# **Additional DEI/ Guidance for Social Studies Materials**

**Contents**

[What does Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) mean in social studies? 1](#_Toc96684253)

[What does *inclusivity* mean in Social Studies? 1](#_Toc96684254)

[Common Issues with Standards 2](#_Toc96684255)

[Common Assessment Issues 2](#_Toc96684256)

[Product Documentation and Teacher Materials 3](#_Toc96684257)

[Social Studies Content Specific Concerns and Issues 3](#_Toc96684258)

[Selecting Texts and Primary Sources 3](#_Toc96684259)

[Creating Instruction 3](#_Toc96684260)

[Personal Perspective and Bias 4](#_Toc96684261)

[Strategies for approaching controversial content 4](#_Toc96684262)

[Current Events 5](#_Toc96684263)

[Additional Topics 5](#_Toc96684264)

[Resources and Citations 6](#_Toc96684265)

## **What Does Inclusivity mean in Social Studies?**

Social studies connects disciplines focusing on the study of human relationships. Civics examines our relationship with others within a group, whether it’s a classroom, community, or country. History teaches us to analyze the past to inform our actions in the present and the future. Economics asks us to investigate how we meet our wants and needs and balance them in relation to others. Geography prompts us to consider how we affect our environment and how it affects us. Sociology and Psychology study the human experience and how biological and social systems affect our communities.1

Content developers should work to create engaging curriculum by:

* Ensuring diverse representation by including events, stories, and issues from a wide range of cultures and groups (including race, ethnicity, family structure, socioeconomic status, ability/disability, and members of the LGBTQ+ community) and diverse authorship of informational, primary, and secondary source texts.
* Ensuring multiple perspectives are considered for historical and present-day events.
* Find opportunities for students to draw connections between what they are learning and current events in their community, state, or the nation.
* Ensuring that content is free of bias and is centered on the facts
* Addressing multiple learning styles in instruction and assessment
* Presenting students with multiple perspectives when discussing complex issues and allowing students to draw their own conclusions.
* Helping students learn to evaluate sources and evidence in order to challenge single stories and dominant narratives and develop a critical lens for analyzing present and historical topics.
* Whenever possible, allowing students choice (e.g., in project products, writing prompts, and research topics) in order for them to take charge of their learning and make it relevant to their lives
* Create “windows” and “mirrors” so all students see themselves and people like them reflected in the content of the curriculum (mirrors), as well as having the opportunity to learn about diverse people, cultures, places, and experiences unlike themselves (windows).
* Understand that an inclusive approach is not “erasing history” or “changing history” but is instead creating a more complete, fact-based curriculum.
* Teach “hard history” as opposed to “pretending that the most troubling parts of our history do not exist” 2; approach difficult historical events by framing them in a way that centers human rights and presents the links between political, social, and economic factors on individual and societal choices, while still being mindful of historical context.
* Include examples of resilience and joy and especially examples of people from historically marginalized groups advocating for themselves.

## **Common Issues with Standards**

Some state content standards in social studies (especially history strands) favor a singular, Eurocentric narrative or cultural frame. These standards may underrepresent the histories and experiences of most other sociocultural groups. Furthermore, history standards may force writers to frame or word content in a certain way.

Content writers can mitigate these effects by:

* Using “forgotten” events, people, and members of marginalized groups to meet standards; include “examples include but are not limited to” language.
* Comparing developments in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe when covering an era or time period, even if the marginalized culture is not required.
* Incorporating the historiography of historical topics, arguments, and conclusions.
* Incorporating NCSS Standards, which are designed to create a citizenry with knowledge, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills that would enable them to succeed in the global economy and society. “NCSS standards provide a framework for selecting and organizing knowledge and modes of inquiry for the purpose of teaching and learning to meet these goals.”

## **Common Assessment Issues**

Traditional social studies assessments also tend to rely on a Eurocentric cultural frame. Assessment should present students with the opportunity to demonstrate their learning without the cultural frame of the assessments creating obstacles.

Best practices for writing assessments in social studies include:

* Avoiding primary sources that contain outdated, offensive language because assessment items normally do not include space to provide historical context
* Ensuring that items include positive aspects of nondominant cultures (for example, items about Africa should not all be about its problems)
* Ensuring that items do not focus only on an individual’s worst (or best) characteristics (Since students may only see one item in an assessment bank, either practice could lead to a perception of bias. When an individual is known for other accomplishments, writers can include an individual’s failings by using that information as a distractor—*Henry Ford opposed antisemitism;* or *Henry Ford supported the growth of unions and respected the cultural beliefs of his immigrant workers*).
  + **Note:** Not all historical figures should be treated as such complex individuals in assessment items, especially when they are included in standards for their acts of murder or injustice (e.g., Adolf Hitler).

## **Product Documentation and Teacher Materials**

Supplemental documents can be used to help schools vet materials for their student population and provide supports to teachers. This documentation will be aligned with the purposes and target grade levels of the product in question.

* Encourage teachers to examine their own biases.
* List lessons from the unit that include mature content best supported by a teacher or content that might be emotionally difficult for some students, along with strategies to support students.
* Provide additional cultural and historical context for the time period, topic, or theme.
* Include author biographies and contextual/background information for primary and secondary sources.
* Include additional readings and extension activities to support diverse learning styles.
* List possible discussion questions that engage students to apply what they have learned or to think critically about issues in their communities

## **Social Studies Content-Specific Concerns and Issues**

### **Selecting Texts and Primary Sources**

“Primary sources support culturally relevant pedagogy by challenging and engaging students, bringing in windows and mirrors, and teaching skills for critical analysis. Students draw connections between the past and the present, set the present in context, and practice critical analysis skills needed for them to become active community members and critique the status quo.”3

Content creators can thoughtfully select texts and primary sources by following these guidelines.

* Use primary sources for all age groups. Younger students can analyze photos, while older students progressively build skills needed for the analysis of complex texts. Use Lexile levels and text complexity to determine the scaffolding and supports given to students.
* Include primary sources from nondominant perspectives alongside dominant ones.
* When discussing the experiences of marginalized people (e.g., discrimination, slavery, Hawaiian annexation), always include primary sources created by members of those groups.
* Note that for many cultures, oral tradition was/is more widely used and more valued than written documentation. Include secondary sources, audio files, etc. appropriate for the topic.
* Provide appropriate historical context when using primary sources that contain outdated or offensive language and beliefs.
* Use secondary sources that include works by authors from marginalized groups.

Publishers may prohibit commercial entities wishing to permission copyright-protected content from being altered in any way, which may prevent writers and reviewers from editing out biased or insensitive content, terms, language and/or images. In other cases, the inclusion of such content is instructionally desirable. Older students are routinely asked to evaluate sources, and the inclusion of biased and/or insensitive content is routinely used to give students opportunities to identify bias, point of view, and historical context.

* Carefully evaluate the appropriateness of sources containing biased or insensitive content before including them in course materials.
* Make sure to include as much information as possible on the context, date, authorship, publication venue, etc. of the source for both students and teachers.

### **Creating Instruction**

* Always include nondominant perspectives when discussing the experiences of marginalized groups.
* Ensure the content is still “true” when the perspectives of marginalized groups are not deliberately addressed.
  + Example: “*The 15th amendment gave all men the right to vote*” is an untrue statement; indigenous men were not included in its provisions.
* Ensure that content addressing the experiences of marginalized groups is not framed from the dominant perspective.
* Avoid broad generalizations without qualifiers.
  + Example: “*Republicans oppose affirmative action and other measures designed to bring equality to marginalized groups”* generalizesthe complex beliefs of millions of Americans. While many Republicans likely oppose affirmative action for a myriad of reasons, certainly not all do, and few oppose every measure “designed to bring equality to marginalized people.”
* Avoid passive language, especially when it obscures the deliberate actions of actors.
  + Example: *“As lands were taken from indigenous groups, they were forced to move further west”* fails to assign responsibility for those who were “taking land” and “forcing” indigenous groups to move.
  + Do not conflate the error by assigning blame to a group of people or by creating problematic generalizations, for example: “White people stole land from indigenous groups”. Instead, be specific: “The US government, with the assistance of state militias, forcibly removed thousands of Cherokee groups from their native lands.”
* Avoid “unreality/rose-colored glasses” framing of content.
  + Example: Content should not try to bring attention to the “good” parts of slavery.
* Avoid inflammatory language. Allow students to make their own judgements about history, people, and events.

### **Personal Perspective and Bias**

Writers and reviewers need to be particularly careful to ensure that personal biases do not affect content authoring. Social studies curriculum includes issues commonly discussed in the news and on social media, and content creators must be cognizant that students and customers hold multiple points of view on these issues. Writers should recognize—and content should reflect—that the potential solutions to most issues, challenges, and inequalities have both advantages and drawbacks.

### **Strategies for Approaching Controversial Content**

* **“Heroes”:** Notable figures in history are human beings who often made mistakes, made morally questionable decisions, and held views unacceptable by many in modern society. Make this point when contextualizing their place in history. Recognize their achievements despite their flaws because their work, innovations, or writings positively impacted many people, changed the course of history, and helped create the world we live in today.
* **“Rugged Individualism” and the “Bootstrap Myth”:** The US is the most individualistic county in the world,4 and this mindset affects everything from its history, economic system, and educational system. “Individualism, as defined by behavioral scientists, means valuing autonomy, self-expression and the pursuit of personal goals rather than prioritizing the interests of the group—be it family, community or country.” 5 Some groups and communities in the US—and around the world—are more collective, but research shows that individualism is increasing around the globe. Some maintain that American individualism has led to the nation’s entrepreneurial success, innovation, and self-reliance. Others believe that individualism has led to America’s wealth gap. Some equate individualism with selfishness, but researchers have found that people from highly individualistic countries tend to be more generous than those from highly collective societies. They donate more money to charity, volunteer more, and are more likely to be organ donors and to support protections for animals. When discussing these concepts, it’s important to convey that neither collectivism or individualism is inherently better, nor are the two ideas mutually exclusive. However, it is also important to recognize how inequality, social issues, and other factors restrict economic mobility. “Although climbing the economic ladder by working hard is a positive concept and attainable for some, it's important to recognize that there are barriers to mobility for large segments of the US population. Rather than promoting upward mobility, the bootstrap myth often perpetuates the belief that the poor remain poor because they're lazy and allows politicians to cut funding for social welfare programs.” 6
* **American Exceptionalism:** The ideas above are tied closely with “American exceptionalism.” ‘American exceptionalism’ refers to the belief “that the United States differs qualitatively from other developed nations, because of its unique origins, national credo, historical evolution, and distinctive political and religious institutions” (Koh,2005) . This belief permeates American identity and culture since before its founding, and its discussion is important to understanding many of the decisions made by the nation (and its leaders) throughout its history. When discussing this concept, however, materials should be careful to place the term in context, and not describe (or allow others to describe) the nation as exceptional (extraordinarily good, special, or better than other nations) in the modern sense. The US certainly has enjoyed remarkable success throughout its history, but this has been as much a product of geographical luck as any uniquely American virtues.7 One cannot discuss the nation’s successes without also discussing its mistakes and failures.
* **Gender Identity vs. Gender Roles:** It’s important when discussing gender roles to differentiate these from gender identities where applicable or appropriate. Gender roles are the norms, behaviors and attitudes that develop over time that reflect the societal expectations that are generally considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable based on that person’s biological sex. These ideas commonly reflect gender stereotypes, which should be addressed in content presentation. Gender identity, however, is how a person self-identifies. Gender roles are predominantly binary across world cultures, while gender identity is not.
* **Abortion:** Typically, information about whether abortion should or should not be legal is not required by standards and should not be included in lesson content.
* **Climate Change:** Climate change is a well-documented phenomenon and is not debatable. The term “climate change” is more accurate and is preferred over “global warming.”
* **Economic Systems:** Like all economic systems, capitalism and socialism have benefits and drawbacks. Provide a complete picture of both benefits and drawbacks so students can understand these and formulate their own views. Do not equate authoritarian countries and leaders who commit human rights abuses (Stalin, China) with the economic systems in which they operate. Do not allow personal beliefs about the benefits of socialist policies to interfere with critical analysis of authoritarian rule.
* **Vaccines:** The use of vaccines is supported by science and is not debatable.

### **Current Events**

The inclusion of current events is important to social studies curriculum, but such events should be carefully selected to ensure they will still be relevant for the life of the course (ten years or more).

* Select timeless issues (immigration policy) and include projects that ask students to identify current issues within the issue rather than detailing specific examples in course content that may fade from the news (Elián González).
* Track examples when current data is included so it can be easily located and updated.

Other tips for discussing current events:

* Recognize the complexity of controversial issues.
* Don’t use pro/cons—instead use benefits/drawbacks or arguments for or against.
* Carefully select topics based on student age.
* Avoid unnecessary arguments that are not generally included in standards (abortion debate).

### **Additional Topics**

Information on additional topics and their treatment in social studies can be found in the Humanities examples appendix, which can be accessed [here.](https://edgenuity.app.box.com/file/933963028766)

## **Resources and Citations**

*References:*

1 Andrews, Mark. Culturally Responsive Instruction in Social Studies   
<https://www.inquired.org/post/culturally-responsive-teaching-in-social-studies>

2 Jeffries, Hasan Kwame. “The Courage to Teach Hard History”. Learning for Justice, 2018. <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/the-courage-to-teach-hard-history>

3 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy explained. Minnesota Historical Society. <https://www.mnhs.org/sites/default/files/ium/crp/intro/intro_crp_with_primary_sources.pdf>

4 Yuriy Gorodnichenko and Gerard Roland. “Individualism, innovation, and long-run growth”. PNAS, 2011. <https://www.pnas.org/content/108/Supplement_4/21316>

5 Marsh, Abigail. “Everyone thinks Americans are Selfish. They’re Wrong.” NY Times, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/26/opinion/individualism-united-states-altruism.html>

6 Roos, David. “The Bootstrap Myth: Climbing the Economic Ladder Takes More Than Hard Work” How Stuff Works <https://money.howstuffworks.com/bootstrap-myth-climbing-economic-ladder-takes-more-hard-work.htm>

7 Walt, Stephen. “The Myth of American Exceptionalism”, Foreign Policy, 2011   
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/the-myth-of-american-exceptionalism/>