

# Managing and Evaluating the Interactive Student Notebook for Secondary Teachers

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# Using the Interactive Student Notebook



*“Notebooks have made my students more responsible for their own learning. They have become more involved in the lessons, more attentive during the activities and reading, and more precise in their note taking.”*

— Middle School Teacher

## Introduction

Student notebooks are an essential part of any social studies course. Unfortunately, they are too often drab repositories of information filled with uninspired, unconnected, and poorly understood ideas. Interactive Student Notebooks, however, offer an exciting twist on the conventional social studies notebook. The first time you see one, you will be immediately struck by the colorful and varied expression within its pages. Words and diagrams, bullets and arrows, ink and pencil, a multitude of colors, highlighting—all reveal a unique personal style as students express their ideas, questions, feelings about and reactions to new content in a host of creative ways. No two Interactive Student Notebooks look the same.

At the same time, the Interactive Student Notebook provides a cohesive structure and serves as the organizational anchor for the multiple intelligence activities that occur in a TCI lesson. For each lesson, the Interactive Student Notebook centers on three key elements of the TCI Approach:

- **Preview Assignments** At the start of each lesson, short, intriguing assignments help students connect the upcoming lesson to their own experience, activating their prior knowledge. The purpose of these assignments, along with examples of the many different types, are found in “Preview Assignment,” page 22.
- **Graphically Organized Reading Notes** As the lesson unfolds, students use a section called Reading Notes to record, in a striking graphic format, main ideas and supporting details of what they are learning. Typically, all “testable” information can be found in this section. Many examples of the various formats suitable for this part of the notebook are presented in “Graphically Organized Reading Notes,” page 96.
- **Processing Assignments** Students end each lesson with a Processing assignment—perhaps involving illustrated timelines, Venn diagrams, matrices, annotated maps, flowcharts, sensory figures, advertisements, visual metaphors, or persuasive letters—to synthesize and apply what they have learned. Many examples of these engaging assignments are found in “Processing Assignment,” page 102.

## Why Interactive Student Notebooks Engage Students

Teachers find that their students embrace the Interactive Student Notebook enthusiastically. “I used to hate taking notes and filling out worksheets in class,” one student commented, “but I love working on my notebook because it’s fun.” Teachers also report that because the Interactive Student Notebook encourages a variety of forms of expression—personalized responses to the subject matter, artwork, graphics, timelines, maps, and song lyrics—there’s more interest and more involvement by students, in addition to more learning and better retention. Here are some of the reasons Interactive Student Notebooks are found to engage students so thoroughly:

**They reach out to students, inviting them to be active participants in their learning.** Many students are accustomed to filling out blanks on a worksheet or laboriously copying teacher-written notes from the board or the overhead. The Interactive Student Notebook changes that. At the beginning of a lesson, students are “hooked” with a Preview assignment that taps into their own experiences and prior knowledge. Then students are encouraged to accurately record Reading Notes for a *purpose*—searching for implications or assumptions, identifying main ideas, providing supporting details, interpreting information. They will use this information during Processing assignments that challenge them to really *think* and apply what they have learned. As a result, students become more creative, more independent thinkers.

They encourage students to use a variety of intelligences, not just linguistic intelligence. Conventional student notebooks may work for motivated students with strong linguistic skills, but they do not work as well for students with other predominant intelligences. In the Interactive Student Notebook, students approach understanding in many ways. They can tap into their *visual* intelligence through such elements as graphs, maps, illustrations, pictowords, and visual metaphors; their *musical* intelligence by composing song lyrics or reacting to a piece of music;

## Origin of the Interactive Student Notebook

The Interactive Student Notebook was initially developed in the 1970s by Lee Swenson and his colleagues at Aragon High School in San Mateo, California. Teachers at TCI, after using Interactive Student Notebooks in their classrooms and seeing how profoundly they improved instruction, contacted Lee in 1992 about adopting the Interactive Student Notebook as part of the TCI Approach. Lee then collaborated with teachers at TCI to refine his ideas by creating standard guidelines for students and teachers, and by expanding the variety of graphic organizers.

*“Students like that the notebooks allow them the freedom and creativity to express themselves in a variety of ways. Parents continually tell me that they think it’s fantastic that kids are relating social studies to their lives and writing about what they learn in their notebooks.”*

— High School Teacher



Students use their visual intelligence when they interpret information graphically in their notebooks. With colored markers and construction paper, they create vivid images that help them understand and remember key concepts—such as the attributes of Mexico’s Porfirio Díaz (above left), and the demographic characteristics of modern Latin America (above right).

their *intrapersonal* intelligence by reflecting on the ways social studies topics affect them personally; their *interpersonal* intelligence by recording group discussions and group project notes; and their *logical-mathematical* intelligence through sequencing and the use of spectrums, graphs, and charts.

**They help students to organize systematically as they learn.** Students use their notebooks to record ideas about every social studies lesson. They use a variety of organizational techniques—topic headings, color-coding, different writing styles—to give coherence to what they learn. The notebook also helps students keep assignments together and in a logical order. Gone are the days of notes and assignments wadded up and stuffed in backpacks or lockers.

**They become a portfolio of individual learning.** These personal, creative notebooks become a record of each student’s growth. Teachers, students, and even family members can review a student’s progress in writing, thinking, and organizational skills.

## Hints for Making Effective Interactive Student Notebooks

Teachers use the Interactive Student Notebook in a variety of forms. Some give their students the consumable workbook that is provided with TCI's core program materials. Teachers who elect to use this consumable can follow the sequence exactly as designed, having students complete the specified Preview, Reading Notes, and Processing assignment for each lesson. This is helpful to teachers who are new to TCI Approach, since they can rely on the published Interactive Student Notebook for support while they are learning to use the essential elements and strategies of the program.

Other teachers elect to supplement the printed workbook with their own handouts and materials that students bring in. Students use spiral-bound notebooks or three-ring binders to combine the materials, cutting and pasting as they create their own unique Interactive Student Notebooks. In this format, TCI materials serve as the backbone, but teachers have the flexibility to tailor instruction to suit their needs.

Still other teachers may be developing their own curricular materials based on the TCI Approach. They won't have a published notebook to start with, but they can follow the same structure, having students create spiral-bound Interactive Student

## Help Students to See the Coherent Whole

The Interactive Student Notebook groups assignments by unit, so that students can see a logical flow from assignment to assignment and begin to understand the coherence of the unit. Their notebooks serve as a chronological record of their work and help reinforce the major concepts and themes in a unit.

This is where the parts of the integrated lesson come together—the Preview, the graphically organized Reading Notes, and the Processing assignment. Using this framework helps students see how everything connects.

**PREVIEW 13**

You are a member of a group of people living in ancient times. Your group needs to move, and you have been chosen to find a new location where the group can reside. You travel around until you find the perfect spot. No one lives there, and it has everything your group needs. What a find! Now you have to convince the others that this is the right place to move.

In the space below, draw and label a picture of the place you have found. Show what you would find in an ideal place to settle.

(Mountains (protective barrier))

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**READING NOTES 13**

For each physical feature, follow these steps:

- Read about the feature in your book. Take turns reading aloud.
- In the table below, enter the name of the feature.
- Write a brief description of the feature.
- In the appropriate place on the map, color and label the feature.
- With your partner, discuss the rating of the feature on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "unavailable for settlement" and 5 meaning "very suitable for settlement." Enter your rating in the table.

Physical Feature	Description	Rating
Brakmaputra River	This river starts in the Himalaya mountains. It often floods in summer. It joins the Ganges on the plains and makes the land fertile.	4
Deccan Plateau	The Deccan Plateau is a high, flat area between two mountain ranges. The land is rocky and dry. It is not good for much except cotton.	3
Eastern and Western Ghats	These are two mountain ranges near the coast. The eastern range is very high and tropical. The western range is lower and drier with four rivers.	2
Ganges River	The Ganges starts in the Himalayas and brings lots of sediment. That gets left on the plains so the land there is very fertile. The river also flows into the Bay of Bengal.	5
Himalaya Mountains	This is the highest mountain range in the world. There is lots of snow and ice that feeds the rivers.	1
Hindu Kush mountains	These high mountains are a barrier between India and Afghanistan. They are mostly uninhabited. They are used for wool and silk.	1
Indus River	The Indus runs from the Himalayas to the Arabian sea. There is a good amount of water. The land is fertile.	5
Thar Desert	The Indus runs from the Himalayas to the Arabian sea. There is a good amount of water. The land is fertile.	1

**READING NOTES 13**

Map labels: Hindu Kush, Indus River, Thar Desert, Deccan Plateau, Ganges River, Brakmaputra River, Eastern Ghats, Western Ghats.

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**PROCESSING 13**

Design a real estate advertisement to convince people to settle near one of the eight physical features you studied in this activity. Include three or four great reasons to settle in this place as illustrated in the lesson.

**REAL ESTATE**

LIFE IS GOOD IN THE

**INDUS RIVER VALLEY**

LAND OF OPPORTUNITY!

- Buy your own farm! Fertile farmlands ideal for farming.
- Never a lack of water! Good fishing - water for crops.
- River handy for travel and trade!

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## It Takes Time

Teaching students how to use Interactive Student Notebooks is a complex task. It takes patience, good modeling, and constant reinforcement. You will discover that your students' notebooks will improve dramatically over time.

*“The notebook allows me to express my opinions about what we are learning. I usually don’t get to do that in my other classes.”*

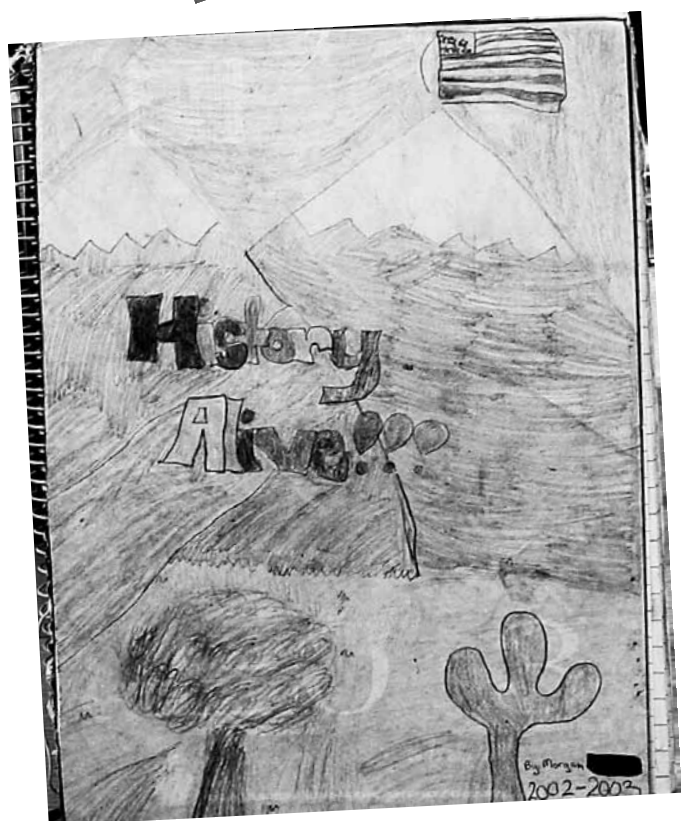
— Middle School Student



Notebooks that include the teacher’s own lesson Previews, graphic organizers for capturing content notes, and Processing assignments, plus any additional support materials. Creating this type of Interactive Student Notebook is labor-intensive, but many teachers are willing and eager to take on the task because of the tremendous success of this powerful organizational and instructional tool.

Regardless of the format you plan to use, the following hints will increase the effectiveness of your Interactive Student Notebooks and allow students’ individual styles to flourish.

- 1. Supply materials that inspire creativity.** An abundance of materials—colored pencils and markers, scissors, glue sticks, colored highlighters—will spark creativity for notebook assignments. Some teachers collect a class set of materials to keep in their room. These can be used by students who don’t otherwise have the materials they need for in-class work on their notebook.
- 2. Let students create their own covers.** When you introduce the Interactive Student Notebook, encourage students to embellish theirs with a colorful cover that in some way reflects the content you are teaching. This immediately sends students the message that the notebooks will be their own creations that they can take pride in—and it helps cut down on the number of lost notebooks during the year.
- 3. Personalize the notebooks with an author page.** Have students create a page about themselves to include at the front of their notebooks. Their author page could include a portrait or photograph, as well as personal information or favorite quotes. (As needed, remind students that any content unsuitable at school is also unacceptable for use in notebooks.) With both a personalized cover and an author page, very few notebooks get lost.



Notebook covers can be as individual as your students. It's up to each teacher to specify which information is considered essential for the cover, such as student's name, course name, class period, date. Beyond that, the students' design treatment may take a wide variety of forms, from the simple to the complex, from the pictorial to the abstract.

## Interactive Student Notebook Guidelines

### What is the purpose of the Interactive Notebook?

The purpose of the Interactive Student Notebook is to enable you to be a creative, independent thinker and writer. Interactive notebooks will be used for class notes as well as for other activities in which you will be asked to express your own ideas and process the information presented in class.

### What materials do I need?

- Spiral notebook—white paper, college-ruled, at least 100 pages
- Pencil
- Blue and black pens
- Colored pens and pencils
- Glue stick and scissors
- Zipper pouch
- Highlighters

### What goes in my notebook?

Everything we do in class. We will use graphically organized visuals to help you take notes, structuring them so that key ideas are clear and supported by examples from class activities, discussion, or reading assignments. Your notebook will also be used for a variety of different activities to preview learning and process new content to demonstrate understanding. This is where you will record and express all of your well-considered ideas.

### How can I earn an A on my notebook?

A student who expects to earn an A- or higher grade on the notebook will be one who keeps a complete, neat notebook, produces quality work, and has taken the time to consistently extend learning beyond classroom assignments.

### How will my notebook be graded?

Notebooks will be graded on thoroughness, quality, organization, and visual appearance. You will know the value of each major notebook assignment when it is given. About 25 percent of your grade for the course will be based on the notebook.

An important part of your notebook is its visual appearance. Your notebook should be NEAT! Each entry should be title and dated. Your artistic talent should be visible throughout the notebook.

Notebooks will be checked periodically for completeness—usually about every 3–4 weeks, except for the first few weeks of class, when they will be checked more regularly. All class notes and notebook assignments should be included, even for days you were absent.

### What happens if I am absent?

If you are absent, it is your responsibility to obtain notebook assignments from a classmate or from the Interactive Teacher Notebook.

Share this handout with your parent or guardian. When both of you have read this information, please sign your names below.

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Give clear guidelines for the notebooks.** One of the most important steps for successful notebooks is to establish clear guidelines. Decide ahead of time what you expect your students to produce in their notebooks, and then clearly communicate your expectations. Most teachers create a list of criteria—how notebooks will be graded, what percentage of the class grade will depend on the notebooks—and ask students to attach that list to the inside cover of their notebooks. Some teachers even include directions for specific types of notebook assignments, class rules, and their grading policy.

You might also send a letter to students and families, explaining the purpose of the notebook and your expectations. In the sample guidelines shown on page 168, students and their parents are asked to sign the handout to show that they have read the guidelines and understand the purpose and importance of the Interactive Student Notebook.

**5. Consider adding a table of contents.** You may want students to create a running table of contents for their notebooks. This can be as simple as a list of completed assignments and page numbers, or it could include more complex information. Add your comments and scores for each assignment. This will help you immensely when it comes time to grade the notebooks.

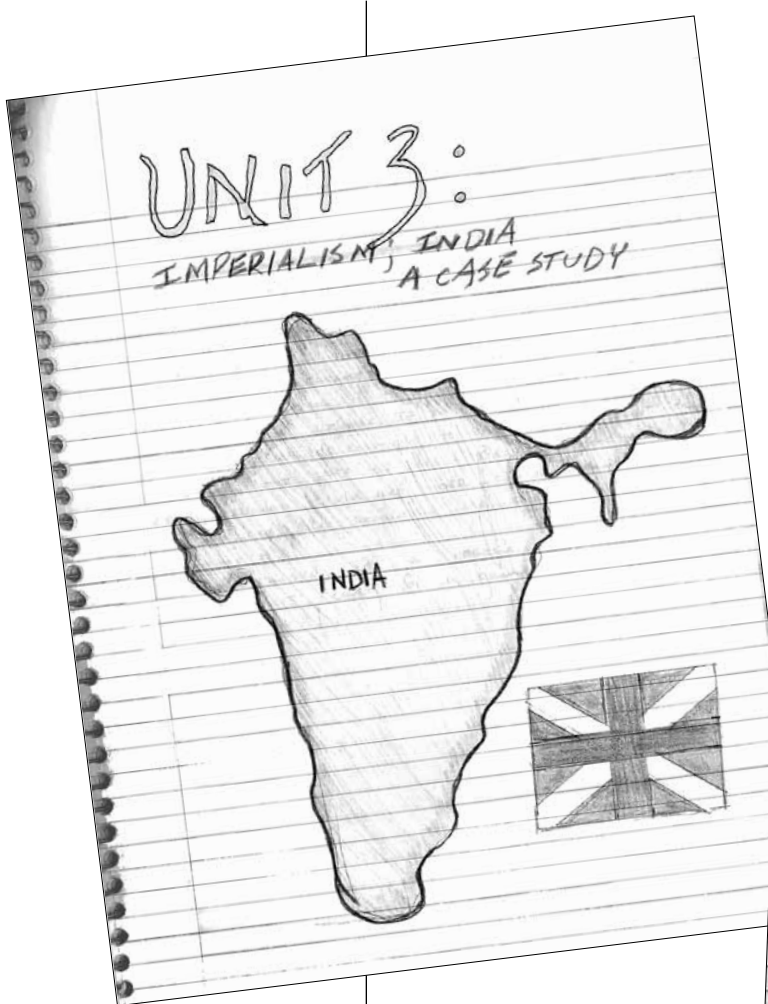
*Mrs. Hutchins Class 7th Period History*

ASSIGNMENT	PAGE	POSSIBLE SCORE	MY SCORE	TEACHER'S SCORE	GRADE
Preview-Representation Taxation without	27	2	2	2	
Reading Notes - Before 1763 Early British actions	28	5	5	4	
Townshend Acts Boston	29				
Boston Tea Party	30				
Intolerable Acts - Concord	31	10	9	10	
Processing - Lexington Dialogue	33	2	2	2	
Making Connections - Boston's Freedom Trail	35	10	8	8	
Preview - "It was the last straw."	36	2	2	2	
Reading Notes - The War Begins The Siege of Boston	37	5	4	5	
Quest of Independence - Drafts a Declaration the Final Break	38	10	9	7	
Processing - Understanding the Constitution	39	5	5	5	
You and the Constitution - Video Clip with Questions	41	10	7	6	
Illustrated Vocabulary	43	10	9	9	
Pop Quiz	44	2	2	2	
Making Connections - Review of major events on Constitution					44/45 = 89%

### Lost Notebooks?

Because students take a great deal of pride of ownership in their notebooks, typically very few are lost during a semester. Most teachers report that only a handful of students lose them each year. If your students do lose their notebooks, consider allowing them to make up a select number of assignments so they may receive partial credit.

This student's contents page lists each assignment completed and the page number where it can be found. A table of contents helps students stay organized, and helps you at grading time.



A simple title page design with a few bold images can be extremely effective.

**6. Add unit title pages that echo the unit theme.** For each unit you study, have students design a title page for that section of their Interactive Student Notebook. On this page they would write the title of the unit, and then find and affix pictures or draw illustrations to represent the unit's theme. This is an opportunity for students to preview the chapter, as well as to use their creative genius to personalize their notebooks.

## How to Manage Interactive Student Notebooks

If you have four or five classes a day, each with up to 35 students, that means you could have 150 or more student notebooks to keep track of. Because so much of the students' work appears in these notebooks, you will need a system for assessing them. Ideally, you will both informally assess the notebooks on a regular basis, to give students immediate feedback, and also *formally* collect and grade the notebooks every three to four weeks.

An earlier section of this book, "How to Manage Assessment of Student Notebooks" (pages 125–127), gives you further details and tips on effectively managing this task.

**Create an "Interactive Teacher Notebook."** Another management tool to help you monitor the use and the effectiveness of the Interactive Student Notebook throughout the year is an "Interactive *Teacher* Notebook." All you need is a master notebook in which you record each notebook assignment, attach student handouts, store copies of content notes, and make annotations on the activities for future reference—notes on how they went, which groups or individuals seemed to have trouble with them and why, and what questions really worked to prompt good critical thinking.

By keeping a master notebook, you have a visual record of what took place in class. If you incorporate details about the lesson objectives, standards addressed, materials needed, and procedures, the teacher notebook serves as your lesson-planning book as well. It is the ideal place to reflect on the outcome of lessons and to record ideas about how to make them more effective in the future.

The Interactive Teacher Notebook serves both the teacher and the students. For the teacher, this tool

- functions as the teacher's lesson-planning book.
- includes a table of contents that becomes the "official" record of assignments.
- provides a place to store extra materials and handouts.
- communicates special instructions for students who have been absent.
- serves as a journal to reflect on the effectiveness of activities and assignments and ways to improve them.

For students, the Interactive Teacher Notebook

- is a place they can find any information and assignments they missed during an absence.
- serves as a model of how assignments should be titled, dated, and arranged.
- allows them to check the completeness of their own notebook.

### Spotlight Student Notebooks

Showcase exceptional notebooks so students have the opportunity to gather ideas for improving their own notebooks. You might set up six or eight stations around the classroom, put an exceptional notebook at each, and conduct a "gallery walk." Allow students 15 or 20 minutes to roam around the room and collect ideas from the model notebooks.