

Introduction

In the early learner’s classroom, social studies instruction incorporates four strands: history, civics, economics, and geography. These social studies topics encourage our primary students to begin exploring the complex web of connections between themselves and their families, communities, and cultural traditions both past and present. A proven strategy for introducing early learners to these subjects is the study of national holidays and other seasonal celebrations, including the people and history associated with those celebrations.

The social studies standards used in this publication are taken from the National Council for the Social Studies’ (NCSS) curriculum standards for grades K–4.* These standards can be found in an edited form at <http://www.educationworld.com/standards/national/index.shtml>. Individual schools and districts typically adapt these standards to fit the unique needs of their local communities and student clientele.

The social studies curriculum standards for grades K–4 are:

History

- Living and working together in families and communities, now and long ago
- The history of students’ own state or region
- The history of the United States: democratic principles and values and the people from many cultures who contributed to its cultural, economic, and political heritage

- The history of peoples of many cultures around the world

Civics

- What is government
- Values and principles of democracy
- Principles of democracy
- Other nations and world affairs
- Roles of the citizen

Economics

- Scarcity
- Marginal cost/benefit
- Allocation of goods and services
- Role of incentives
- Gain from trade
- Specialization and trade
- Markets—price and quantity determination
- Role of price in a market system
- Role of competition
- Role of economic institutions
- Role of money
- Role of resources in determining income
- Profit and the entrepreneur
- Growth
- Role of government
- Unemployment and inflation

Geography

- The world in spatial terms
- Places and regions
- Physical systems
- Human systems
- Environment and society
- Uses of geography

Wee Can Travel integrates these standards with the the 6+1 Trait® Writing Model of Instruction & Assessment by focusing on 12 award-winning children’s books that address traditional social studies units in the early primary classroom. The titles are listed here in the order they are typically taught during the school year:

- *The Pledge of Allegiance* (August)
- *Johnny Appleseed* (September)
- *Follow the Dream* (October)
- *Legend of the Indian Paintbrush* (November)
- *Stone Soup* (November)
- *Coming on Home* (December)
- *The Twelve Days of Christmas* (December)
- *Martin’s Big Words* (January)
- *Follow the Drinking Gourd* (February)
- *A. Lincoln and Me* (February)
- *The Gardener* (March/April)
- *Watch the Stars Come Out* (May/June)

The chapters in this publication are based on the above titles. Together with the related activities we have included, they allow primary teachers to introduce a wide variety of social studies standards into their classrooms in a natural and logical way. Beginning with *The Pledge of Allegiance* in August and continuing through *Watch the Stars Come Out* in May or June, the themed units give teachers easily prepared, ready-to-use lessons, materials, and activities that can be adapted to their existing social studies curricula, while simultaneously enhancing students’ understanding of the 6+1 Trait Writing model.

Each chapter includes the following components:

- 6+1 Trait Writing activities that include the relevant focus traits, specific

criteria, and an explanation of specific trait terminology

- Three literacy centers per chapter, presented with a balance of writing traits
- A materials list for each literacy center, including detailed directions and reproducible handouts
- An introduction to the relevant NCSS curriculum standards for each literacy center
- Culminating activities for whole-group participation
- Additional reading lists for each of the award-winning titles, in order to enrich classroom reading, writing, and comprehension activities

We have also added three assessment tools. All reproducibles needed for each literature title are provided.

The literacy centers are ready to copy and use. The trait activities and the literacy center activities may be used individually. Pick and choose what works best for the early learners in your classroom. We suggest making visual models of the literacy center products, which will aid students in completing the tasks independently.

We hope you enjoy integrating social studies and 6+1 Trait Writing activities in your classroom!

Carolyn and Peggy

*National Council for the Social Studies, National Task Force for Social Studies Standards. (1994). *Expectations of excellence: Curriculum standards for social studies* (NCSS Bulletin No. 89). Silver Springs, MD: Author.

Trait Definitions

IDEAS are the heart of the message, the content of the piece, and the main theme, together with all the details that enrich and develop that theme. When the ideas are strong, the message is clear, and the storyline is easy to follow. Things make sense. The secret lies in the details: Strong writing always includes details that are clear, interesting, and less than obvious. Successful writers do not spend time telling readers what they already know: Penguins are black and white. Penguins live in Antarctica. Penguins love to eat fish. Instead, they seek out details a reader might not know: Penguins swim well because they are shaped like torpedoes. Penguins are territorial and like some space around themselves and their nests—they will launch themselves at anyone who comes too close.

How This Looks at the Primary Level

At the primary level, we need to look for details in children’s artwork and listen for important details in the stories they tell verbally, long before they begin to create extended written text. Encourage students first to be gatherers and collectors of information, as well as observers of life—to look carefully at the world around them—and to share what they see through their pictures and through their text. Later, as they write more, look for focus, meaning, a clear message or story, strong details, and direct statements, such as, “I like horses.” When you see these things point them out, so that children can begin to see the power of their own writing.

Look also for complexity, such as lots of lines and lots of color in pictures, and

important little details that would have been easy to gloss over—veins in leaves, birds or insects with wings and legs, expressions on faces, details such as buttons or shoelaces, signs of movement (a person running or waving, a bird poised for flight), words woven into pictures, perspective (small to large), or pictures that extend off the page.

ORGANIZATION is the internal structure of writing, like the framework of a building or the skeleton of an animal. It holds things together and gives the whole piece form and shape. Good organization helps a reader understand a writer’s message and follow a story with ease. A writer with strong organization stays focused on one key idea (in informational writing) or one main plot (in a story). The writer also fills the text (and sometimes the pictures) with little clues that tie the ideas together, and builds transitions from one idea or event to the next. When the organization is strong, the beginning builds a sense of anticipation in the reader and the ending wraps things up in a satisfying way.

How This Looks at the Primary Level

At the primary level, think balance and harmony. Early signs of organization include filling the page with text or pictures in a balanced way (the writer literally “organizes” text, picture, and white space) and creating labels, titles, or other text that harmonize with a picture. Gradually, primary writers also develop a sense of sequencing, which may begin with chronological ordering (for storytelling), then grouping (putting similar

bits together in informational writing). This kind of beginning structure may show up in picture sequences (two or more pictures) first, then in multiple sentence text. Primary writers may also develop a strong sense of beginning and ending from listening to text, long before they are able to reproduce these features in their own writing.

VOICE is the writer coming through the writing. It is the heart and soul of the writing—the magic, the wit, the feeling, the life and breath. It is unique to each writer. When a writer is personally engaged with the topic and aware of communicating with an audience, a very personal flavor emanates from the writing. It is that individual something—different from the mark of all other writers—that we call voice.

How This Looks at the Primary Level

Individuality! Sparkle! Love of writing, drawing, life itself! Exuberance! Humor! Playfulness! Emotion on the faces of the characters! The extraordinary! These are the signs of voice. At the primary level, voice is first noticeable in speaking, oral storytelling, and art. It is individual expression, independence, liveliness. In art, it may show up as a kind of energy in the work. It may reveal itself through facial expressions or pictures that create tension or a sense of anticipation in the viewer. Writers/artists with strong voice find their own paths through pictures, and later through words and ideas in text. Their work tends to look or sound different from others. It gets our attention. And it often makes us say, “Oh, I know whose picture writing that is.” The something that tells you is voice.

WORD CHOICE is the use of rich, colorful,

precise language that communicates not just in a functional way, but in a way that moves and enlightens the reader. In good descriptive writing, strong word choice paints pictures in the reader’s mind. In informational writing, strong word choice clarifies, explains, and expands ideas. In persuasive writing, strong word choice compels the reader to see things more clearly and, sometimes, to agree with the writer. Effective word choice is characterized not so much by exceptional vocabulary as by the ability to use everyday language naturally and in a fresh or unexpected way.

How This Looks at the Primary Level

Primary writers/artists may express strong word choice in their oral storytelling or other sharing, long before they write many words at all. Early on, we can listen for original expression and note their curiosity about word meanings or usage. As children begin to write words, look first for the understanding that letters form words and that written words communicate a specific meaning. Later, look both for correct word use and for originality, including a willingness to experiment—to try new words recently heard or even to invent words. Look also for images, pictures, and ideas that evoke particular words or phrases: “When I look at this picture, the word that comes into my mind is _____.”

In text, look for verbs—words that show action, energy, and movement. Verbs are important because they give the reader more information per word than any other part of speech. Unusual, precise, or well-used nouns, adjectives, and adverbs are important, too. Look for the unexpected, which will reveal a writer who is stretching.

SENTENCE FLUENCY is the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of word patterns, the way in which the writing plays to the ear, not just the eye. How does it sound when read aloud? That's the test. Fluent writing has cadence, power, rhythm, and movement. It is free of awkward patterns that slow down a reader and cause the reader to stumble or reread. Sentences vary in both length and style, and are so well crafted that reading aloud is a pleasure.

How This Looks at the Primary Level

Most children are not writing complete sentences at the beginning of their primary years. At first, then, we cannot look at sentence length or patterns. We will find these things as soon as they develop. Until then, listen for rhythm and cadence in oral language and notice how the writer attends, as a listener, to rhythm in the language you share orally. Is the listener in tune with your sentence patterns, rhythmic language (such as poetry), or rhymes? Can your listeners/writers tell a sentence from a fragment or phrase? Can they tell rhythmic language from language that is choppy? They will write what they hear. They will first learn fluency as listeners, then gradually reflect what they hear in the beat of their own text.

Once the sentences begin to flow, look beyond punctuation. Listen for the rhythm. Listen to this second-grader's words about poetry:

What Is Poetry?

Poetry is moosick

to me on a pees of paper

moosick that rimes,

soft moosick to my ers

Always look at sentence beginnings. When you see differences, let the writer know you noticed. Does one sentence begin in a way that hooks it to the preceding sentence? For example: At the same time ... Then ... Next ... But ... When that happened ... Later ... The next day? These links are important. They show logic. Are some sentences longer? You can point this out. But mostly, hear the sound. Hear the beat. Read aloud. Enjoy the flow.

CONVENTIONS are textual traditions.

They have grown out of the need for conformity to make text easier to follow. Anything a professional proofreader deals with in getting text ready for publication falls under this heading: spelling, punctuation, grammar and usage, paragraphing, and capitalization. Neatness, while important, is not considered part of convention, but is included in the 6+1 Trait model under presentation.

How This Looks at the Primary Level

Primary students are natural borrowers, and their knowledge of conventions shows up first in their borrowing. Keep in mind that even the simplest of things—such as writing from left to right, beginning at the top of the page and working downward, facing Es the same way all the time, putting spaces between words—must ALL be learned. No writer is born knowing these things. All are conventions of our accepted writing style. Notice and acknowledge these beginning conventions to give your primary writers a legitimate sense of their true accomplishment.

Discovery of periods or quotation marks (or any mark of punctuation) is cause for celebration—regardless of whether those marks

are correctly placed. Exploration is a vital stepping-stone on the path to correctness. The writer who discovers periods will also soon discover how and when to use them.

Similarly, students must first associate sounds (consonant sounds, then vowels) with letters and play with letter strings to form words before moving to prephonetic, phonetic, and close-to-correct or correct spelling. Readable spelling is a fine goal at the primary level.

Conventionally correct spelling is a lifelong goal that virtually no one (including professional editors) masters totally without the support of helpful resources such as dictionaries and spell checkers.

Next, look for creative and persistent borrowing. Reward your students for noticing the print around them—provide plenty of it—and for being curious enough to ask questions. Encourage guessing about what a group of letters might spell or what a mark of punctuation might mean. This is a time of exploration, and the exploration is itself a major and conditional goal for the primary years—and for as long as we want writers to keep learning. If you doubt its importance, visit a high school English classroom and ask how many students have recently read a style handbook or dictionary for fun, added a new convention to their editing repertoire, or showed enough curiosity about a mark of punctuation to ask how or why it was invented.

PRESENTATION is the outward look of the finished piece. Good presentation is pleasing to the eye. Yet, it is actually much more than that. Presentation is also a reflection of how much care and pride and “self” the author has brought to the piece. The final test

is how the form and presentation enhance the ability of the reader to understand the message. Effective presentation includes the use of white space, which helps the reader focus on the text, as well as the appropriate use of fonts and their sizes if word-processed, or the neatness and uniformity of handwriting, either manuscript or cursive. If included, pictures, maps, charts and other markers need to match and flow with the text.

How This Looks at the Primary Level

Primary students are learning to use spaces between words, draw pictures that match their words, and choose words that match their pictures. Some of these primary presentation skills are closely related to those skills found in the trait of organization. At this level we look for pictures that are fun to see. Primary students should know how to balance their text with pictures, and in turn how to balance both with white space. Primary papers should be neat—if handwritten in either manuscript or cursive—and if word-processed the fonts selected should be of a type and size that help the reader understand the piece. Teachers need to help students learn to draw pictures that help the reader “see” what the words say. Finished pieces should have margins similar to that of a framed picture. At the primary level it’s all about how the paper looks and how easy it is to read.

Teaching Support Terminology

These are descriptions of teaching materials and resources mentioned in the text.

Butcher paper: Large-width paper, usually cut from a roll.

Chart paper: Large, lined paper sheets with holes at the top for hanging on a chart stand or the wall.

Community circle: Carpeted space in the room where all children can sit on the floor to share as a whole group.

Four-box job: Paper folded into quarters and then unfolded to divide it into four boxes.

Morning message: A daily quotation or thought displayed in the room.

Pocket chart: A chart containing transparent pockets for the display of word strips. Useful for showing individual words, or for building sentences.

Sentence strips: Card strips cut to length for the display of either individual words or whole sentences.

Story map: A sequence of drawings on chart paper to show the main points in the plot of a story.

Word wall: A listing of words, often placed on a wall, that students may use as a reference in writing tasks. The words may be frequently used, or selected to match a particular unit of study.