United States one of the most diverse nations on Earth.

Study of the interactions of these diverse peoples over time provides students with a context for understanding how such diverse peoples have been able to create a strong and united nation. The development of common democratic values, institutions, and traditions, evolving through struggle, has created a people committed to a united, national identity while preserving many of their individual cultural traditions.

#### **5. Multiculturalism and Multiple Perspectives**

Contemporary multicultural issues, while linked to earlier movements for ethnic studies (1970s) and improving intergroup relations (1950s), differ from them in important ways. With respect to social studies, the primary issue is the nature and extent of inclusion of the histories and cultures, experiences, and perspectives of the diverse groups that constitute what is now the United States. "Multicultural education needs to be more broadly defined and understood so that teachers from a wide range of disciplines can respond to it in appropriate ways." (James Banks, "The Dimensions of Multicultural Education," *Multicultural Leader*, Vol. 3, 1990, p. 1). Implementation of the standards should go beyond the addition of long lists of ethnic groups, heroes, and contributions to the infusion of various perspectives, frames of reference, and content from various groups. As a result, students better understand the nature, complexity, and development of United States society as well as societies in other nations throughout the world. Effective multicultural approaches look beyond ethnic particularism, examine differences in light of universal human characteristics, focus on multiple perspectives, and attend to the mutual influences among groups within and across national boundaries. (Adapted from: James Banks, "Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform," *Multicultural Leader*, Vol. 1, 1988, p. 2).

In examining different perspectives about events and issues and how ethnic, racial, gender, religious, and socio-economic background can influence opinion, students should understand that all members of a given group will not necessarily share the same view. Recognizing diversity within groups and multiple group memberships is necessary to avoid stereotyping.

Social studies classes should also help students acquire knowledge that will lead to greater tolerance and empathy for people who hold varying viewpoints on social, political, or economic issues. Students “will respect and practice basic civic values,” including respect for self and others (Regents Goal 5). But accomplishing this goal is not simple. Throughout history there have been events inconsistent with basic American values. Tolerance for practices such as the Nazi Holocaust, totalitarianism, chattel slavery, the subjugation of peoples, and the infringement of human rights are not acceptable. They must be studied in historical context, but evaluated within a values perspective.

## **6. Patterns to Organize Information**

Social studies courses should help students identify patterns for organizing data. One approach is to look for systems. A system describes how any group of facts, ideas, principles, or concepts are arranged or classified to explain the functioning of a logical or constructed whole. For example, political systems can be defined and classified as totalitarian, democratic, authoritarian, parliamentary, and so forth. Economic systems can be traditional, command, market, or combinations of these types. Social systems describe what is meant by human society, explaining the roles of men and women across time and place, the status and characteristics of various groups and classes, and “how economic, religious, cultural, and political changes have affected social life.” (Taken from: *Lessons From History, The National Center for History in the Schools, 1992, p. 25*).

Another approach to patterning is to use a few broad concepts such as continuity and change, cause and effect, and interdependence, to help students make meaning out of unfamiliar people, events, and cultures. Using such concepts gives students a frame of reference for analyzing the human condition past and present.

For example, the concepts of continuity and change and interdependence can provide an interesting context for studying the impact, costs, and benefits of scientific and technological developments over eras or time periods. Focusing on interdependence can illuminate and give new meaning to breakthroughs in transportation and communication that have brought communities and nations closer together. Understanding interdependence helps students have a broader context for dealing with the phenomenon that what happens today in one part of our world can have important implications for others in distant places.

## **7. Multiple Learning Environments and Resources**

Using local resources and different learning sites can be an effective way to let students experience firsthand how scholars conduct their work and how communities function and use the intellectual skills learned in social studies. Classes might be held, for example, in conjunction with a higher education (college/university) class, in the community at social service, government, and health agencies; at community-based organizations; in libraries and other cultural institutions; and in factories, business, or other work sites. By working and studying at these alternative learning sites, students gather information from a wide range of resources, learn how scholars contribute to their fields and how various organizations provide services.

With increased access to more advanced technologies, schools now can expand their learning environments to include databases, information-retrieval systems, and other library and museum resources throughout the world. Through Internet, electronic study groups, and international education networks, teachers can plan class-to-class long-distance learning activities. Students retrieve, process, and organize information gathered from libraries, cultural institutions, museums, archives, and government document repositories. They can share this

information using computer links with other students studying similar topics, issues, and problems. The challenge is twofold: 1) to learn how to use these resources, and 2) to encourage schools and communities to expand instruction beyond the walls of the schools.

## **8. Student-Centered Teaching, Learning, and Assessment**

In an effort to engage students more effectively in the learning process and to provide real opportunities for the application of intellectual skills, many educators have called for linking teaching, learning, and assessment to the world of the student. For this to happen, students need to participate in many different kinds of activities to gain a broad knowledge base, develop thinking skills, and take responsibility for their own learning. In addition to the more traditional learning tasks, activities should include independent reading on and investigation of topics identified by the teacher and by the student, performances that require in-depth understanding, complex questioning and thinking, and opportunities to present conclusions in new ways. Many assessment tasks should be embedded in learning activities to mesh instruction and monitoring students' progress toward the attainment of learning goals. (Grant Wiggins, "Assessment to Improve Performance, Not Just Monitor It: Assessment Reform in the Social Sciences," *Social Science Record*, Vol. 30, No. 2, Fall 1993, p. 10.) Using this approach at all levels is supported by recent studies showing that students can conceptualize and employ complex thinking skills at a very young age.

# Concepts and Themes for Social Studies

Concepts and themes serve as content organizers for the vast amounts of information people encounter every day. Concepts represent mental images, constructs, or word pictures that help people to arrange and classify fragmented and isolated facts and information.

All school and life experiences influence a person's perception of a concept such as ~Citizenship

↑ VOTING

↑ TRAFFIC TICKET — SPEEDING

↑ PAYING TAXES

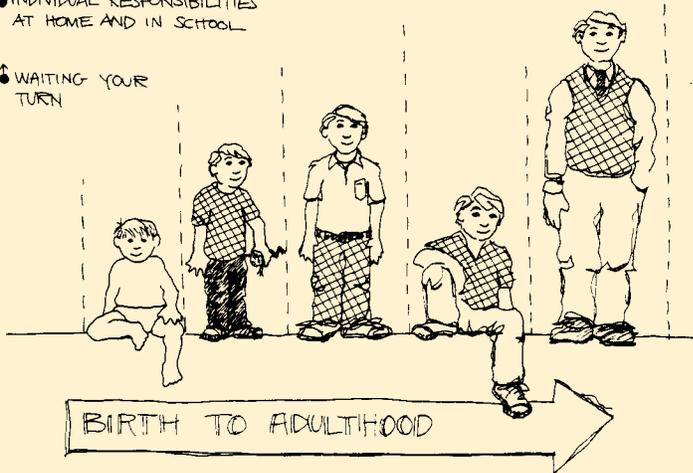
↑ ROLE MODELS AT HOME AND IN THE COMMUNITY

↑ OBEYING BICYCLE LAWS

↑ INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES AT HOME AND IN SCHOOL

↑ WAITING YOUR TURN

AS AN INDIVIDUAL GROWS THE EXPERIENCES WHICH THE INDIVIDUAL INTERNALIZES BUILD A CONCEPT ~



A concept is

- usually abstract, as opposed to concrete
- a product of the analysis and synthesis of facts and experiences rather than a definition to be learned
- constantly subject to change and expansion of meaning and delineation of detail, as different experiences provide settings and different relationships in new contexts.

Students construct concepts and themes as they interact with their environments. This process of concept formation is ongoing, stimulated by active, meaningful involvement, and developmental in nature. To demonstrate the developmental nature of concept learning, the concepts and themes of the K-12 social studies program are listed on each page of the scope and sequence.

Illustrated graphically, students grow to incorporate new experiences into their existing conceptual frameworks and at the same time modify that mental framework, constantly changing and expanding it.

## The key concepts of the K-12 social studies program are:

### History

**Belief Systems** means an established orderly way that groups or individuals look at religious faith or philosophical tenets.

**Change** involves the basic alterations in things, events, and ideas.

**Conflict** is a clash of ideas, interests, or wills that result from incompatible opposing forces.

**Choice** means the right or power to select from a range of alternatives.

**Culture** means the patterns of human behavior that includes ideas, beliefs, values, artifacts, and ways of making a living which any society transmits to succeeding generations to meet its fundamental needs.

**Diversity** means understanding and respecting others and oneself including similarities and differences in language, gender, socioeconomic class, religion, and other human characteristics and traits.

**Empathy** means the ability to understand others through being able to identify in one's self responses similar to the experiences, behaviors, and responses of others.

**Identity** means awareness of one's own values, attitudes, and capabilities as an individual and as a member of different groups.

**Interdependence** means reliance upon others in mutually beneficial interactions and exchanges.

**Imperialism** means the domination by one country of the political and/or economic life of another country or region.

**Movement of People and Goods** refers to the constant exchange of people, ideas, products, technologies, and institutions from one region or civilization to another that has existed throughout history.

**Nationalism** means the feeling of pride in and devotion to one's country or the desire of a people to control their own government, free from foreign interference or rule.

**Urbanization** means movement of people from rural to urban areas.

## Geography

The six essential elements of geography:\*

**The World in Spatial Terms**—Geography studies the relationships between people, places, and environments by mapping information about them into a spatial context.

**Places and Regions**—The identities and lives of individuals and peoples are rooted in particular places and in those human constructs called regions.

**Physical Systems**—Physical processes shape Earth's surface and interact with plant and animal life to create, sustain, and modify ecosystems.

**Human Systems**—People are central to geography in that human activities help shape Earth's surface, human settlements and structures are part of Earth's surface, and humans compete for control of Earth's surface.

**Environment and Society**—The physical environment is modified by human activities, largely as a consequence of the ways in which human societies value and use Earth's natural resources, and human activities are also influenced by Earth's physical features and processes.

**The Uses of Geography**—Knowledge of geography enables people to develop an understanding of the relationships between people, places, and environments over time—that is, of Earth as it was, is, and might be.

(\*Taken from: *Geography for Life: National Geography Standards, 1994*, pp. 34-35. Permission applied for.)

**Environment** means the surroundings, including natural elements and elements created by humans.

## **Economics**

**Needs and Wants** refer to those goods and services that are essential such as food, clothing, and shelter (needs), and those good and services that people would like to have to improve the quality of their lives, (i.e., wants—education, security, health care, entertainment).

**Economic Systems** include traditional, command, market, and mixed systems. Each must answer the three basic economic questions: What goods and services shall be produced and in what quantities? How shall these goods and services be produced? For whom shall goods and services be produced?

**Factors of Production** are human, natural, and capital resources which when combined become various goods and services (e.g., How land, labor, and capital inputs are used to produce food.).

**Scarcity** means the conflict between unlimited needs and wants and limited natural and human resources.

**Science and technology** means the tools and methods used by people to get what they need and want.

## **Civics, Citizenship, and Government**

**Justice** means the fair, equal, proportional, or appropriate treatment rendered to individuals in interpersonal, societal, or government interactions.

**Nation-state** means a geographic/political organization uniting people by a common government.

**Citizenship** means membership in a community (neighborhood, school, region, state, nation, world) with its accompanying rights, responsibilities, and dispositions.

**Political Systems** such as monarchies, dictatorships, and democracies address certain basic questions of government such as: What should a government have the power to do? What should a government not have the power to do? A political system also provides for ways that parts of that system interrelate and combine to perform specific functions of government.

**Power** refers to the ability of people to compel or influence the actions of others. “Legitimate power is called authority.”

**Government means the**

*“formal institutions and processes of a politically organized society with authority to make, enforce, and interpret laws and other binding rules about matters of common interest and concern. Government also refers to the group of people, acting in formal political institutions at national, state, and local levels, who exercise decision making power or enforce laws and regulations.”*

*(Taken from: Civics Framework for the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAEP Civics Consensus Project, The National Assessment Governing Board, United States Department of Education, p. 19).*

**Decision Making means the processes used to**

*“monitor and influence public and civic life by working with others, clearly articulating ideals and interests, building coalitions, seeking consensus, negotiating compromise, and managing conflict.”*

*(Taken from: Civics Framework, p. 18).*

**Civic Values** refer to those important principles that serve as the foundation for our democratic form of government. These values include justice, honesty, self-discipline, due process, equality, majority rule with respect for minority rights, and respect for self, others, and property.

**Human Rights** are those basic political, economic, and social rights that all human beings are entitled to, such as *the right to life, liberty, and the security of person, and a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family.* Human rights are inalienable and expressed by various United Nations Documents including the *United Nations Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*

# Social Studies Skills

Content, concepts, and skills form the basis for the learning standards and goals for the State social studies curriculum. Social studies skills are not learned in isolation but rather in context as students gather, organize, use, and present information. These skills are introduced, applied, reinforced, and remediated within the framework of the K-12 social studies program. Students understand the importance of social studies skills as they use them to interpret, analyze, and evaluate social science concepts and understandings. Students aim for mastery of skill objectives at the same time that they pursue the other cognitive and affective objectives of the social studies program.

Learning, practicing, applying, extending, and remediating social studies skills is a developmental process. Just as students who lack social studies facts and generalizations have difficulty in applying information to new situations and analyzing new issues and historical problems, students with limited understanding of social studies skills have great difficulty in processing information, reaching higher cognitive levels, and learning independently. The teaching of social studies skills needs to be built into every classroom activity so that students engage in a systematic and developmental approach to learning how to process information.

Social studies skills can be classified into thinking skills and thinking strategies. (See: Barry K. Beyer, *Developing A Thinking Skills Program*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1988). Thinking skills include the ability to gather, interpret, organize, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information. Thinking strategies involve processing information as students engage in problem-solving, decision-making, inquiry, and conceptualizing. The following skills charts provide examples of how thinking skills and strategies can be organized throughout the social studies curriculum, K-12. The social studies standards, performance indicators, and core curriculum provide additional examples of skill development strategies.

Source: *Incorporating Skills Into Social Studies Programs K-12*. The New York State Education Department, Albany, NY.

# Chart A: Social Studies Skills

I. GETTING INFORMATION	II. USING INFORMATION
<p><b>Students shall be able to:</b></p> <p>identify a variety of sources of information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• multiple sources of the same types of information</li><li>• varying approaches, viewpoints, interpretations</li><li>• reference works, newspapers, magazines, primary and secondary sources</li><li>• tables, graphs, charts, diagrams</li><li>• maps, globes, atlases, vocabulary</li><li>• visuals, field trips, artifacts</li><li>• listening</li><li>• observing</li></ul> <p>recognize advantages and limitations of various sources</p> <p>locate sources of print and nonprint information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• libraries (card catalogs, indices, library guides such as <i>Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature</i>)</li><li>• tables of contents, appendices, glossaries, bibliographies, and indices</li><li>• museums, galleries, public and private collections, motion pictures, television, radio, recordings, conversations, interviews</li></ul> <p>identify the types and kinds of information needed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• recognition of information that is relevant as differentiated from information that is irrelevant</li><li>• use of subquestions and/or predicted consequences</li><li>• understanding of purposes for which information is to be used</li></ul> <p>locate information in print and nonprint sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• main elements</li><li>• main ideas</li><li>• supportive elements</li></ul> <p>organize collected information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• orderly, precise, summarized notes</li><li>• cited sources</li></ul>	<p><b>Students shall be able to:</b></p> <p>classify and/or categorize data by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• selecting appropriate headings for data</li><li>• distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant information and events placing ideas in order, chronological and other</li><li>• developing tables, charts, maps, and graphs to clarify data and ideas</li><li>• identifying differences and similarities in data</li></ul> <p>evaluate data by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• differentiating fact from opinion</li><li>• identifying frames of reference</li><li>• identifying value-laden words</li><li>• detecting evidence of propaganda</li><li>• evaluating author's or person's qualifications</li></ul> <p>draw inferences from data by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• identifying relationships among the parts</li><li>• detecting inconsistencies</li><li>• weighing conflicting facts and statements</li></ul> <p>check on completeness of data and question hypotheses based on sufficiency of evidence by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• using simple mathematical and statistical devices to analyze data</li><li>• testing, refining, and eliminating hypotheses and working out new ones where necessary</li><li>• drawing conclusions</li></ul> <p>generalize from data by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• applying previously learned concepts and generalizations to the data or situation</li><li>• checking reasoning against basic principles of logic and looking for inconsistencies, limitations of data, and irrelevancies</li><li>• creating a broad statement which encompasses findings</li></ul> <p>scrutinize possible consequences of alternative courses of action by evaluating them in light of basic values, listing arguments for and against such proposals, and selecting courses of action most likely to achieve goals</p> <p>revise generalizations in the light of new data</p>

# Chart A: Social Studies Skills

## III. PRESENTING INFORMATION

### *Students shall be able to:*

speak in an effective way by:

- spending sufficient time in planning and preparing, whether it be for an individual oral report or as a member of a panel, debate, forum, etc.
- talking in complete sentences
- keeping to the topic
- using appropriate visuals
- learning and developing the skills of being a discussion leader or participant

use media and various visuals for communicating ideas by:

- previewing such media and visuals
- preparing appropriate commentary
- using a variety of media forms: films, filmstrips, photographic essays, etc.
- constructing and using appropriate tables, charts, graphs, cartoons, etc.

write in an expository way by:

- thinking logically
- communicating ideas coherently
- forming generalizations based on appropriate data
- supporting such generalizations through the use of relevant factual information
- using different forms of written exposition: investigative, informative, interpretive, argumentative
- following an acceptable format that includes an introductory element, a body containing the basis of the exposition, a conclusion

recognize and use nonverbal means of communication by:

- understanding the variety of kinds of nonverbal communication: gestures, touching, eye language, etc.
- appreciating that the amount and kind of nonverbal communication varies from culture to culture

## IV. PARTICIPATING IN INTERPERSONAL AND GROUP RELATIONS

### *Students shall be able to:*

incorporate a set of positive learning attitudes by:

- recognizing that others may have a different point of view
- observing the action of others
- being attentive to situational as well as personal causes of conflict
- listening to reason
- recognizing and avoiding stereotypes
- withholding judgment until the facts are known
- objectively assessing the reactions of other people to one's own behavior

participate in group planning and discussion by:

- following democratic procedures in helping to make group decisions
- initiating ideas
- giving constructive criticism
- suggesting means of group evaluation
- suggesting ways of resolving group differences
- anticipating consequences of group action

assume responsibility for carrying out tasks:

- individual
- group

be alert to incongruities and recognize problems

define basic issues by:

- defining terms
- identifying basic assumption
- identifying value conflicts

set up hypotheses and/or alternative courses of action

## Chart B: Problem-Finding/Solving Skills

Developing skills in dealing with conflicts, incongruities, and problems facing individuals and societies has been recognized for a number of years as a major skills area. By learning to resolve problems in a classroom or a school setting, students are given practice in approaching problem tasks in a rational manner. It is hoped that by making this practice a continuing one, K-12, the process can be transferred by the students to their outside encounters. Pupils need practice in rational approaches to working out conflicts and problems. The steps in this process generally consist of having students:

1. define or identify a problem
2. hypothesize and investigate data
3. make a decision based upon step #2
4. recognize value conflicts
5. redefine the decision in attempting to accommodate any conflicts in values.

Students should be helped to realize that while one problem may be resolved by taking one action or another, the solution may well raise new problems. This realization should encourage students to weigh alternative solutions carefully.

Each person or group determines which solution to apply by a combination of rational thinking and subjective judgments which may be intuitive, value-laden, or emotional. The process of problem-solving is developmental in nature; the solution of a problem or the changing of the decision gives the student the skills needed to approach another problem. If we conceptualize the basic steps in problem-solving, we can see how attempting to solve one problem will provide the student with the experiences and skills needed to solve another problem.

Chart B applies the skills found in Chart A in an attempt to specifically apply that material to social studies content: problem-solving, conflict resolving, and decision-making. The format is that of objectives which when followed would enable students to proceed through the process. People do not necessarily proceed step-by-step through the process, but may omit steps because of previous knowledge or intuitive reaction. Students without these advantages for whatever the reason should be given many opportunities for application and practice.

Each of the steps in this process, as in the continuum, can be assessed, taught/learned, practiced, and used outside the problem context. But the student learns best when the skill is learned and practiced in the context of real or vicarious experiences requiring resolution of some kind.

### Objective I:

**The student will be able to find problems.**

**The student will:**

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• raise questions related to a problem<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- question beyond the who, what, when, where and include the how and why</li><li>- generate ideas and questions which show originality, flexibility, and inventiveness</li></ul></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• recognize that a problem exists<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- identify several aspects of a problem area identify gaps or missing links in the events and ideas</li><li>- recognize conflicts in data</li><li>- point out relationships between conceptual areas not usually related</li></ul></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• use higher level thinking skills of comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- establish a network of related facts and concepts</li><li>- organize and bring structure to ideas, events, and things</li><li>- reach some tentative conclusions or hypotheses</li><li>- define basic issues, terms, assumptions, value conflicts</li></ul></li></ul> |
|--|---|---|

## Objective II:

The student will be able to solve problems which are either presented by the teacher or which are identified by the student.

The student will:

- write a sentence or paragraph which states the problem
  - include a clear identification of the problem
- write a series of questions using stems which indicate increasing levels of complexity, for use as a guide for problem-solving
- develop a plan for problem-solving
  - include use of time, location, and date of completion
  - include appropriate age level, the objective, and available resources
  - include alternative courses of action
  - assume responsibility for carrying out individual and group tasks
- obtain information from a variety of sources by
  - using libraries (card catalogs, indices, library guides such as *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*)
  - using reference works, newspapers, magazines, primary and secondary sources
  - using tables of contents, appendices, glossaries, bibliographies, and indices
  - identifying main ideas and supportive elements
  - using maps, globes, atlases, visuals, field trips, artifacts, tables, graphs, charts, diagrams, people, museums, galleries, public and private collections, motion pictures, television, radio, recordings, conversations, and interviews
- evaluate the sources of information by
  - using multiple sources of the same types of information
  - varying approaches, viewpoints, interpretations
  - checking on completeness of data
- recognizing advantages and limitations of various sources
- testing, refining, and eliminating questions and working out new ones where necessary
- understanding purposes for which information was provided
- differentiating fact from opinion
- identifying frames of reference and value-laden words
- detecting evidence of propaganda
- evaluating author's or person's qualifications
- recognizing information likely to be relevant as differentiated from information likely to be irrelevant
- organize and use data by
  - categorizing data
  - selecting appropriate headings for data
  - distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant information and events
  - placing ideas in order, chronological and other
  - developing tables, charts, maps, and graphs to clarify data and ideas
  - identifying differences and similarities in data
  - drawing inferences from data
  - seeing relationships among the parts
  - recognizing inconsistencies
  - identifying conflicting views and statements
  - checking on completeness of data and questioning hypotheses based on sufficiency of evidence
  - using simple mathematical and statistical devices to analyze data
  - drawing conclusions
  - generalizing from data
- drawing on previously learned concepts and generalizations
- checking reasoning against basic principles of logic and looking for inconsistencies, limitations of data, and irrelevancies
- scrutinizing possible consequences of alternative courses of action, by evaluating them in light of basic values, listing arguments for and against such proposals, and selecting courses of action most likely to achieve goals
- when necessary, redefine the original problem or identify "new" problems by
  - arranging and recombining data to create new structures for looking at the problem
  - thinking of new ways to use old or standard ideas and things
  - thinking of novel, unique, or unusual possibilities
  - thinking of different kinds of possibilities by manipulating, adapting, and modifying ideas
  - embellishing the possibilities
- develop a product or conclusion which summarizes the information and can be shared
  - orally: mini-lecture or debate tapes of interviews or discussions, records
  - visually:
    - chalkboard
    - maps, diagrams, charts
    - photographs, collages
    - models
    - by demonstration
    - in writing
      - report                    letter
      - article                    poem
      - mock diary                story
      - drama

# Chart B: Problem-Finding/Solving Skills

## Objective III:

The student will be able to work with others engaged in problem-finding/solving skills.

*The student will:*

- participate in group planning and discussion by
  - following democratic procedures in helping to make group decisions
  - initiating ideas
  - giving constructive criticism
  - suggesting means of group evaluation
  - suggesting ways of resolving group differences
- incorporate a set of positive learning attitudes by
  - recognizing that others may have a different point of view
  - observing the actions of others
  - being attentive to situational as well as personal causes of conflict
  - listening to reason
  - recognizing and avoiding stereotypes
  - withholding judgment until the facts are known
  - assessing the reactions of other people to one's own behavior
- recognize and use nonverbal means of communication by
  - understanding the various kinds of nonverbal communication: gestures, touching, eye language, etc.
  - appreciating that the amount and kind of nonverbal communications varies from culture to culture.

## Objective IV:

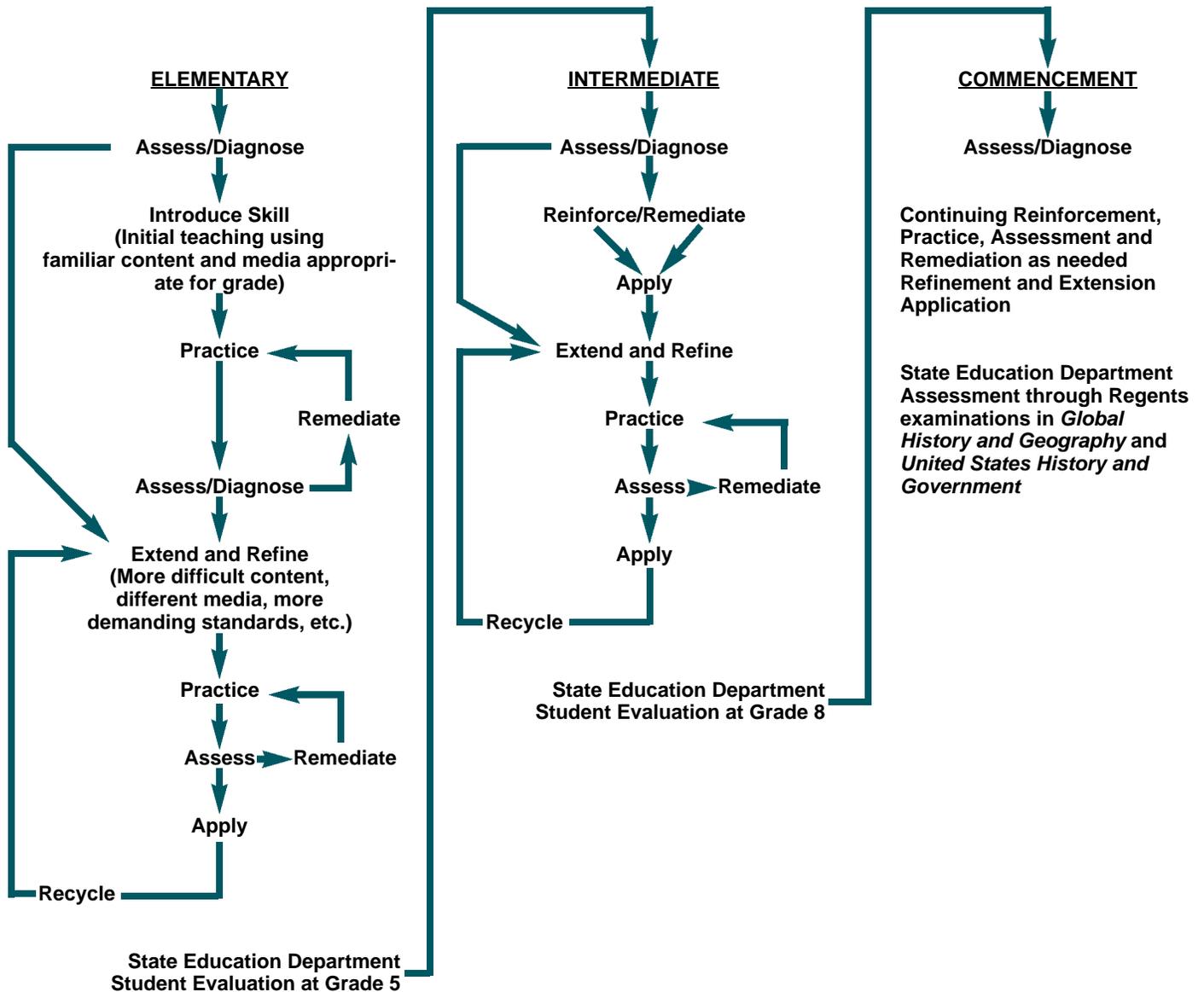
The student will be able to communicate orally, visually, and/or in writing the results of the problem-finding/solving effort.

*The student will:*

- speak in an effective way by
  - spending sufficient time in planning and preparing whether it be for an individual oral report or as a member of a panel, debate, forum, etc.
  - talking in complete sentences
  - keeping to the topic
  - using appropriate visuals/gestures, etc.
  - learning and developing the skills of being a discussion leader or participant
- use media and various visuals for communicating ideas by previewing such media and visuals
  - preparing appropriate commentary
  - using a variety of media forms: films, filmstrips, photographic essays, etc.
  - constructing and using appropriate tables, charts, graphs, cartoons, etc.
- use different forms of written expression: investigative/informative, interpretive, argumentative, narrative, and descriptive by
  - following an acceptable format that includes an introductory element, a body containing the basis of the work, and a conclusion
  - thinking creatively
  - thinking logically
  - communicating ideas coherently
  - forming generalizations based on appropriate data
  - supporting such generalizations through the use of relevant factual information

# SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROCEDURES

The following diagram suggests a systematic procedure for skill development in the social studies. Teachers should determine at the beginning of each year the proficiency level of students in the various skill areas.



Source: *Social Studies 11: United States History and Government*. The New York State Education Department, Albany, NY.