

Iowa Academic Standards in Social Studies Instructional Shifts Overview

The Iowa Academic Standards in Social Studies articulates what students should know and be able to do in social studies throughout their K-12 experience. However, teachers must also think about and implement the instructional shifts necessary to realize the full intention of the standards. These shifts articulate ways that teachers can strengthen their instruction, while also impacting the design of curriculum and assessment. The goal of this overview is to clearly communicate a coherent set of instructional practices and elevate these practices as models for enhancing social studies teaching and learning in all classrooms.

Shift	Description
Realize Democratic Principles	<p>A strong social studies program helps students understand the democratic principles that shape civic life and sustain constitutional government. Concepts such as liberty, equality, individual rights, civic responsibility, and the rule of law provide the foundation for informed and engaged citizenship. Teaching democratic principles is important because it encourages students to examine how governments function, how citizens participate in civic processes, and how societies and individuals can address conflict and change. Through discussions of historical and contemporary issues, students learn to consider multiple perspectives, engage respectfully in civil discourse, and understand the importance of participation in a democratic republic. Realizing these democratic principles should start at the earliest grade levels to ensure students can build on a strong foundation throughout their K-12 educational experience.</p>
Engage in Disciplinary Literacy Practices	<p>Disciplinary literacy teaches students to think, read, write, and communicate like historians, geographers, economists and political scientists. Students engage in learning how experts in the field analyze evidence, evaluate sources, recognize multiple perspectives, and construct claims supported by evidence. Social studies content is often complex, requiring students to interpret sources, maps, political cartoons, legal documents, and more. By emphasizing disciplinary literacy, teachers help students develop the critical thinking and analytical skills necessary to understand the past and engage thoughtfully in civic life.</p>
Purposeful Use of Primary Sources	<p>The use of primary sources is central to high-quality social studies instruction. K-12 classrooms should include a focus on the effective use of primary sources. Primary sources strengthen social studies instruction by allowing students to directly engage with voices, experiences, and evidence from the past. Engaging with a variety of sources also exposes students to a variety of content-rich information that is focused on the disciplinary questions being studied.</p> <p>Primary source analysis also helps students understand that history is constructed through interpretation and evidence. Writing about primary sources encourages students to analyze evidence, support claims with textual details and communicate their thinking. This process deepens comprehension while building essential disciplinary thinking skills such as sourcing, contextualization, corroboration, and argumentation.</p>
Integrate Content and Skills Purposefully	<p>The standards guide the curricular content and skills necessary for a rigorous social studies program. A high-quality social studies approach cannot just focus on content or skills. It is critical to purposefully integrate content and skills together in order to create an approach to social studies that models that of the disciplinary best practices. Historians, for example, don't just read about historical content. They analyze sources to construct an argument about what happened and why.</p>