



Building Content Knowledge and Inquiry Skills with Discovery Education Social Studies Techbook

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In 1992, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) officially defined social studies as “...the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence,” and further stated that “the primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society and interdependent world.”¹ Although many traditional social studies classrooms in the United States primarily emphasize the students’ acquisition of content knowledge in disciplines such as history, economics, geography, and civics, NCSS’s discussion of the purpose of social studies also underscores the importance of developing in students’ dispositions and skills required for effective citizenship. “Civic competence,” NCSS states, is built upon a “commitment to democratic values, and requires the abilities to use

knowledge about one’s community, nation, and world; apply inquiry processes; and employ skills of data collection and analysis, collaboration, decision-making, and problem-solving.”²

The recently published College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards (2013) reaffirms the importance of developing student skills and dispositions in addition to content knowledge. C3’s introduction observes that “students quickly become disengaged when instruction is limited to reading textbooks and to answer end-of-chapter questions and taking multiple-choice tests that may measure content knowledge but do little to measure how knowledge is meaningful and applicable to the real world.” Van Sledright (2010) argues that history instruction focused on the memorization of a single narrative provides low cognitive challenge, invites skepticism from

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traditionally marginalized students, depresses enthusiasm for content, and may have adverse effects on assessment performance, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).³ C3's introduction also notes that "active and responsible citizens are able to identify and analyze public problems, deliberate with other people about how to define and address issues, take constructive action together, reflect on their actions, create and sustain groups, and influence institutions both large and small."⁴

The C3's embrace of college and career-ready skills reflects a growing emphasis on critical reading, writing, and thinking across all disciplines. The Common Core State Standards for English and the Language Arts (CCSS) strike a balance in the English Language Arts between reading literary texts and writing narrative prose, and comprehending informational texts and using those texts to support written or spoken arguments. Recognizing the importance of this shift, the CCSS set the expectation that reading and writing outcomes be integrated into state standards in history, social studies, science, and technical subjects. The CCSS argues that explicit emphasis on these skills across disciplines, will not only prepare students for success in college and careers, but also help students be literate, engaged citizens in the twenty-first century.

An NCSS position paper entitled "A Vision of Powerful Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies: Building Social Understanding and Civic Efficacy," published in 1992 and revised in 2008, "presents a vision of social studies teaching and learning needed to achieve the levels of civic efficacy that the nation requires of its citizens."⁵ According to this paper, "social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are "meaningful," "integrative," "value-based," "active," and "challenging."

Digital resources and tools can play a significant role in supporting teaching and learning that facilitate the development of civic efficacy. Students have instant access to a wider and deeper breadth of resources from multiple perspectives, including primary

and secondary source documents, which increase their understanding of complex concepts. Many researchers have pointed out that this access to sources creates an opportunity for students and teachers in social studies, but must be paired with effective instructional activities to attain optimal results (Tally & Goldberg 2005, Swan & Locascio 2008).^{6,7}

Students also have greater opportunities to be multimedia content creators, integrating digital resources into what they produce and present. Multimedia evidence can be paired with interpretation and argument in student-built videos, websites, and document. Digital content provides diverse learners with different modalities to including text, audio, and video. Digital platforms can also promote collaboration in a classroom by allowing students and teachers seamless, real-time sharing of ideas, content, and feedback. These capabilities are among the most promising developments in digital education.⁸

Discovery Education Social Studies Techbook is an all-digital on-line resource that is aligned to state standards and supports a comprehensive curriculum. As an alternative to traditional print social studies texts, Social Studies Techbook leverages the advantages of digital technology to make "powerful" social studies instruction accessible to more students and teachers. Techbook facilitates teaching and learning by integrating standards-aligned social studies content from a variety of media with activities and model lessons that support the critical thinking, reading, and writing skills outlined by NCSS, C3, and the CCSS. It is intended to provide teachers with one-stop shopping for planning and implementing lessons that exemplify each of the five qualities of powerful social studies teaching and learning.

Social Studies Techbook is platform neutral and can be used in one-to-one or one-to-many classroom configurations and in any instructional environment. Students can access Techbook individually, in small groups, or as part of the whole class. Because Techbook is web based, its resources,

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assignments, and assessments can be accessed anywhere that web access is available including at home or on mobile devices. Student accounts can be shared with parents so that they can see what students are learning and producing.

SOCIAL STUDIES TECHBOOK AND QUALITIES OF POWERFUL SOCIAL STUDIES INSTRUCTION

Meaningful Teaching and Learning

Social studies instruction is meaningful when students recognize the importance and relevance of the knowledge and skills they are acquiring, and when instruction develops those skills they will use later in life as citizens and scholars. According to NCSS, “meaningful social studies builds curriculum networks of knowledge, skills, beliefs, and attitudes that are structured around enduring understandings, essential understandings, important ideas, and goals.”⁹

To be meaningful, social studies content knowledge must push beyond recall of simple facts. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) recommend that educators organize content delivery around “provocative and multilayered” Essential Questions that “cannot be answered satisfactorily in a sentence” and that “reveal the richness and complexities of a subject.”¹⁰ Essential Questions provide “teacher and students with a sharper focus and a better direction for inquiry,” and also “render the unit design more coherent and make the students more appropriately intellectual.”¹¹ In a case study of a high school history classroom, Lattimer (2008) found that student inquiries built around Essential Questions led students to become more engaged with content, to make connections across topics, and to voice more nuanced interpretations of important issues. She also found that the use of Essential Questions had a positive impact on student achievement and attendance.

HOW SOCIAL STUDIES TECHBOOK SUPPORTS MEANINGFUL TEACHING AND LEARNING

By organizing its content delivery and many activities around complex and important Essential Questions, and then using these questions to facilitate

student inquiries into social studies topics, Social Studies Techbook supports implementation of instruction that is meaningful for students. For example, Techbook divides “chunks” of content into segments known as concepts. All Techbook concepts, which are designed to provide content and resources to support roughly a week’s worth of classroom instruction, have a single Essential Question appropriate for students and teachers to pose at the commencement of instruction and revisit throughout the concept. Examples of concept Essential Questions include “Why did the colonists risk their lives to fight for independence from Great Britain?,” “Was the 1950s a decade of progress?,” “In what ways did the agricultural revolution change human life?,” and “Have global contact and migration created a more culturally united or divided world?” Each concept also features a “Social Studies Explanation” organizer, which provides students with opportunities to test preliminary responses to the concept Essential Question, and to document examples of evidence they encountered in support of their responses. The concept Essential Questions, therefore, bring meaning and importance to the content by helping to transform traditional content coverage into a student investigation that reflects the nature of the discipline.

Social Studies Techbook’s organization of resources in each concept around the “5E” instructional model brings further meaning to social studies teaching and learning. Within each concept, resources have been categorized according to how they will be used by students and placed behind five different digital tabs: ENGAGE, EXPLORE, EXPLAIN, ELABORATE, and EVALUATE. Wilson et al (2010) concluded that this 5E model can positively impact both achievement and equity in science.¹² Applied to social studies, this format’s emphasis on problem solving and novel challenges will help teachers and students organize classroom experiences to match the learning patterns that come naturally to students.¹³

In addition, the 5E model is compatible with the Four Dimensions of the Inquiry Arc outlined in the C3 Framework.

The Core Interactive Text in Social Studies Techbook is available in English and Spanish and features tools designed to support readers in decoding, comprehending, and analyzing informational text.

Techbook's ENGAGE pages, which pose each concept's Essential Question, are suitable for the first dimension: developing and planning social studies inquiries. Materials found in the EXPLORE and EXPLAIN tabs provide content to assist students with Dimension Two: applying disciplinary concepts and tools. In these tabs, students are asked to consider secondary source information, use disciplinary skills such as chronological thinking or cost/benefit analysis, and organize that information to form a nuanced response to the Essential Questions. The ELABORATE resources, particularly the numerous Document-Based Investigations, provide students with opportunities to develop skills associated with Dimension Three, evaluating sources and using evidence. Finally, both the ELABORATE and EVALUATE tabs feature resources that provide students with opportunities to develop proficiencies associated with Dimension Four, communicating conclusions and taking informed action.

The NCSS emphasizes the role of social studies instruction in the development of skills students will use as scholars and as citizens. These skills include "discipline-based literacy," as well as "information gathering and analysis."¹⁴ In an analysis of college and career readiness skills, Achieve (2007) stated that informational text literacy is a key skill for post-secondary success.¹⁵ However, Moss and Newton (2002) noted that this skill has not been emphasized by traditional basal reading instruction.¹⁶ To bridge this gap, the CCSS and C3 both place strong emphasis on informational text comprehension and analysis.

The Core Interactive Text in Social Studies Techbook is available in English and Spanish and features tools designed to support readers in decoding, comprehending, and analyzing informational text. For example, the read aloud tool can provide support for struggling readers with or without disabilities, providing them better access to content and support with vocabulary.¹⁷ Highlighting and note-taking tools encourage structured text annotation guided by the teacher.¹⁸ Teachers can even review student annotations to check for active reading practices.

By including structured graphic organizers in the body of the Core Interactive Text, Techbook provides additional support for student comprehension and analysis of informational text.¹⁹ These organizers encourage students to apply analysis skills such as compare and contrast and classification to their text. These organizers are repeated in argumentative and analytical writing activities to help students structure their own writing. Similarly, the EXPLAIN activities in Social Studies Techbook, particularly the Social Studies Explanation, provide structured forums for students to respond to informational sources and analyze these sources as evidence. The Social Studies Explanation, for example, focuses on the collection and organization of evidence related to an Essential Question before students draw conclusions from the evidence.

Integrative Resources and Skills

To understand the world around them, students must draw on varied information and apply multiple types of analysis.²⁰ Therefore, successful social studies instruction integrates resources and skills from across the social studies sub-disciplines and draws on competencies from disciplines such as English language arts and math. In the twenty-first century, social studies students must also be able to access information, evaluate sources, and communicate conclusions across several forms of digital and analog media.

The social studies encompass a number of distinct disciplines. NCSS outlines social studies as a broad discipline composed of anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, in addition to relevant content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The Praxis II for social studies content knowledge includes six content categories: U.S. history, world history, government/civics/political science, geography, economics, and behavioral sciences. Social studies cannot be the study of the past alone. Even in history courses, the understanding of the past must integrate economic, geographic, and sociological thinking. Additionally, students engaged in meaningful social

Finally, the digital age has created new opportunities for social studies students.

studies learning will need to analyze data, comprehend difficult texts, and form nuanced arguments. The social studies need to encompass the entire human experience, and equip students with the tools and knowledge to be effective citizens.

Over the past several years, the emphasis on social studies instruction has declined in schools and educational policy has placed greater importance on mathematics and language arts. Fitchett and Heafner (2010) concluded that while the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation magnified trends in decreased instructional time for social studies, the NCLB federal mandate is not the sole reason for the decline of social studies. They argue that the marginalization of social studies is an enduring trend over the last two decades, a byproduct of an educational policy shift toward national standardization.²¹

However, the reduced emphasis on instructional time and attention for the social studies ignores the emphasis that quality social studies interaction places on cross-curricular reading, writing, and thinking skills. By drawing on the tools and content of language arts, math, science, engineering, and fine arts, effective social studies lessons provide real-life examples of and applications for cross-disciplinary thinking and skill building.

Researchers and policymakers alike are beginning to recognize the key role the social studies can play in developing cross-disciplinary skills, particularly literacy and writing skills. The Common Core State Standards adopted by many states have taken an integrative approach to social studies, including specific social studies literacy and writing standards that mirror those developed for English/Language Arts.²² These standards emphasize citing evidence to support analysis, evaluating point-of-view and bias in sources, and developing logical and well-organized arguments. These standards also recognize that, in both college and career settings, most young adults engage in informational text reading and descriptive or argumentative writing. To more closely align with college and career readiness skills, the Common Core standards recommend

a shift across the curriculum to increase the value placed on these skills – skills already core to social studies.

Finally, the digital age has created new opportunities for social studies students. Online resources can connect students with information instantly. Digital technology allows students to integrate audio-visual resources into presentations to form and support arguments. Research shows that effective integration of digital resources can improve learning outcomes. Tally and Goldenberg (2005) found that using digital primary sources to teach history increased students' understanding of and interest in history.²³ They also found that examination of digital resources exercised many key historical thinking skills. Bell and Bull (2010) argue that, when paired with quality pedagogy, digital video can improve engagement and provide interesting objects for analysis.²⁴

HOW SOCIAL STUDIES TECHBOOK SUPPORTS INTEGRATIVE RESOURCES AND SKILLS

Discovery Education Social Studies Techbook is designed to reach across the sub-disciplines, foster interdisciplinary skill development, and integrate varied forms of media. Techbook draws on the sub-disciplines of social studies to provide an integrated understanding of content. Activities across all courses embrace discipline-specific tools and concepts, as described in the C3 Framework. United States History Social Studies Techbook, for example, includes map-based interactive investigations on the growth of American cities, and economics-based cost/benefit analyses of inventions during the Industrial Revolution.

In addition to supporting basic informational text comprehension through the tools such as read aloud, highlighting, and graphic organizers, Social Studies Techbook integrates instruction and practice of complex reading, writing and thinking skills. Activities in Social Studies Techbook provide multiple opportunities for scaffolded practice in literacy and writing skills. Each concept contains several activities in the Elaborate section, many of which require student analysis and

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synthesis of complex, mixed media sources and written responses. These activities give students practice working with primary sources and provide graphic organizers and other supports that help students to structure arguments.

As an all-digital resource, Discovery Education Social Studies Techbook provides unique opportunities to integrate resources from several different media formats. In the Core Interactive Text, Techbook pairs explanatory text with video segments. Secondary source segments can be used to transport students outside of their own experience and provide visual cues for learning. Primary source segments can be treated as historical artifacts and analyzed carefully. The video segments in Discovery Education Techbook have been edited to present information in shorter format, and can be paused, replayed, downloaded, and paired with other resources. The activities in Social Studies Techbook often ask students to create multimedia presentations, integrating images, video, audio, and text into an argumentative product. Discovery Education Board Builder provides an easy-to-use multimedia platform for student content creation.

Value-Based Instruction

Social studies instruction, more than any other discipline, provides students the knowledge and skills to become effective citizens. The C3's introduction explains that "advocates of citizenship education cross the political spectrum, but they are bound by a common belief that our democratic republic will not sustain unless students are aware of their changing cultural and physical environments; know the past; read, write, and think deeply; and act in ways that promote the common good. There will always be differing perspectives on these objectives. The goal of knowledgeable, thinking, and active citizens, however, is universal."²⁵

To foster these democratic values, NCSS states that social studies students should be "made aware of potential policy implications and taught to think critically and make decisions about a variety of issues, modeling the choices they will make as adult citizens."²⁶

Rahima Wade argues social studies teachers "have a significant role to play in developing citizens committed to social justice. They can best fulfill this role by guiding students to examine injustice, seek out multiple perspectives on social problems, and develop concrete strategies for improving their communities and nation."²⁷ The skills associated with corroborating multiple sources and multiple perspectives to draw conclusions, and to use those conclusions to implement action, are at the heart of the Common Core skills standards and the C3 framework. Those skills are modeled and practiced through activities in Social Studies Techbook.

HOW SOCIAL STUDIES TECHBOOK SUPPORTS VALUE-BASED INSTRUCTION

Several activities in Techbook courses ask students to "Act Locally" by developing plans to lobby local policymakers or drafting new practices for water conservation in their communities. Structured debates and discussion seminars provide a forum for students to express differing views in a formal civic dialogue. Additionally, activities such as Document-Based Investigations and Express Your Opinion encourage students to evaluate government policies, past and present, to form arguments and recommendations.

Social Studies Techbook invites students to understand modern challenges in the context of past events. For example, in the United States History (Civil War–Present) course, students connect the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s to modern policy debates about income equality. In the World Geography and Cultures course, each regional chapter concludes with a "Modern Issue Analysis" concept that asks students to consider complex challenges faced by countries around the world. Students analyze issues through varied disciplinary lenses and from multiple points of view, then provide policy recommendations. This focus on the real impact of national and global policies encourages students to become informed and engaged citizens.

Finally, Social Studies Techbook uses interactive Investigations to promote

The inquiry-based model of the Discovery Education Social Studies Techbook encourages complexity and depth in social studies instruction.

students' engagement with value-based decision-making. Investigations called Enduring Debates ask students to consider both sides of debates that have implications throughout history. Students choose a side to support in arguments such as "Liberty v. Security" and "Isolationism v. Interventionism" and justify their position in response to several short questions. The Global Challenges and Key Decisions Investigations place students in the role of decision makers, choosing between policies and explaining their choices. In Historical Perspective Investigations, students consider questions in history from the perspectives of varied fictional observers. This activity seeks to build students' abilities to understand the differing points of view that citizens bring to issues.

Challenging Student Work

According to the NCSS, challenging student work "reflects a balance between retrieval and recitation of content and includes a thoughtful examination of concepts in order to provide intellectual challenges."²⁸

Educators and researchers have struggled to define "rigorous instruction." Strong, Silver, and Perrini (2001) conclude the "goal of helping students develop the capacity to understand content that is complex, ambiguous, provocative, and personally or emotionally challenging" defines rigor.²⁹ Boggess (2007) found that rigor is "the quality of thinking, not the quantity" and can occur at any grade-level and in any subject.³⁰ Wagner (2008) constructs a more modern definition of rigor, explaining that success in the twenty-first century will require students in every discipline to develop "critical thinking, communication skills, and collaboration."³¹ While these experts may vary in their definitions, researchers agree that rigorous instruction means more than work that is difficult for students to complete.

Course labels, such as Honors or Advanced Placement do not necessarily guarantee the sort of rigor Strong, et al, Boggess, and Wagner describe. In a study of Advanced Placement classrooms, Wagner (2008) found that

even in advanced classes, complex questions and collaboration were often lacking.³² Students leaving high school to immediately enter the workforce also need more rigor in their K-12 education. The National High School Alliance (2006) argued that all students should be provided with an education that qualifies them for college entry should they so choose. In fact, many students now follow non-traditional paths through post-secondary education, entering colleges many years after leaving high school.³³ Furthermore, students planning to join the workforce after graduation also require practice in higher-order skills.³⁴

HOW SOCIAL STUDIES TECHBOOK SUPPORTS STUDENT WORK THAT IS CHALLENGING

The inquiry-based model of the Discovery Education Social Studies Techbook encourages complexity and depth in social studies instruction. By focusing learning around Essential Questions and organizing instruction around the 5Es, Techbook pushes students to think critically about social studies content. Activities such as Debates and Document-Based Investigations require students to consider multiple sources, form arguments, and defend them with evidence. Other activities, such as You As Artist, Say What?, and Socratic Seminars push students to grapple with the ideas and themes in one or two sources. Throughout, students are provided with opportunities to collaborate, reflect on ideas, and communicate their reasoning. In doing so, students engage in the work of social studies experts – historians, policymakers, geographers – and develop skills that will be critical in college and careers.

To encourage teachers to develop challenging lessons, Social Studies Techbook presents teachers and students with multiple options for instruction and inquiry. Though it contains enough information to "cover" all content standards, Social Studies Techbook provides resources that will enable students and teachers to dig deep into topics. Text, images, and video segments on the Explore tab not only provide content across multiple

Through Model Lessons in each concept, Discovery Education Social Studies Techbook provides three different inquiry pathways to provide a varying degree of student independence in pursuing challenging inquiry.

learning modalities, but also provide opportunities for students to compare sources, analyze differences, and look more closely at key ideas. The Explain and Elaborate tabs contain multiple activities, inviting multiple types of analysis and synthesis. Teachers cannot expect students to complete every Elaborate activity for every concept. Rather, the abundance of in-depth activities encourages curriculum planners, teachers, or students to choose which topics will receive additional focus and discussion.

Through Model Lessons in each concept, Discovery Education Social Studies Techbook provides three different inquiry pathways to provide a varying degree of student independence in pursuing challenging inquiry. Most teachers will use a mix of instructional pathways and resources, drawing some activities directly from the Model Lesson and designing others from the many resources in Techbook.

In the Guided Inquiry pathway, the teacher guides students through the 5Es by selecting and assigning materials for exploration; designing pre-, during-, and post-reading or viewing activities to promote student understanding of content; and checking frequently for understanding. While students may work individually, in small groups, or as a whole class, they are usually all engaged in similar work and investigating the same Essential Question.

In Project-Based Inquiry, students learn content and develop skills as a means to complete an overarching project related to the Essential Question. Teachers introduce the project as an engaging “challenge” that frames the learning of the entire concept. The Document-Based Investigations and other Elaborate activities in Social Studies Techbook are appropriate projects for this pathway. Students then consider what they will need to learn to complete the project and explore materials and explain understandings as steps toward completing the final project. This pathway encourages problem solving and meta-cognition as students must simultaneously learn content and manage project development. Finally, Social Studies Techbook provides a rich

library of resources for students on the 5E tabs, inside the Reference tool, and through keyword search.

In Self-Guided Inquiry, students develop their own inquiry questions based on concept or chapter Essential Questions, background research, and their own interests. Students then use the variety of resources available in Social Studies Techbook to research their questions, formulate a response, and present their evidence. For a shorter inquiry, teachers can lead students through limited Engage and Explore sessions and then use the questions students generate in the Social Studies Explanation as a springboard to Self-Guided Inquiry. For a longer and more open inquiry, teachers can limit the introduction to a concept or chapter and then allow students to develop much broader inquiry questions and conduct longer research assignments.

Creating challenging learning experiences is not easy. Throughout Techbook, student and teacher guides provide step-by-step support for students and teachers engaged in complex work. Student guides for activities break long investigations into smaller steps and offer graphic organizers to help students gather and analyze evidence. The teacher guides help teachers conduct these inquiries and project in their classroom with suggestions for procedures and practice.

Active Learning

Active lessons require students to synthesize content to draw conclusions and to reflect on their learning. NCSS states there is a “profound difference between learning about the actions and conclusions of others and reasoning one’s way toward those conclusions.” Active learning requires students to do the work of learning. Active lessons also require students to envision themselves as experts in their field, creating authentic content based on their own analysis. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) argue that students must have frequent and repeated opportunities to perform their learning in real or simulated contexts.³⁵ Yell and Scheurman argue that quality projects engage students in the act of “explaining what the past means, not just what it was.” They also



One way to foster student-centered instruction is to have students brainstorm dialogue based on primary source analysis.

stress the importance of collaborative work in active learning.³⁶

Digital resources can play an important role in active instruction. In addition to providing platforms for interactive content exploration, digital resources can encourage content creation and promote active collaboration. Alan November (2010) suggests that digital tools can create new, active roles for students in class – including instant fact checking and digital discussion monitoring.³⁷ Research also supports the active, collaborative use of digital tools for learning. In his meta-analysis of research into teaching practices, Hattie (2009) found that collaborative learning in pairs or small groups exposes students to “multiple perspectives, revision on their thinking, varied explanations...and alternative ways to construct knowing.” He also found that impact extended into technology-rich classrooms, providing a measurable benefit to students who used digital tools collaboratively.³⁸

HOW SOCIAL STUDIES TECHBOOK SUPPORTS ACTIVE LEARNING

From the inquiry-based hooks in the Engage tab to the performance-based assessments on the Elaborate tab, Social Studies Techbook provides many opportunities for active learning. The inquiry model puts the burden of learning on the students, pushing them to find evidence and develop answers to the Essential Questions. The Elaborate activities provide multiple options for students to engage in authentic performance tasks by asking students to create presentations, documentaries, and virtual museums. The Board Builder tool inside the Discovery Education

platform allows students to create multimedia presentations, while the ability to download most Discovery Education media provides students the option of using other digital tools to create new content. Many of these projects are designed to be completed collaboratively.

The model lessons in Social Studies Techbook also promote active collaboration while students Explore content. Instead of encouraging students to simply read through Techbook, the model lessons provide teaching strategies such as paired reading, jigsawed reading, and active discussion protocols that ensure students process information together.

Discovery Education Social Studies Techbook leverages the advantages of a digital platform to provide learning opportunities that are meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active. The Techbook uses research-based tools to help teachers build critical thinking, reading, and writing skills into social studies lessons and activities. As a result, students not only develop deep understandings of social studies content, but also develop cross-disciplinary abilities that will help them succeed in college, career, and civic life.

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