

Social Studies Skill Builders in Five Easy Steps

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TCiTM

Multiple Intelligence Teaching Strategy

Social Studies Skill Builder



Steps at a Glance

- 1 Use Social Studies Skill Builders to engage and inspire your students.
- 2 Teach the skill through modeling and guided practice.
- 3 Prepare students to work in pairs.
- 4 Set clear expectations, allow students to practice the skill repeatedly, and give immediate feedback.
- 5 Debrief the lesson to help students make connections to key social studies concepts.

Social studies skills—such as reading maps, categorizing information, analyzing artifacts and primary resources, comparing and contrasting ideas, reading for detail, summarizing the main idea in writing, and interpreting historical documents—are vital to a student’s success in middle and high school. Sadly, by the time your students reach the secondary level, their teachers may be so hard-pressed to cover content that they rarely have time to teach skills. You can prepare your students for success by giving them a strong foundation in the skills they will need to master more difficult content in middle and high school. Because they are fun, engaging, and fast-paced, Social Studies Skill Builders will allow you to begin teaching these skills as soon as students enter kindergarten.

In this strategy, students work in pairs to complete skill-oriented tasks. You begin each activity by quickly modeling the skill and then challenging students to practice that skill again and again. As students work, you give them immediate feedback. The activity ends with a debriefing session that allows students to use their new skill to make connections to key social studies concepts.

Use Social Studies Skill Builders to engage and inspire your students.

Teaching the skills elementary students will need to be successful in social studies courses during their secondary school careers may seem daunting. Using Social Studies Skill Builders, you can turn this formidable challenge into fun, interactive lessons that both you and your students will enjoy. The first step is to appreciate these unique features of Social Studies Skill Builders:

Students sit in pairs to solve skill-oriented problems. Working with just one partner gives each student more opportunity to talk and be involved than when working in a group.

Each task challenges students to use multiple intelligences. For example, in a lesson about how five racial and ethnic groups—Native Americans, Latinos, European Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans—came to America and contributed to the country’s growth and development, students read about each group, draw images and symbols to represent each group’s experience, create a collage of the images, and write a verse that relates to each group.

Each skill is introduced quickly, and students are challenged to practice it repeatedly. Active involvement is the key to success.

Students are told exactly how their mastery of the skill will be assessed. For example, during an activity in which students analyze artifacts related to public services—such as drawings of a fire hose, fire hydrant, ax, and fire helmet to represent fire fighting—students must carefully write about what they think each artifact is, what it is used for, who would use it, and what public service it is related to. Students are given immediate feedback on each artifact they analyze. This pushes them to work quickly and creates a game-like atmosphere.

Each skill is taught at a developmentally appropriate level. If a skill is introduced thoughtfully, elementary students can master fairly complex topics sooner than you might expect. For example, lower-elementary students can learn how to understand perspective in a map if you begin by identifying objects in the classroom and then tell a story about a mouse that crawls to the top of the shelves and looks down upon the classroom. Using the idea of the mouse’s perspective, students are then challenged to interpret a map of the classroom. In this way, young students learn basic map skills, which they will use for the rest of their lives.

In this Social Studies Skill Builder, lower-elementary students practice the social skills of talking and listening.



“Students enjoy Social Studies Skill Builders because they get to work with someone and the activities are fast-paced—they don’t realize how much work they are actually doing. And I really appreciate that these are gradable activities without take-home paperwork for me.”

In this upper-elementary Social Studies Skill Builder, students work in teams to learn about the motives of European explorers.

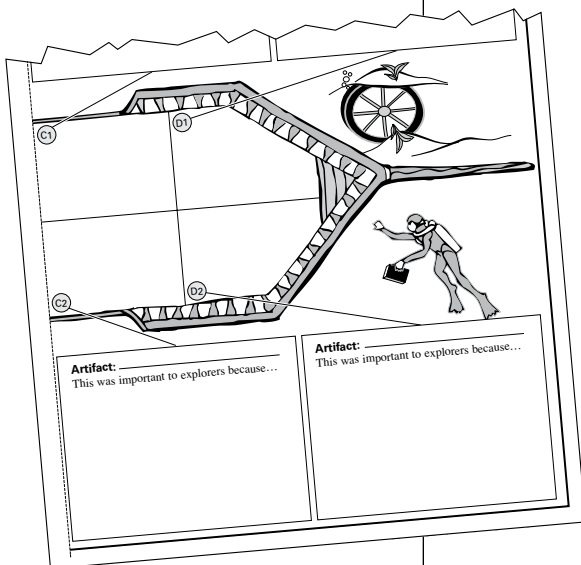


STEP
2

Teach the skill through modeling and guided practice.

Introduce each Social Studies Skill Builder by quickly modeling and leading your students through guided practice of the skill. Teaching the skill consists of carefully explaining, and having students practice, each step before turning them loose to work on their own. Here are steps you could take to prepare students for a Social Studies Skill Builder in which they “excavate a sunken ship” to learn about the motives of 15th- and 16th-century European explorers:

1. **Tell students that they will work in pairs and act as underwater archaeologists excavating a sunken ship.** Explain that they will soon learn how to retrieve artifacts (pictures) from a sunken ship’s hull (outlined in tape on the floor), determine what they are, and draw conclusions regarding European exploration.
2. **Ask each pair to share the respective roles of diver and research scientist for the first artifact they bring to the ocean’s surface.** They will switch roles for each new artifact.
3. **Show the divers how to simulate swimming motions and to enter the hull of the wrecked ship to retrieve an artifact.** Play underwater sound effects while students practice this.
4. **Show all students how to use geography skills to note on their underwater maps the grid section—such as D2—from which the artifact was taken.** Be sure everyone masters the skill.
5. **Show the divers how to bring the artifacts to a research station (desk) on “land.”**
6. **Model for all students how to examine an artifact carefully, sketch it quickly, and find information in the text that sheds light on what the artifact is and what it was used for.**
7. **Explain that once pairs have identified and read about the artifact, they must finish this sentence: *This was important to explorers because...*** Model one or two sentences for them.



“Be prepared to hear, ‘May we PLEASE do this again tomorrow? It was so much fun!’”

8. Demonstrate how you will review pairs’ work. Show them how to stand patiently in line until you are ready to correct their assignments. Or become the “senior research scientist,” making the rounds to the research stations to check for accuracy and to approve another dive. Explain that if an answer is wrong, pairs may have a chance to correct it to receive full credit.
9. Tell students that when their work has been corrected, they will dive back into the ship to return the artifact and choose another one to study. Have them study as many artifacts as possible in the allotted time.

STEP**3****Prepare students to work in pairs.**

After you have modeled the skill, it's time to place students in pairs. Because they will be discussing skill-oriented questions that have discrete answers, working in pairs is ideal. Students will have more opportunity for interaction and won't get off track as easily as they might in a larger group. Here are some tips for preparing students to work in pairs:

Arrange students in mixed-ability pairs. Since these skill tasks require the use of multiple intelligences, it makes sense to pair students with complementary abilities. This will help ensure that each partner has something of value to contribute, and that interaction is more equitable. For an activity that requires linguistic and visual skills, for example, try to put a strong linguistic student with one who excels visually. This process may take a half hour, but it is time well spent as it will result in students working together much more harmoniously.

Before class, prepare a transparency showing where students will sit. Create a map showing the arrangement of desks or tables in your classroom or, for younger students, the location of the rug or community area. To limit distractions, space desks evenly around the classroom. Use an erasable marker to write students' names next to the desks at which you want them to work. This will help students move efficiently into pairs and will reinforce geography skills, especially if you add a compass rose to your map. Use the transparency as a template for your next Social Studies Skill Builder.

Instruct students to sit side by side on the rug, at tables, or with their desks touching. Project the map for students to use as a guide in forming pairs. Tell them they are not officially a team until they are sitting on the rug or at a table with their shoulders touching, or until the right edge of one desk is touching the left edge of the other and both students are facing forward.

Encourage students to greet each other. Once students have found their partners and are sitting correctly, tell them to introduce themselves and shake hands. Model this behavior with one of your students. Smile and have fun while you do this. This will ease tension and help pairs work together more effectively.

Conduct a quick team-builder to warm up students for working together. This might be as simple as having students look directly into their partners' eyes as they, with conviction and spirit, say, "Buddy, if you need a helping hand, you can count on me!" and give each other a high-five. You might also ask them to discuss a question relating to the skill being taught. For example, before an activity on public services, you might ask partners to share which of four public service jobs—teacher, firefighter, judge, or police officer—they would most like to have and why.

"Some students have such strength in a skill needed for the task that I make them 'experts' available to other pairs for consultation. The variety of skills needed for Social Studies Skill Builders gives me the opportunity to use many different experts, and students' self-esteem is very positively affected."

A bit of silliness in the classroom will help students feel comfortable and work together effectively.



Making Your Job Easier

You might create cards folded to show three surfaces—colored red, yellow, and green—and have groups signal their current working condition by flipping their card. Green means “We’re fine, making progress.”

Yellow means “We have a question, but we’ll continue to try to solve our own problem.” Red means “We have finished our task and need to be checked but will continue to read and research while waiting.”

This encourages students to make wise use of their time and to take responsibility for helping themselves learn.

Checking work as students proceed through the activity helps keep students on task.

STEP

4

Set clear expectations, allow students to practice the skill repeatedly, and give immediate feedback.

After you have quickly modeled the skill and placed students in mixed-ability pairs, clearly state what you expect from them so you can evaluate their work fairly. An easy and efficient way to do this is to create a transparency that tells students exactly what is expected of them. You may want to award points for each part of an assignment your students successfully complete.

Checking work and awarding points as students progress through the activity will motivate them to work quickly and conscientiously in a game-like atmosphere. It will also assure that students create high-quality products, as they know you’ll be carefully scrutinizing each answer. And it will give you a break from grading papers at home.

The greatest challenge you will face when giving students immediate feedback is managing the constant, and possibly overwhelming, flow of students waiting to have their work checked. Here are some tips to help make sure you have no more than two or three pairs of students waiting for feedback:

- Familiarize yourself with the handout in advance so you can quickly check each student’s work for key points.
- Have students put their fingers on the exact answer they want corrected. This will prevent your having to search the entire handout for the next answer to correct.

- Give pairs more than one artifact or question to work on at a time so they take longer to finish.
- Ask students who have accurately completed the activity to be responsible for correcting their peers’ work.
- Circulate around the classroom to correct handouts rather than having students wait in line. Students might signal they are ready for your review by putting their pencils down, folding their arms, and smiling—not by yelling for your attention.



Debrief the lesson to help students make connections to key social studies concepts.

Most teachers find that there comes a point during each Social Studies Skill Builder when most students, but not all, have finished working. It may be more effective to debrief the activity at this point than to wait for everyone to finish. To ensure that all your students have been exposed to the same content, consider asking pairs to take turns reporting to the class what they discovered. A pair might interpret an artifact, explain a primary source, or answer a geography question for the entire class while the other students take notes to make the information their own.

After all your students have been exposed to all the content, it is time to challenge them to think holistically about the fragmented bits of content they have learned. Think of a way for your students to consider, as a whole, all the artifacts, questions, or primary resources they analyzed during the Social Studies Skill Builder. Here are some activities used to wrap up Social Studies Skill Builders:

- **Write an acrostic including all the examples they analyzed.** After a lesson in which students learn about public services by connecting a series of artifacts to specific services, challenge them to write an acrostic using the word PUBLIC. For example, the P might introduce the line, “Police make sure people are safe.”
- **Write song verses about various groups in American society.** After students have analyzed a series of readings about racial and ethnic groups in the United States, ask them to write several verses to the song “This Land Is Your Land” that identify each group’s country of origin and highlight the group’s contributions to American society.
- **Create a photo journal of key geographic landmarks.** After students have located a series of physical features on a U.S. map, have them create a “photo journal” of a trip across the states by drawing geographic landmarks (Appalachians, Great Plains, Colorado River) seen along the way.
- **Create a “human spectrum” evaluating the contributions of European explorers.** After students have studied how ten European explorers claimed, conquered, and controlled North America, have individual students hold up a placard of each explorer and stand along a spectrum from “Explorer with Most Impact on the United States Today” to “Explorer with Least Impact on the United States Today.”
- **Identify the effects of local geographic features.** After students have learned how geography impacts human settlement around the United States, have them select a geography topic—such as weather, elevation, natural resources, or bodies of water—that affects them locally and make a drawing showing the effects of that topic on people’s lives.

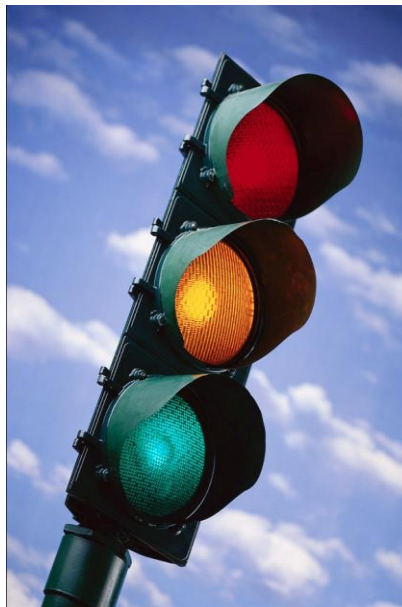


Having students group themselves along a spectrum helps the entire class to think holistically about the various pieces of information they collected during the activity.

“Debriefing Social Studies Skill Builders gives me a chance to make sure all students understand the concepts. I’ve found that after they have worked in pairs, they have a lot of details and ideas to share with the class.”

Stop, Slow, Go!

To modify workloads for IEPs, SpEd and ESL students, back the placards or color code the question strips. Green indicates the station is a must-do, yellow means it is optional, and red says it is not necessary. Students must complete all the station reading with their partner but the amount of written work has been adjusted. A fourth color can be used to indicate a challenge or bonus points or extra credit station.



The Joy of Baggies

Store placards, question strips and answer matrices in a labeled plastic baggie to keep materials together, clean, and organized.



Limit That Line

Tape 3 Xs on the floor near the teacher check point. Pairs must stand and advance on the Xs. No Xs open? Tell students to stay at their seats until there is an opening.



Random Pairing Options

While you may want and need to manipulate grouping 90% of the time, periodically a random pairing works with Social Studies Skill Builders. Some quick strategies you can use are an appointment calendar, a meet-me-at graphic, having students draw from a deck of cards (red 2 pairs with a red 2), having students draw a slip of paper with names (Fred and Barney, Lucy and Ethel, Batman and Robin, bread and butter, etc.) or having the students line up in birthday order and fold the line in half to make pairs.



Keep 'Em Moving

By placing the placards around the room on the walls or chalk rails, or the question strips across the room from the teacher check point, students are moving more during the Social Studies Skill Builder, increasing the body-kinesthetic nature of the activity.



Debrief the Content

Make sure you debrief the content at the end of the Social Studies Skill Builder. A human spectrum, speed dating and assorted written reflections are just a few of the methods you can use.

Create a spectrum of MOST IMPORTANT to LEAST IMPORTANT or MOST IMPACT to LEAST IMPACT, and have student pairs decide where the placard they hold fits on the spectrum. One partner stands with the placard on the spectrum, the other partner shares their rationale.

For speed dating, create two lines of students facing each other. Give the students a set time to either compare information they both researched, or share new information on a placard they had not visited. After a set amount of time, move the line so that each person gets a new partner to share information.



Manipulate Pairings for Success

Use multiple intelligences and reading levels to form Social Studies Skill Builder pairs. Pair a strong verbal-linguistic student with a strong visual-spatial student for placards that involve reading and images. Pair logical-mathematical students with visual-spatial or verbal-linguistic for mapping and math-based skills. Pair strong readers with weak readers to provide support at the stations.



Not All Stations Must Be Completed

Time is always a consideration. Every student does not have to finish every station. You can provide additional content during the debriefs (refer to placard 6). Students can complete reading notes during class-wide note check. You can even project an image of the notes and have the students help you fill them in.

Call on different pairs to come up and fill in one section of the projected notes until all sections have been completed. To save time when working with matrices, you can make a transparency of the matrix, cut it into strips, and give each pair a strip to complete. Then, call pairs to the overhead one at a time to place their transparency strip on top of a blank matrix.

If you plan to grade the reading notes (refer to placard 15), base the score on the sections the students completed.



Skill Builders: Not Just for Social Studies Anymore

The Skill Builder strategy isn't limited to social studies/history. Look at some examples for the other content areas.



Modifications for Special Pops (Also Great Time Savers for the Entire Class)

- Copy the answer key and create blanks for select words to make Cloze notes.
- Provide a word bank of the correct answers that students can use to complete the notes.
- Provide the answers in random order for students to match up on the reading notes.



Provide Immediate Feedback with a Twist

As pairs complete a station, have them check the accuracy of their answers with you. You place a stamp, sticker, or initials on their paper to okay the answer. The twist is in the placement or position of your mark. Placed on the question number could be for 100% accuracy, on the left side on the answer if you had to prompt the pair for a more complete answer. A stamp that is oriented correctly can indicate 100% for the answer, on its side or upside down can indicate you had to work with the students.



A Forced March

Set a time limit for each station and signal it's time to move to the next station with an attention-getting device like a train whistle, rain stick, or bell. For a variation of Musical Chairs, play music for the set time, when the music stops, the pairs move to the next station.



Teambuilders

Allow teams to bond with a simple activity like the “I can do it!” we modeled at the beginning of this Skill Builder. A special handshake, a team name, or a secret password can be simple teambuilders.



Missing in Action

If a student is absent on day one of a Social Studies Skill Builder, the solo partner joins a pair and moves through the stations with them. When the absent partner returns, the reunited pair continues doing the unfinished stations. The absent partner may make up the missed stations for homework or during a study hall.

If a partner is absent after day one, the solo partner moves through the unfinished stations, joining different pairs at the stations.



Easy Grading: The Twist

If you give a grade for reading notes, the placement or position of the stamp or sticker can help you quickly score the page. If the position or placement indicates 100% accuracy for an answer then full points are earned for that item. If the placement is to the side or the stamp is upside down because prompting was needed to get the correct answer, then 1-3 points can be deducted for that item. In no time the papers are scored and you are out the door. And the students never catch on to this twist.

