

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES THEMES

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) curriculum standards provides a framework for professional deliberation and planning about what should occur in a social studies program in grades pre-K through 12. The framework provides ten themes that represent a way of organizing knowledge about the human experience in the world and a holistic lens through which to educate students for the challenges of citizenship in a democracy.

The thematic strands draw from all the social science disciplines and other related disciplines and fields of study to provide a structure for social studies curriculum design and development. The themes provide a basis from which social studies educators can more fully develop their lessons.

The themes represent strands that should thread throughout a social studies program, in all grades, as appropriate at each level. Specific themes, though highly interrelated, will be more dominant at certain grade levels and courses. To understand culture (Theme 1), for example, students also need to understand the theme of time, continuity, and change (Theme 2); the relationships between people, places, and environments (Theme 3); and the role of civic ideals and practices (Theme 10). To understand power, authority, and governance (Theme 6), students need to understand different cultures (Theme 1); the relationships between people, places, and environments (Theme 3); and the interconnections among individuals, groups, and institutions (Theme 5). History is not confined to TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE (Theme 2) because historical knowledge contributes to the understanding of all the other themes; similarly, geographic skills and knowledge can be found in more than (Theme 3).

1 CULTURE

Through the study of culture and cultural diversity, learners understand how human beings create, learn, share, and adapt to culture, and appreciate the role of culture in shaping their lives and society, as well the lives and societies of others. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with geography, history, sociology, and anthropology, as well as multicultural topics across the curriculum.

2 TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE

Through the study of the past and its legacy, learners examine the institutions, values, and beliefs of people in the past, acquire skills in historical inquiry and interpretation, and gain an understanding of how important historical events and developments have shaped the modern world. This theme appears in courses in history, as well as in other social studies courses for which knowledge of the past is important.

3 PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS

This theme helps learners to develop their spatial views and perspectives of the world, to understand where people, places, and resources are located and why they are there, and to explore the relationship between human beings and the environment. In schools, this theme typically appears in courses dealing with geography and area studies, but it is also important for the study of the geographical dimension of other social studies subjects.

4 INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY

Personal identity is shaped by family, peers, culture, and institutional influences. Through this theme, students examine the factors that influence an individual's personal identity, development, and actions. This theme

typically appears in courses and units dealing with psychology, anthropology, and sociology.

5 INDIVIDUALS , GROUPS, AND INSITITUTIONS

Institutions such as families and civic, educational, governmental, and religious organizations, exert a major influence on people’s lives. This theme allows students to understand how institutions are formed, maintained, and changed, and to examine their influence. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, and history.

6 POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE

One essential component of education for citizenship is an understanding of the historical development and contemporary forms of power, authority, and governance. Through this theme, learners become familiar with the purposes and functions of government, the scope and limits of authority, and the differences between democratic and non-democratic political systems. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with government, history, civics, law, politics, and other social sciences.

7 PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND CONSUMPTION

This theme provides for the study of how people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services, and prepares students for the study of domestic and global economic issues. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with economic concepts and issues, though it is also important for the study of the economic dimension of other social studies subjects.

8 SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY

By exploring the relationships among science, technology, and society, students develop an understanding of past and present advances in science and technology and their impact. This theme appears in a variety of social studies courses, including history, geography, economics, civics, and government.

9 GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

The realities of global interdependence require an understanding of the increasingly important and diverse global connections among world societies. This theme prepares students to study issues arising from globalization. It typically appears in units or courses dealing with geography, culture, economics, history, political science, government, and technology.

10 CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES

An understanding of civic ideals and practices is critical to full participation in society and is an essential component of education for citizenship. This theme enables students to learn about the rights and responsibilities of citizens of a democracy, and to appreciate the importance of active citizenship. In schools, the theme typically appears in units or courses dealing with civics, history, political science, cultural anthropology, and fields such as global studies, law-related education, and the humanities.

National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2010).