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## **Civic Education: What are the High School Graduation Requirements Across the Nation?**

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### **Abstract**

Americans are facing social, political, and economic uncertainty, and historically education in the United States has been given the responsibility for preparing individuals to participate in a democratic society. Accompanying uncertainty faced by many Americans is an increase in incivility across many sectors of society and a lack of unity. Cancel culture, identity culture, and “us versus them” patterns of behavior have increased along with a lack of communication. At the same time, the priority given to civics in our nation’s high schools has decreased over the past 4-5 decades. While states and national associations have adopted guidelines and standards relevant to social studies and civics, state high school graduation requirements do not provide evidence that civics education is a high priority in high schools. This low priority, along with the 2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress civics scores, raise questions about the priority states are giving to preparing our youth for participation in a democratic society.

**Keywords:** civics education, high school graduation requirements, education policy

Americans are currently living in a society characterized by political polarizations and significant levels of uncertainty. Americans are expressing themselves in a variety of ways some of which are considered by those holding opposing views to be offensive. Furthermore, Americans are members of many different communities, and for communities to exist, they must have things in common and a mechanism for communicating the aims, beliefs, aspirations, and knowledge associated with the community. The concept of a community is an accumulation of our past endeavors, and we need to objectively look at our past record and present endeavors to ascertain whether we are educating individuals to serve humankind or just themselves. Unfortunately, we have not always been adept when it comes to learning from our past. In a recorded conversation, former President Harry Truman stated: “The next generation never learns anything from the previous one until it’s brought home with a hammer. . . . I’ve wondered why the next generation can’t profit from the generation before... they never do until they get knocked in the head by experience” (Rushay, 2009).

The concerns expressed by former President Truman may be more relevant today than ever. We are in an unprecedented time, and we appear to be reliving lessons that were not learned from earlier generations that have resurfaced in different, but at the same time, familiar ways. While efforts to ignore the past may prove beneficial in the short run, the futility of such undertaking is best characterized in a statement by John Dewey 1916 (2013): “The past just as

past is no longer our affair... But knowledge of the past is the key to understanding the present. History deals with the past, this past is the history of the present” (p. 214).

Americans are feeling socially, economically, and politically alienated from society and many individuals have become prisoners to themselves and do not share their thoughts and feelings with others. The McCarthy Era is an example of a challenging event whereby many Americans did not always feel they could express their thoughts. One exception was Senator Margaret Chase Smith (1950) who expressed her thoughts on the floor of the Senate: “Those of us who shout the loudest about Americanism . . . , ignore some of the basic principles of Americanism: The right to criticize; the Right to hold unpopular beliefs; The right to protest; and the Right of independent thought” (pp. 621-622).

Lately, Americans have experienced the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the subsequent rioting and destruction of private and public property in several urban areas. In some cases, Americans have become “unhinged” from normal and expected patterns of behavior when dealing with societal issues. With the pandemic and the accompanying mandates related to the wearing of masks, limits on individual freedoms in restaurants and the closure of entertainment venues have all pitted one group of Americans against another. Likewise, the “us versus them” identity politics (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018) and cancel culture have denied many Americans their first amendment rights to present diverse viewpoints and have created communication barriers between and among groups. Most recently, the Capitol riot on January 6, 2021, demonstrated a lack of understanding of our Constitution and the peaceful transfer in the Office of the President.

### **Statement of Problem**

Historically, our schools have been tasked with providing students with the knowledge and skills associated with living in and contributing to a democratic society. If this is the purpose, then all students should have the opportunity to engage in experiences to develop the knowledge and skills associated with authentic civic concerns (Muetterties et al., 2022). Social studies in general and civics in particular are areas of the school curriculum that has traditionally been tasked with providing the requisite knowledge and skills for democratic citizenship. Since the 1960s, there has been a reduced emphasis on civics in our schools (Wilson, et al., 2019); however, there has been an increase of uncivil behavior in our society. This increase in incivility and the subsequent polarization of society has resulted in a renewed attention on civic education (Blevins, 2022). While this is a national issue, education policy often determines priorities in our public schools across the 50 states and the District of Columbia. As such, the focus of this study is on the state high school graduation requirements in the area of civics.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Defining Civic Education**

Historically, some people have felt alienated from their neighborhood and community (Light & Keller, 1979), especially in urban areas; and are reluctant to carry out their responsibilities as citizens of a given society. As such, communication is critical for the

transmission of common understandings and schools have been one of the agencies in our society assigned with this responsibility. As our country developed, there was a need for unity, and according to Webb (1981) schools offered a child exposure to the competing roles they would play during their lifetime as a member of different communities. The concept of unity was also emphasized by Campbell (2007) as important within an increasingly diverse society. One component of the school curriculum that has played a critical role in helping student develop the knowledge and skills relative to the different roles they will play is social studies with civic education being one aspect of the social studies curriculum. According to Spiegler (2021), “Civics education, at its core, is about understanding how government works and how to access government to achieve equity, justice, and a fair shot for all” (para 13). One state, Nebraska, has included the statement “A central role of schools is to impart civic knowledge and skill that help our youth to see the relevance of a civic dimension for their lives” (Nebraska Revised Statute 79-724, para. 1). Educating for American Democracy (2021) defines civic as denoting “the virtues, assets, and activities that a free people need to govern themselves well . . . They acquire and share the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective participation” (p. 9). The National Council for the Social Studies (2013) posits “Civics is not limited to the study of politics and society; it also encompasses participation in classrooms and schools, neighborhoods, groups, and organizations” (p. 31).

As citizenship involves participation in various communities that are both private and political in nature, formal education becomes a critical component relative to our interests and what we value individually and collectively. Campbell (2019) identified other mediating variables including what happens in the classroom, sources of information outside the classroom, extracurricular activities, service learning, school ethos, and public policy including testing requirements. Dunkin and Biddle (1974) have also identified teacher characteristics such as formative experiences and educator preparation as being important variables related to student learning along with context of the classroom, including textbooks and climate. However, the current polarization of our society, diminishing trust in government, and the breakdown of traditions and institutions (Westheimer, 2019), bring into question whether we are meeting desired outcomes of civics/ citizenship education.

### **Court Cases**

State mandates related to P-12 education have often been related to funding and curriculum and citizens and school districts have gone to court to rectify what they perceive as disparities. While the disparities have often related to access to equal educational opportunities with *Brown v. Board of Education* being a landmark decision at the federal level, there have also been state cases relative to funding that have impacted public education at the local level. One such case was *Rose v Council for Better Education* (1989), where the burden of responsibility for providing funding for a quality education for all Kentucky students was placed squarely on the shoulders of the Kentucky General Assembly. Civics is no exception to concerns about education ending up in court. Student voice is a critical component of preparation for the workforce,

college, or the military and students have begun to express their views on the importance of civics within the high school curriculum.

In 2018, the case *Cook (A. C.) et al. v. Raimondo et al.* (2020) was brought before the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island by 18 student plaintiffs. They argued that the state failed to instruct them in the values and skills necessary to participate in a democratic society. On October 13, 2020, the Court handed down its decision. In handing down the ruling, the Court stated the students allege public officials failed to provide them: “. . . an education that is adequate to prepare them to function productively as civic participants capable of voting, serving on a jury, understanding economic, social, and political systems sufficiently to make informed choice, and to participate effectively in civic activities” (p. 2). In an acknowledgement of the importance of the plaintiffs’ efforts, the Court stated: “This case does not represent a wild-eyed effort to expand the reach of substantive due process, but rather a cry for help from a generation of young people who are destined to inherit a country which we – the generation currently in charge – are not stewarding well” (p. 5). Furthermore, the court stated that: “while it is clearly desirable – and even essential, as I argue in the Introduction – for citizens to have a deeper grasp of our civic responsibilities and governing mechanism and American history, this is not something the U.S. Constitution contemplated or mandates” (p. 45). “There is no right to civics education in the Constitution” (p. 47). The Court could not provide a relief.

The U. S. District Court ruling was appealed to the U. S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit as *Cook (A. C.) v. McKee*. The Court affirmed the judgment of the district court on January 11, 2022; however, in dismissing the case, Judge wrote “the Students have called attention to critical issues of declining civic engagement and inadequate preparation for participation in civic life at a time when many are concerned about the future of American democracy” (p. 20).

Prior to Judge Smith handing down his decision, Chief Justice John Roberts included the following statement in his 2019 Year-end Report on the Federal Judiciary: “. . . we have come to take democracy for granted, and civic education has fallen by the wayside” (p. 2). Furthermore, “each generation has an obligation to pass on to the next, not only a fully functioning government responsive to the needs of the people, but the tools to understand and improve it” (p. 4).

### **Curricular Perspectives and Guidelines**

Over time, issues change, and cases are filed in respective jurisdictions. One of the current issues facing our society relates to the broad area of civility which impacts many if not all sectors of society. Whether it be the workplace, governmental entities, businesses and industries, or educational institutions, the various forms of media are replete with incidents of behavior that could be classified as noncivil. Historically, our P-12 schools have taken on the responsibility of helping individuals acquire the knowledge and requisite skills associated with becoming a participating member of our democratic society, and the instruction has been found in coursework identified as civic education. Instruction identified as civic education has been included in coursework beginning at the elementary level and continuing through high school.

Essential learnings associated with civic education were included in the 1942 edition of *Missouri at work on the public school curriculum: Courses of study for elementary grades* (State Superintendent of Public Schools). The document included objectives of civic responsibility as part of the courses of study. These objectives included: social justice, social activity, social understanding, critical judgment, tolerance, etc. (p. 3). As part of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum, students were expected to “develop habits of good citizenship, . . . developing habits of respecting the rights of others as guaranteed to them in the Bill of Rights, . . . and strengthening habits of tolerance” (p. 506). Essential learnings for 5<sup>th</sup> grade students included: “strengthening habits of group cooperation and discussion” and “continuation of the habit of considering facts on both sides of all questions” (p. 475). Expectations associated with citizenship were also included in the 1980 Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education *Guide to social studies curriculum development for Missouri educators*. “Assumptions about citizenship in American society” (p. 34) and “assumption about responsibilities of social studies teachers to help students become more effective citizens” (p. 35) were included in the *Guide*. The *Guide* also included suggested course sequences for grades 7-12 with Government being suggested; however, it was not required for graduation. At the time of the publication of the *Guide*, only one unit of social studies was required for graduation and the unit did not have to be Government and Civics and was not included in the examples of course sequences for grades 7-12. However, Citizenship/Law Related – American Studies was suggested in the sample scope and sequence for grades K-6 (pp. 72-79).

Implied in the assumptions for social studies teachers is the expectation that individuals would be prepared to provide learning experiences in their college/ university preparation program; and one indicator of preparation is based on the inclusion of civic education in social studies methods textbooks. A review of methods textbook provided a mixed perspective on whether civics was emphasized in the methods courses and in several instances, civics was embedded under political science. This could be problematic if one accepts the following statement from Clark: “while all political science applies to citizenship education, the primary difference being that citizenship education has a much broader scope than government-oriented courses” (1973, p. 217). Of the methods books reviewed with copyrights prior to 1990, three provided a section devoted to the teaching of civics, three minimally referenced political science in the index, and one briefly mentioned civics in the text. One methods textbook with a 1991 copyright did not mention civics/civics education. The two older methods textbooks, Clark (1973) and Gross et al. (1969) provided the most extensive sections on civics/ civics education. Although the available textbooks were limited, those available indicated a diminished emphasis on civics in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. More recently, four methods textbooks (Chapin, 2015; Douglas, 2021; Larson, 2016; Singer, 2015) include sections on civics and other books are available as resources to educators. Pedagogical knowledge along with an understanding of content relative to civics is important for the classroom teacher. Likewise, teachers need access to professional development to facilitate their skills relative to civic education engagement (Blevins, et al., 2016).

While the content of social studies methods textbooks is an indicator of what might be included in college methods courses, it is not the only indication of the course content. College faculty can use textbooks as a guide for organizing their methods courses, with supplementary materials, and accreditation requirements include expectations relative to learned society guidelines. The *National Standards for Civics and Government* (Center for Civic Education, 1994) and the National Council for the Social Studies document, *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History* (NCSS, 2013) have set forth standards/ learner outcomes relative to civic education. For illustrative purposes, the following outcomes to be met by the end of grade 12 are taken from the NCSS document.

1. “D2. Civ.4.9-12. Explain how the U.S. Constitution establishes a system of government that had powers, responsibilities, and limits that have changes over time and that are still contested” (p. 32).
2. “D2. Civ.7.9-12. Apply civic virtues and democratic principles when working with others” (p. 33).
3. “D2. Civ.14.9-12. Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights” (p. 34).

Educator preparation programs are also accredited by the various states and numerous states follow national accreditation guidelines and standards. States also establish guidelines for P-12 schools including high school graduation requirements. The guidelines are a strong indicator of instruction in P-12 schools. As posited by Campbell (2019) and Dunkin and Biddle (1974), what happens in the classroom is extremely important and research findings indicate student engagement relative to civics is important (Blevins, et al., 2016; Kahne, et al., 2016).

Current literature in civics education provides a wealth of findings related to curriculum. Fitzgerald et al. (2021) posits a greater need for “more active, experiential, and relevant” experiences. While part of a larger conversation, Dabach et al. (2018), Fitzgerald, et al. (2021), and Tichnor-Wagner et al. (2022) report findings positing that current strategies and state policies may not provide an inclusive learning environment for marginalized students. Furthermore, Saye et al. (2018) suggests in order to develop civic competency, students must be in a learning environment based on authentic pedagogy and challenged intellectually. Unfortunately, this pedagogical approach is not congruent with assessments of civic knowledge based on multiple choice questions as evident on naturalizations tests and other high-stakes assessments. Furthermore, there are few research findings related to state curriculum requirements at the high school level. In a study reported by Wilson, et al., (2019) the researchers reported an increase in policies during the period of 2004-2016 in the areas of coursework, assessments, and accountability. Relative to coursework, there was considerable variation in the curricula. All states required students to pass a course covering civics content; however, there was no value placed on the quality of civic education experienced by the students. Similar findings were found in assessment. Overall, findings from the study indicated 30 states increased

their policies related to civic education. An earlier report on state education policies related to civic education was reported in 2016 by the Education Commission of the States. The report included as summary statement indicating every state required coursework in civics or social studies to graduate; however, the requirements vary from state to state. Furthermore, 37 states required students to demonstrate proficiency in civics in order to graduate.

Although there is an appearance by some states to increase their emphasis on the importance of civic education for our students, Shapiro and Brown (2018) reported a wide variation in what states were doing to address the need for preparing individuals to become responsible citizens in our country. One indication of the importance of specific knowledge and skills related to civics can be found in requirements specific to the completion of a course in civics as part of the high school graduation requirements. Therefore, what are the high school graduate requirements in civic education across the United States? To answer this question, the following research questions were posed for this study.

### **Methodology**

The general research question for this study was, what states are doing to promote civic education at the 9-12 level, with specific questions as follows:

1. What are the high school course graduation requirements relative to civic education?
2. What are states doing relative to the inclusion of learner outcomes related to civic education?

The researcher employed a document analysis method relative to accessing data to help answer the research questions. Individual state high school graduation requirements were accessed digitally during the months of January through June 2021, using the following search inquiry “state” high school graduation requirements for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Course and assessment requirements were digitally accessed and rechecked in 2022. In most cases, these inquiries led directly to the state high school graduate requirements, and in other cases, the information was obtained using weblinks to the state departments of education. In all cases, the official website for the state departments of education was consulted. This approach was used as official web sites are the public face of state information related to public P-12 education. Likewise, for “most people, the term civic education refers to classroom instruction” (Campbell, 2019, p. 36) and the websites reflect the official policy of public education in each of the states.

### **Findings**

#### **Research Question 1**

The first research question “What are the high school course graduation requirements relative to civic education?” is multi-faceted in nature as civic education is a component of social studies and could be incorporated in various courses. As such, Table 1 (see Appendix) reports the findings from the broadest interpretation of the data available on the official websites for all

50 states and the District of Columbia. Minimum state requirements are reported; however, districts have flexibility beyond the minimum requirements. Additionally, three states, Idaho, Nebraska and New Jersey do not use traditional Carnegie credit units in reporting their requirements, and several states identified courses as a requirement, but did not identify the credit hours. Such requirements are identified with an x. Several states have requirements associated with future graduating classes and the year is identified with the state or requirement. Overall, 24 states have a requirement for a course in Government, 8 states have a requirement for a course in Civics, and 10 states require a course in Government/ Civics. Four states are identified as “Other” with Hawaii requiring a course in U.S. History/ Government, New Mexico coupling Government and Economics, and South Carolina requires a course in U.S. History and Constitution. The fourth state, North Carolina, requires a course titled Founding Principles. This course can either be American History: Founding principles, Civics and Economics or Founding Principles of the United States of America and North Carolina Civic Literacy. One state, New Jersey, indicated that civics was integrated in all social studies courses.

In addition to course requirements related to civics and or government, 30 states required specific assessments related to civics/ government. Many states provided key phrases to denote their civics/ government related assessment. These phrases were used to facilitate access to state testing requirements. Examples of key phrases included “end of course assessments,” passing tests on state and the Federal Constitution, immigration tests, etc. All but one state, Kentucky, that required an assessment related to civics and/ or government required a course in civics and/ or government at the high school level. Additionally, one state, Rhode Island, required students to complete a research project and the District of Columbia required students to complete a community service project.

### **Research Question 2**

The second research question “What are states doing relative to the inclusion of learner outcomes related to civic education?” is also multifaceted. All states included information on their websites indicating standards relative to social studies and/ or civics. Mississippi’s civics strand denotes civic engagement with an additional comment “learning experiences should be expanded to include the community” (Mississippi Department of Education, 2018). Additionally, all states listed as part of their state expectations the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History* (NCSS, 2013), state academic standards, state social studies performance/ learning standards, or content standards/ frameworks.

### **Discussion and Implications of Findings**

Based on the information available on state websites, the current prevalence of uncivil behaviors exhibited by Americans across the United States and statements provided by the judiciary (*Cook (A. C.) v. McKee*, 2022; *Cook (A. C.), et al. v. Raimondo, et al.*, 2020; and Roberts, 2019), as a society we may not be doing enough to prepare students for participation in civic life and the democratic process. The 18 student plaintiffs in the *Cook (A. C.) et al. v. Raimondo et al.*, 2020 case raised the point that too much emphasis was placed in the teaching of

reading and mathematics at the expense of not requiring coursework in civics. The point raised by the plaintiffs posits an issue related to priorities in the context of the challenges society is currently facing and was supported by Shapiro and Brown (2018). Findings from this study also raise questions regarding state policies. Both the Education Commission of the States (2016) and Wilson, et al. (2019) studies report many states require knowledge of the content without placing a value on the quality of instruction. Findings from the current study also indicate many states appear to have integrated civics in other courses including government. Knowledge of the content associated with participation in a democratic society is important; however, learning the skills critical to participation goes beyond content knowledge (Blevins, et al., 2016; Kahne, et al., 2016) and civics tests. Based on this study's findings, many states require a paper and pencil test which may not provide an appropriate assessment mode for marginalized learners. Furthermore, while knowledge is critical for the development of higher order critical skills, it does not guarantee the development of civic-related skills. This perspective is supported by Dabach et al. (2018), Fitzgerald, et al. (2021), and Tichnor-Wagner et al. (2022). Furthermore, Saye et al. (2018) posit learning environments must be based on authentic pedagogy in order for students to develop civic competency. Students must also be in an intellectually stimulating environment aligned with higher order thinking skills.

Have we approached the point where we are just checking off expected learning outcomes, or are we committed to making civic education a priority in our secondary schools? Being a team player, resiliency, communication skills, listening, collaborative learning, problem solving, and creative thinking are important attributes in a democratic society. However, based on the findings of the analysis of state graduation requirements, only the District of Columbia required students to gain the necessary skills through active participation in the democratic process. Policy tends to drive the formal curriculum in schools; therefore, a focused effort to bring about change resides within state departments of education and the state legislative bodies. However, a change in policy does not always denote a change in student knowledge and application of skills related to civic education. Unfortunately, many Americans and policy makers view education to be in a period of crisis that goes back to the 1980s (Flower, 2009) and continues up to today. Educators are not always consulted or encouraged to provide input. Griffith and Finn (2021) stated “. . . far too many young (and not-so-young) Americans have only the haziest grasp of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are essential to informed citizenship, in part because for decades now we have systematically failed to impart them to our children” (p.3).

Concerns about preparation of our high school graduates for participation in a democratic society are supported by the 2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in civics. According to assessment results, less than one-quarter of the eighth graders scored at or above the NAEP *Proficient* (p. 3). Likewise, there was no significant change in civic scores from the 2014 assessment. Furthermore, only twenty-two percent of the students had 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers who were “primarily responsible for teaching civics and/or U.S. government” (p. 3). To help address concerns related to knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to preparing students for

engagement in a democratic society, Stern et al. (2021) recommended “Maximize civics and U.S. History coverage in elementary and middle school and require at least one year of U.S. History and one semester of Civics in high school” (36). The need for greater attention on civic education is evident in a recent study reported by the RAND Corporation (Diliberts & Kaufman, 2022). Findings from the study indicate elementary teachers are more likely to integrate civics in all subjects than secondary teachers who indicated the content was included in subject specific social studies and history courses. Elementary teachers were also more likely to focus on developing social and emotional skills than secondary teachers. Teachers also reported they were more likely to focus on critical thinking and skills in conflict resolution as important aims in the civics curriculum.

Expectations across the 50 states and the District of Columbia tend to be very uneven. While Wilson, et al. (2019) reported all states required students to pass a course in which civics was included, and the current study indicated all states included standards associated with civics and social studies. However, evidence that all students possess the knowledge and skills to function effectively in and contribute to a democratic society is weak at best, even where students have to pass a test. A concerted effort has been made by every state to ensure students have appropriate learning opportunities in mathematics and reading. The current social and political environment in our country indicates similar attention needs to be given to civics across the P-12 setting with stronger expectations for the high school level.

In addition to the above recommended changes in the P-12 system, higher education through the preparation of educators has a responsibility to ensure educators are prepared to provide high quality learning environments at the P-12 level. With the limited number of states requiring projects, performance assessments, and community engagement, institutions need to look beyond P-12 settings for field experiences. Developing the knowledge and skills to participate in a democratic society goes beyond the higher education learning environment. Field experience requirements need to be examined to ensure teacher candidates have opportunities to engage in the community to develop the knowledge and skills to facilitate P-12 learning necessary for effective contributions in a democratic society. Completing experiences in community agencies and participating in project-based activities will engage teacher candidates in various sectors of the community, i.e., community educational agencies, disaster relief efforts, food pantries, housing authorities, and refugee resettlement agencies. This expectation was supported by the Mississippi Department of Education (2018) and teacher candidates need experiences requiring direct involvement in communities.

The potential impact of not providing focused learning opportunities relative to civics education go beyond the point raised by the plaintiffs in the *Cook (A. C.), et al. v. Raimondo, et al., 2020* case. In a recently released study (EdWeek Research Center, 2022) the satisfaction of classroom teachers appears to have hit an all-time low with 44% of those surveyed indicating they were either very dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with their jobs. Reasons given for their dissatisfaction included the political and cultural wars associated with the pandemic and the reduced respect for the profession. Respect or lack thereof for others is connected to civic

education and is evident in the *C3 Framework* for participation and deliberation in a democratic society “D2.Civ.9-12. Use appropriate deliberative processes in multiple settings” (NCSS, 2013, 33). Of those who expressed dissatisfaction with their job, 55% indicated a high likelihood they would leave the profession in the next two years. This could exacerbate the current teacher shortage in many areas and negatively impact district efforts to recruit teachers who are well qualified to prepare students to effectively engage in a democratic society.

We cannot ask teachers to work harder; however, as a society we must work smarter. Taking an insight from educational reform in Kentucky, Pankratz and Petrosko (2000) stated: “...reform works best when it blends the strengths of past practice with the potential of new initiatives” (p. 278). The self-interests of groups can negatively impact efforts to bring about change. However, when society works to bring groups together, it can solve issues resulting in incivility and provide curriculum opportunities for students what will prepare them to be active and informed participants in a society that builds on a foundation of informed discussions in a civil and respectful environment. Students at the high school level have a level of cognitive maturity to understand issues facing society and some will be eligible to vote prior to graduation. Therefore, providing focused opportunities for students to acquire the knowledge and skills associated with effective engagement in our democratic society would be a prudent option for helping society address the current social, political, and economic conflicts. Findings from this study and Stern et al. (2021) along with the NAEP scores in civics indicate society needs to reconsider the current priority given to civics education as part of our high school graduation requirements.

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## Appendix

**Table 1**

*High School Graduation and Assessment Requirements in Government and Civics by State*

State	Govt.	Civics	Civics/ Govt.	Other	Tests/Assessments
Alabama	.5	-	-	-	Civics
Alaska	-	-	r	-	-
Arizona	.5	-	-	-	US Naturalization-Civics
Arkansas	-	.5	-	-	Civics
California	.5	-	-	-	-
Colorado*	1	-	-	-	-
Connecticut	-	-	.5	-	-
Delaware	-	-	-	-	-
Florida	.5	-	-	-	Civic Literacy
Georgia	-	-	.5	-	-
Hawaii	-	-	-	1	-
Idaho	-	2	-	-	Civics
Indiana	1	-	-	-	U.S. Naturalization
Iowa	.5	-	-	-	-
Kansas	1	-	-	-	-
Kentucky	-	-	-	-	Civics
Louisiana	-	-	1	-	Graduate Exit Exam
Maine	-	-	x	-	-
Maryland	1	-	-	-	Government
Massachusetts	-	x	-	-	-
Michigan	-	-	.5	-	-
Minnesota	-	-	x	-	-
Mississippi	.5	-	-	-	-
Missouri	.5	-	-	-	Civics & U.S. & MO Constitution
Montana	-	-	-	-	-
Nebraska	-	x	-	-	U.S. Citizenship & Immigration
Nevada	.5	-	-	-	Civics
New Hampshire	-	-	.5	-	-
New Jersey	-	-	-	-	-
New Mexico	-	-	-	1	End of Course (EOC)
New York	.5	-	-	-	Regents Examination
North Carolina	-	-	-	1	-
North Dakota	.5	-	-	-	Civics
Ohio	.5	-	-	-	EOC
Oklahoma	.5	-	-	-	U.S. Naturalization (2025)
Oregon (2026)	-	.5	-	-	If Funding Available
Pennsylvania	1	-	-	-	Government & Civics
Rhode Island (2025)	-	x	-	-	Research Project

South Carolina	.5	-	-	1	EOC U.S. History & Constitution
South Dakota	.5	-	-	-	-
Tennessee	-	-	x	-	US Constitution & Naturalization
Texas	.5	-	-	-	USCIS Civics Test**
Utah	-	-	.5	-	USCIS Civics Test
Vermont	-	1	-	-	Proficiency-Based
Virginia	1	-	-	-	Standards of Learning (SOL) Test
Washington	-	.5	-	-	-
West Virginia***	-	-	1	-	Mastery of Content Standards
Wisconsin	x	-	-	-	USCIS Civics Test
Wyoming	x	-	-	-	U.S. and State Constitution
District of Columbia	x	-	-	-	Community Service Project

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*Notes.* A dash is used to indicate the state does not require this course. A r denotes the course is recommended.

\* Colorado Graduation Requirements are set by the school districts.

\*\* USCIS – United States Customs and Immigration Services

\*\*\* West Virginia graduates can take Civics or AP Government or Poli

## Making Connections from Narrative and Experience Classroom Instruction

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### Abstract

Elementary school teachers who work in locations with high levels of rural poverty engaged in summer professional development. As part of this experience they travel from Appalachia to gain understanding about the world outside their community. As part of this experience teacher reflections indicated they had emotional experiences that influenced their decision making. The teachers made personal connections with the places where they visited. These two ideas interact with teacher ideas for future classroom practice.

**Keywords:** in-service, professional development, travel, reflection, peer relations

How did elementary social studies teachers learn through summer in-service? A group of elementary school teachers desired to enhance their content knowledge about a neighboring state and augmented their understanding of their social studies curriculum by traveling for professional development. The teachers learned content during the school year in a two-day teacher in-service and took a week out of their summer to travel across the state. During the two-day in-service teachers worked with a presenter to learn the C3 framework and practice inquiry. Then they traveled to experience the history, culture, geography, and economics of Pennsylvania -- which equated to innovation, landmarks, heroes, and devastation. The teachers traveled from their home in southeastern Ohio to experience both the urban areas of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia along with an exploration the southern transportation corridor along the historic National Road (US 40) and the Lincoln Highway (US 30) before examining the anthracite region of the state.

Teachers visited historic sites, museums, architecture, battlefields, and units of the National Park Service. The teachers disseminated their updated content information in their community. The in-service leaders asked the teachers to provide written reflections at the end of the week-long event to help them understand how this learning adventure helped the teachers. The result was important because it informed other practitioners about how this professional development experience occurred. Teachers also described what they valued from the field trip.

Moreover, teachers used the field trip to model a field trip as an inquiry arc while they gathered information for their students. By using the National Council for the Social Studies College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) framework (2013) teachers collected resources to use in their classroom. As part of the C3 inquiry arc the teachers participated in each of the steps of

questioning, fitting the investigation within a discipline, examining sources, and communicating results.

### **Experience**

The elementary teachers taught first through sixth grade social studies in the three counties that formed an educational service center district in the Appalachian and former coal producing region in southeastern Ohio. The teachers represented five school districts and all the elementary schools in the area. The group members were all white, evangelical Protestant, and ranged from age 30 to 65 years which mirrored the population demographics of the community. The area represented the rural poverty and addiction problems typical of southeastern Ohio. Most of the teachers were born or matured in the area and received teacher licensure from an Appalachian institution.

It was also important for social studies teachers to take some time for professional reflection. Shuttleworth, et. al. (2018) defined reflection as transposing episodes when teachers observed events and contextualized those concepts to transform their instructional practices. The occasion for this occurrence appeared when there was a choice of content or collaboration with a peer. Reflection was not compulsory; teachers performed it on their own volition. The idea of reflection appeared multiple times in elementary social studies, and teachers needed to reflect more to improve their teaching (Levstik et al, 2014; Silva, 2016). Teachers monitored their abilities, knowledge, professional behavior, and skills when they practiced reflection. As teachers learned they needed to find time to think about their personal growth. This self-regulation helped the teacher to evaluate themselves and determine what they should do to improve their performance as part of a teacher in-service program.

There were many possible professional settings where teachers reflected; moreover, the idea of reflection also appeared in elementary social studies professional development. To change educational practices teachers worked to encourage reflection, open communication, and build democratic space which were all important when creating an entire in-service environment. Jensen and Brandi (2018), Brugar and Roberts (2017), Ediger (2014), Morris (2017), Rebar (2012), and Taylor (2019) all called for reflection as part of professional development. As teachers examined their practices they discerned effective strategies that supported their instruction. It took time to build the experience with deep content needed to experience an idea, find value in it, create the disposition to teach the idea, and reflect on the practice. Teachers even reflected on their effectiveness in creating integrative situations for students to learn social studies skills.

Teachers wrote reflections on the question: “How did elementary social studies teachers learn through summer in-service?” Teacher reflections ranged in length from a paragraph to a page of typed text responses. Most of the teachers typed their reflections as they were traveling home the last day of the trip on the charter bus though some people emailed their reflections the next day. The field studies leaders used the data to understand the nature of the experience for the teachers.

The field trip took teachers to visit the beginning of the French and Indian War, communalists, iron furnaces, utopians, the first federally funded highway, train stations, captains of industry, laborers, twentieth century architecture, and modern factories. In one week, the teachers encountered many of the historical, cultural, and geographical highlights of Pennsylvania through tours and guest speakers as they spent significant amounts of time on location. The teachers learned content that enriched their social studies classrooms, provided information about the history of America, and how people interacted with the land. The teachers learned on site to get an understanding of place and a comparison of Americans in different times and places. Teachers reflected on the content over meals and in conversations on the bus.

Teachers learned about the inquiry arc in two days of teacher in-service prior to the field trip. The teachers had multiple experiences with forming questions, using disciplinary content, examining numerous primary sources, and communicating results. In the in-service the teachers worked with disciplinary content from civics, economics, geography, and history. On the field trip teachers had the opportunity to model the C3 framework as they selected resources for classroom use (NCSS, 2013). The teachers framed questions similar to those they used in the classroom with their students. When teachers used the inquiry arc they, “D1.3-5. Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources” (NCSS, 2013). These compelling questions investigated problems that endured across time and that each generation addressed for themselves. Teachers considered legal cases, constructed graphs from tables, examined maps, and explored photographs as they learned about disciplinary content. This work prepared them to find and reflect on information while on the field trip.

Specific civics topics, processes of government, and personal interaction with civic participation were included during the in-service. On the field trip teachers compared federal and state government. “D2.Civ.5.3-5. Explain the origins, functions, and structure of different systems of government, including those created by the U.S. and state constitutions” (NCSS, 2013). Most states had some slight variations from their national government. The teachers also learned about individual participation as part of their travels. “D2.Civ.2.3-5. Explain how a democracy relies on people’s responsible participation, and draw implications for how individuals should participate” (NCSS, 2013). Both before and on the field trip teachers worked with civics content. The teachers then built upon the civics material for reflections content.

Similarly, teachers worked with economic content in the two days of in-service prior to traveling. Once on site the teachers had background information that prepared them to gather economics information they brought back to their students. “D2.Eco.2.3-5. Identify positive and negative incentives that influence the decisions people make” (NCSS, 2013). During the two days of in-service prior to leaving on the field trip teachers considered economic consequences that resulted from their decisions. Teachers considered what they needed to jettison in making economic decisions. “D2.Eco.8.3-5. Identify examples of external benefits and costs” (NCSS, 2013). The teachers worked with economic content while on the field trip. They reflected about the economic decisions they made and what they released to make the choice they desired.

Teachers raised questions, examined economics content, considered sources, and shared conclusions.

Teachers worked with geographic content in the two-day teacher in-service prior to the field trip, and once teachers engaged with the field trip they worked with geographic content on location. Teachers used disciplinary knowledge in geography to explore the sites on the field trip. Furthermore, the teachers needed to, “D2.Geo.5.3-5. Explain how the cultural and environmental characteristics of places change over time” (NCSS, 2013). Using the discipline of geography teachers framed problems that continued to provoke discussion; moreover, teachers looked at how weather events and human interaction lead to disaster. Human interactions magnified the effects of some weather events with devastating results. “D2.Geo.9.3-5. Analyze the effects of catastrophic environmental and technological events on human settlements and migration” (NCSS, 2013). Teachers examined photographs and newspaper descriptions as they looked at the land during the field trip to compare then and now. The resulting contrast was pretty remarkable as the teachers saw the changes that occurred over time. Valuable teacher reflection of geographic content occurred on the field trip as a part of the exploration of the site.

Historical content and skills were learned by the teachers in the two-day in-service prior to the field trip. “D2.His.2.3-5. Compare life in specific historical time periods to life today” (NCSS, 2013). Teachers defined questions explored in the field using historic content. “D2.His.12.3-5. Generate questions about multiple historical sources and their relationships to particular historical events and developments” (NCSS, 2013). The teachers used multiple stories to create questions that attracted their attention and other questions that were enduring issues. Teachers gathered information from exhibits, sites, museums, gift shops, and presenters they encountered during their travels. Teachers found stimulation for raising questions from many locations. The teachers examined how people had different interpretations of events, and how they shared those conversations with their students. Multiple sources were also used when teachers examined source materials to inform their questions prior to sharing information. The professional development sessions individually and collectively were trying to impart the idea that there was a larger world beyond their little section of Appalachia, and the teachers were the vehicles who exposed their students to that world.

The teachers composed their thoughts into questions they explored in the field to gather information. Some of these questions were enduring issues that each generation wrestled with to resolve in the context of their time. “D3.3.3-5. Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources in response to compelling questions” (NCSS, 2013).

### ***Social Studies Driving Reflection***

In studying civics teachers learned the differences in operation between state and federal governments. The Pennsylvania State Capitol was a very popular site since Teddy Roosevelt called it the handsomest statehouse in the land. Participant Dian stated that one of her favorites was, “. . .the Pennsylvania state capitol building. WOW, the majestic beauty of the rotunda and every room gave the nickname 'palace of art' to this building designed by John Miller Huston.”

Moving beyond boosterism participants recognized the significant aesthetic and historical contributions revealed through the structure. Before the project few teachers had any experience with any other state capitols and were not able to compare them. The in-service provided more opportunities for teachers to develop a critical lens in gathering knowledge and seeing things in plain view differently.

A new National Memorial at the site of the Flight 93 impact impressed teachers. Christi said, “I stood in awe of the brave names on the wall of the passengers and crew who tried to take back the flight knowing how it was going to end.” The teachers lived through this experience, remembered what they were doing that day, and recalled the emotions that they connected with that experience. The site provided additional context for their memories and a connection to a direct experience with a real place. This was a favorite location because they knew so much about it. The teachers learned about how individuals participated by taking direct and responsible action.

In economic decision-making teachers examined the good and bad choices that resulted in working with Frank Lloyd Wright. Responses scattered across many different sites on the trip indicating the teachers responded to individual interests and needs. Angela said,

One of the tour highlights would have to be visiting Frank Lloyd Wright’s famous Falling Waters. This is a place that many have heard of and seen here in America. I would say that is one of the most recognizable pieces of American architecture. I had never been and was excited to go.

Before the in-service few of the teachers in the group knew anything about Frank Lloyd Wright and none of the participants had previously visited a Wright structure especially a landmark like Falling Water. Teachers considered external costs and benefits in the construction and maintenance of Falling Water. There were positive and negative incentives that influenced the Kaufman family as they engaged in the construction of Falling Water.

The Johnstown Flood was a story of manmade disaster. The dramatic physical space and the elaborate museum allowed the teachers to explore the scope of the disaster. Aaron said,

The museum provided great . . . [insight] to what caused this incident and the consequences of it. I believe it's one of the most . . . non-talked about catastrophes in American history. I believe the memorial gave great . . . [insight] to how the people of Johnstown were going about their daily lives when it was suddenly taken from them. I believe it is an event that should . . . be taught in the classrooms while discussing dams and how humans alter . . . their environments.

Aaron appreciated the connection between human causation and events that impacted the larger community as one of the aspects he observed in this in-service experience. The teachers observed how the events unfolded seemingly without warning to obliterate their lives. The teachers found the experiences of the in-service important in both their content knowledge and engagement with new places.

Teachers enjoyed the Ghost Tour of Philly because it was their first view of the iconic sites of Philadelphia. Walking the historic streets of the city hearing of the people who once lived

and worked in the place, the tour enabled teachers to pinpoint a city's history that was often overlooked. Hannah said:

Another area of this trip that I really enjoyed was our tour of Philadelphia through the Ghost walk. Although I do not believe in ghosts, I do think this is a great way to see the city. The guides take you to many historical landmarks. There were many buildings and landmarks that we got to see that we otherwise would not have had time for.

The in-service provided for contact time with historic places in a less formal experience, and just walking through urban spaces was something distinctive for this group of teachers. In addition, the act of slowing down by walking helped the elementary teachers see the details they missed at a faster pace. The teachers were able to contrast past and present and from multiple events and sources.

The teachers communicated what they learned on the field trip to their students by explaining problems at specific times and locations. The teachers discussed obstacles and invitations for achievements in the lives of the people they encountered. "D4.6.3-5. Draw on disciplinary concepts to explain the challenges people have faced and opportunities they have created, in addressing local, regional, and global problems at various times and places" (NCSS, 2013).

### ***Emotional Connections***

Emotional connection appeared to impact the importance of the peer relationship when learning social studies. It both limited disengagement and enhanced motivation. Taboada Barber, et. al., (2017) reported that students who learned social studies with motivational development demonstrated emotional bonding. Effective teachers influenced the enhancement of motivation and limited disengagement. Group travel for students and teachers was an opportunity to bond as they explored their world. Elementary students enjoyed working with their peers in a social environment to learn social studies during school and after school hours (Giesemann, 2008; McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006). Civics occurred socially which lead to political development. Civic participation while interacting with family and peers meant that democratic participation dispositions occurred long term. The social aspect of education to learn content and skills smoothly transitioned into social studies values and dispositions.

Travel experiences provided the time on site to reflect about professional practice. Females and first-time international travelers were the most likely to travel in the future after an international in-service experience (Slotkin, et. al., 2016). Even past international travelers gained confidence by traveling with a university group to study abroad.

Elementary social studies teachers made connections to the sites that ranged from despair to elation and they equated a site with an emotion. These pleasant memories reflected the full range of the human experience. When teachers reflected on their experiences Crystal said, "While we learned about loss and devastation on this trip, we also learned of innovation and success . . ." She saw and connected with a variety of sites that communicated powerful stories for her. Teachers described the emotional response they had to visiting particular sites, and they

equated some sites with having particularly sad narratives. Jayme described devastation after her visit to the Johnstown Flood site. “Such devastation to the people, land, and the town itself. I could not truly image being in such a devastating natural disaster.” Even after a century it was difficult for the teachers to image the horror of the event. Another type of emotional response was triumph over adversity. Deborah said about the Fight 93 National Memorial, “. . . it also brought back the good feelings of pride and patriotism. The bravery and selflessness the passengers on the flight showed was truly heroic and inspiring.” Whether feeling success or devastation, elementary school teachers felt empathy toward the site and people they encountered through their travels. The bond teachers created with the location was based on strong emotions evoked by the story of the people and events that occurred there. The emotional response to the place was an important part of the experience of visiting the site. Beth elaborated by saying,

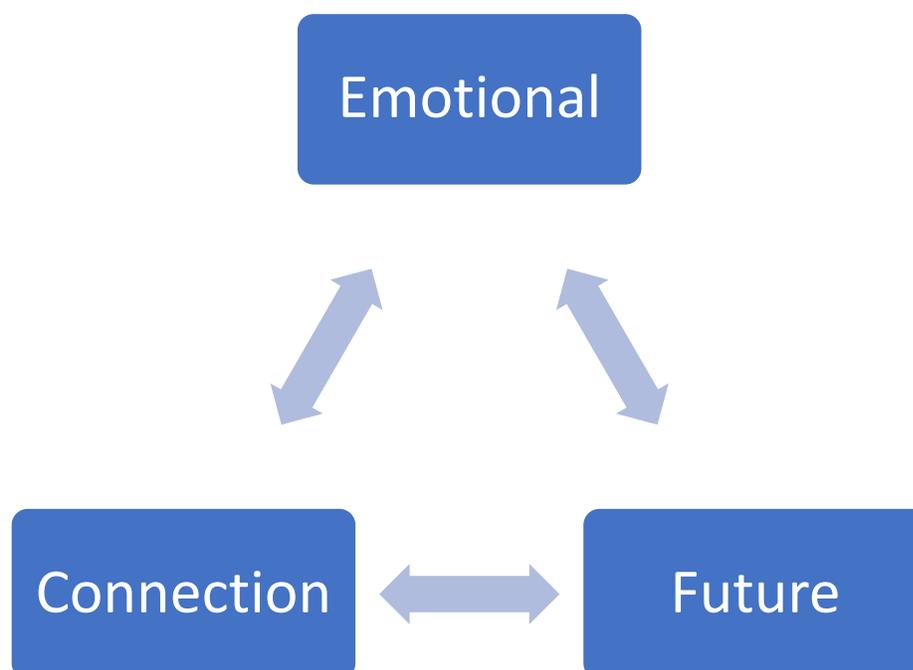
Visiting the sites of the different religious groups and tragic events taught me things I didn't know. In our text books, it is a little bit cut and dry, but seeing it like I did, helped me see the struggles of these people and how they shaped the state, as well as the United States. I have a new perspective to share with children.

The teachers clearly were interested in sharing their findings with their students. Some of their findings were driven by emotional experiences from participating with the events in the field.

Unlike some teacher in-service programs where all the participants were strangers gathered at one central location, the teachers in this program the teachers came from school districts that represented three counties. Multiple teachers came from each school and since the teachers all traveled together as a group they learned together from visiting places during the in-service. Jenny observed, “I treasure the experience as it allows me to collaborate with colleagues from other schools. The collaboration among us is important and has helped to build professional and personal relationships.” Learning with the peer group was very important to the teachers. The teachers found that they based the learning on the relationships they had with each other. Their emotional connections with one another reinforced their understandings of the experienced content.

Traveling together incited a desire for future travels and exploration. Elementary social studies teachers started making plans for future visits to places they particularly enjoyed. Another interesting response from the teachers included the desire to return and visit with family or with their elementary school class. This indicated an ownership of the site that the teachers wished to share their experience with others. The in-service created new desires in the elementary social studies teachers to explore sites in-depth.

Figure 1: Interactions in Connection



### ***Change in Practice?***

Teachers reported that these emotional links and plans lead to a change in practice. Teachers reported that they gained knowledge, experiences, and narratives that they expected to carry into their classrooms. Melissa said:

I will be using nonfiction material *Who was Frank Lloyd Wright* to teach summarizing. I can also make real world connection by talk about a career as architects. I can even incorporate dialect/register in grammar with the missing y on Kentuck and how the Pennsylvanians shorten it. (They also use distinct words like dahntahn – downtown). The teachers coupled language arts and social studies content in working with their students. Teachers expected to teach about regions when they shared information with their students to help them know more about their world. Teachers also saw classroom applications for their experiences, this included connections between social studies and literature in architecture. Teachers asked their students to describe in words the spaces Frank Lloyd Wright created during the Cold War and how that informed American life.

Content alone did not make for great teaching, but it was particularly difficult to teach from a place of ignorance. To combat this issue some teachers collected visual images to share with their students. Nancy said, “I was able to take pictures that I will use in my classroom to show items from the different cultures . . .” Teachers shared their experiences of people, places, and events with their students. Teachers gathered as many images as they could while traveling. Students profited from the heightened experiences their teachers acquired during the in-service.

Teachers gathered information through the inquiry arc as they examined the events connected to the Johnstown Flood. Teachers asked the question, “Should people have been held accountable for the devastation of the Johnstown Flood?” The teachers looked at the land, the

reservoir, the construction of the dam, the river channel downstream, and the Johnstown cemetery. Through the discipline of geography, the teachers examined how the land magnified the destruction of a flood. Teachers looked at video of the damage, visited the summer resort near the reservoir dam that gave way, inspected exhibits about the causes of the flood, and listened to presenters about the causes of the flood. Teachers took photos, gathered resources from gift shops, and formulated pro and con arguments they used with their students as to whether or not charges should have been brought against the owners of the resort.

### **Discussion**

The teachers from Ohio moved beyond their personal and professional boundaries, discovered new content, and considered how they might share it with their students. It took time to build deep content experiences, make connections, develop significant interactions, discern value in the experience, create the disposition, teach the idea, and ultimately reflect upon it. When the teachers considered the application of knowledge in their classrooms, they engaged in reflection. The variety of new experiences engaged them in multiple opportunities to reflect. The self-regulation of their experiences led them to evaluate their teaching to determine what to do next to improve their performance.

The teachers reflected without compulsion; therefore, manifesting a level of control to own the experience which was motivating to them. Additionally, teachers reflected on their effectiveness in creating situations for students to learn social studies skills that included emotional connections, learning with a peer group, and inciting a desire for future travel. Teachers engaged in self-study driven by their use of the inquiry arc, and they used the C3 framework to identify questions to explore enduring issues. The teachers examined disciplinary content and investigated sources about the geography of past events. The results of their data retrieval were manifested in experiences, knowledge, and resources they shared with the students in their classrooms.

Teachers explored civic content through field-based inquiry in-service at the Pennsylvania State Capitol and the Flight 93 Memorial. This process allowed the teachers to use multiple sources to construct arguments about the comparative merits of the U.S. and state constitutions. The teachers put forward claims and evidence illustrating why they supported federal or state government as more likely to protect individual rights. Teachers' conceptions of responsible participation in the shadow of the Flight 93 Memorial was sobering as was the opulence of the Pennsylvania State Capitol and the implications of how individuals participated in the past. The teachers saw how democracy relied on citizens and the functions, origins, and structures of government while remaining responsive to the needs of people in the present.

Teachers continued their in-service exploration by examining economic content at Falling Water, and they identified the positive and negative influences in the ongoing maintenance of the property. Teachers generated multiple questions about Falling Water specifically about how those needs were met and who contributed those funds. Teachers were influenced by multiple

factors that shaped the decisions they made about events and developments. The proprietors of Falling Water used their new relationship with the teachers to solicit contributions beyond the price of admission. Teachers sometimes used historical sources to gather information about particular sites they wished to share with their students.

Furthermore, teachers used their understandings of geography to decipher the events surrounding the precipitation of the Johnstown Flood. Teachers shared with their students the cultural elements and the effects of catastrophic environmental events that lead to the disaster. The teachers analyzed the results of the event on human settlement elimination and out migration from the valley. The place changed over time; in this case the environment washed out a dam and the narrow valley funneled the water into densely inhabited industrial zones. While the dam was not replaced the place has changed over time to erase the powerful wall of water that once swept the floor and walls of the valley.

Finally, teachers looked at history through the perspective of the stories and landmarks featured on a ghost tour in Philadelphia. Teachers compared events in the past to the present to generate questions that examined historical events that involved colonization, revolution, constructing a new republic, or the context of their time. Teachers responded to the stories to identify compelling questions to explain the challenges people faced in disease, injustice, and confinement. Other questions teachers asked required them to use multiple historical sources to understand the evidence needed to draw conclusions from the stories. Teachers drew on historical events to create opportunities to address problems common to the human experience.

### ***Professional Development***

The locations where teachers received professional development shaped the nature of the experience. Teachers practiced inquiry as they learned during field trips for the purpose of in-service. Teachers engaged with other cultures, historical sites, and travel adventures which sometimes reified the teachers' pre-existing biases or expectations (Coughlin, 2010; Ediger, 2014; Kali, et al., 2019; Patterson, 2014). When teachers had significant interactions, it changed their understanding of places and people. Teachers needed time at the place to appreciate the depth of the interaction and form connections. After teachers engaged in deep experiences they reflected on the importance of the situation to describe both the content and their social studies professional development.

Teachers who engaged in professional development that included reflection observed a shift in their attitudes. They engaged in a variety of professional development experiences ranging from video, online, or peer observational. While they enjoyed online professional development as a supplement to regular in-service, educators improved their skills when they engaged in collaborative peer observational experiences. They learned to observe student thinking through classroom interaction, and teacher attitudes on the efficacy of inquiry (Clarke-Vivier & Lee, 2018; Daniels, et. al., 2013; Frazier & Boehm, 2012; Lotter, et. al., 2018; Vogler & Prediger, 2017). Their attitudes about professional development shifted as well as how they saw their students thinking through problems, and teachers shifted their attitudes about

empowering students to engage in inquiry. Instructors worked with their peers to reflect on their practices and changed their minds about the efficacy of instructional practices.

In addition to altering their attitudes, social studies teachers who used reflection in professional development changed their practice, content knowledge, values, and methods through that experience. Teachers who bought into the in-service felt less resistance to change both while implementing a new curriculum and while engaging in classroom research (Bleicher, 2014; Gibson & Brooks, 2012). Teachers played a role in creating their own development through motivation, knowledge, action, and reflection. Within the school culture teacher development supported the needs of teachers by providing active learning experiences, collaboration, and modeling. Teachers used the inquiry arc as they participated in field based professional in-service. Social studies teachers changed their knowledge base, instructional methods, and values when they engaged in reflection based professional development.

The teachers from Ohio experienced professional development that was important to them because it caused them to examine other cultures and changed their understandings of people and locations. Teachers practiced inquiry as they gathered information through field-based inquiry. Sometimes they experienced a shift in their attitudes and considered working with their peers to reexamine the efficacy of instructional practices to change their knowledge base, instructional methods, and values. They created their own meaning from in-service as they constructed their attitudes about motivation, knowledge, action, and reflection. They also created their own professional development culture to support the needs of their peer teachers through active learning experiences, collaboration, and modeling.

The teachers from Ohio found the peer relationships formed to be one of the most important parts of the experience. The emotional engagement was motivating to the teachers who were volunteering time during their summer vacation to learn social studies content. The Ohio teachers developed knowledge and skills about civic ideas which washed into their values and dispositions. The peer engagement they shared motivated them to take risks, gain confidence in traveling, especially to new areas, or return to these locations with their families. As the teachers traveled, they experienced direct contact with cultures, people, and places.

Moreover, the professional development helped them to sharpen their past skills or learn new skills in content experiences. Access, diversity, equality, human rights, and power were challenging concepts to understand without connecting them with meaningful experiences. Professional development for the Ohio teachers was refreshing, cultivated new ground, and opened the door to reflect on their experiences as they took their adventures back to the classrooms.

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# The Graphic Memoir *Crude* and the C3 Framework: Disciplinary Thinking in the Social Studies

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## Abstract

This article examines one way that graphic memoirs can be utilized to engage K-12 students in the type of social studies instruction advocated for in the C3 Framework. First, we define graphic memoirs and describe potential benefits with using this type of text. The article shifts to an overview of one graphic memoir *Crude* (Fajardo et al., 2021) and then gives three activities that can be implemented to develop students' disciplinary thinking skills in the manner argued for within the C3 Framework. The steps and resources needed to implement the three activities are provided.

**Keywords:** Graphic memoirs; *Crude*; C3 Framework; environmental social injustices

Social studies education is changing. Teacher-centered lecturing is slowly being replaced by a focus on student-centered learning that actively engages students in the learning process. This is a positive step. School should not be a place where younger people come to watch older people work. This movement to student-centered learning has been in large part driven by the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework from the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). The C3 Framework focuses on building students' disciplinary thinking, literacy, and argumentation skills in the four core social studies disciplines: civics, geography, history, and economics (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2013; Swan & Griffin, 2013). Many states, including Kentucky, have directly adopted the C3 Framework or use social studies standards that closely mirror the disciplinary thinking, literacy, and argumentation skills found within its indicators. For some social studies teachers, this means that they will have to restructure their classroom instruction. One of the outcomes from implementing the type of social studies instruction advocated for by the C3 Framework is that teachers need to utilize texts to develop their students' disciplinary thinking skills (Swan & Griffin, 2013; VanSledright, 2013). One type of text that can be used is graphic memoirs.

This article explores how graphic memoirs can be used to engage K-12 students in the type of social studies instruction argued for in the C3 Framework. First, we define graphic memoirs and discuss potential benefits associated with using this type of text. The article shifts to an overview of one graphic memoir *Crude* (Fajardo et al., 2021) and then provides three activities that can be used to develop students' social studies disciplinary thinking skills in the manner advocated for within the C3 Framework. The steps and resources needed to implement the three activities are provided.

## Graphic Memoirs as a Teaching Tool

Graphic novels are book-length comics, or sequential art, either an original work or a reprint of previously published comics within a single-story arc (Eisner, 2008; Weiner, 2003).

Comics are multimodal texts. They utilize an interplay of the visuals and texts to convey meaning through panels, text, and gutters (McCloud, 1993; Serafini, 2013). Contrary to the idea that comics are simplistic texts for young audiences, graphic novels can be highly complex texts that address significant issues, weaving multiple narratives with an intentional use of symbolic imagery.

The most famous, and arguably most iconic, graphic novel to demonstrate the narrative complexity possible in a comic is Art Spiegelman's (1986) *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale*. The graphic novel is a three-pronged narrative encompassing Vladek Spiegelman's (Art's father) experiences in the Holocaust, Art's experiences as a child of Holocaust survivors, and the story of the creation of *Maus*. The images used in the graphic novel appear deceptively simplistic, as Spiegelman uses black and white drawings of animals to tell his story. However, his choice to represent different groups with specific animals, such as Jews represented as mice, Germans as cats, and the Poles as pigs, is not random. In the book *Meta Maus*, Spiegelman (2011) explains his rationale for choosing the animals representing the different groups, such as mice and pigs being used by Nazi propagandists to reference Jews and Poles, respectively. One could argue that by using the animal iconography, Spiegelman was able to demonstrate in a visual shorthand what would take multiple sentences to explain in a traditional text. Specifically, when Vladek Spiegelman and his wife Anja attempt to pass as non-Jewish Poles, they are depicted as mice wearing pig masks.

Beyond the omnipresent superheroes, there are graphic novels in every genre of fiction, including romance, action, and even horror (Sheffield et al., 2015). One of the most frequently published genres of graphic novels is the graphic memoir. A sub-set of autobiographical literature, memoirs tell the story of a specific moment in an author's life that had a significant emotional impact (Chaney, 2011).

Memoirs, while they contain factual information, convey the author's emotional truth more so than a wholly faithful account of an event (Duncan et al., 2015). The author's emotional connection to that event can be leveraged to engage students in historical inquiry through the process of emotive empathy (Chisholm et al., 2017). Since graphic memoirs are created by the person living through an event, and told through what is true through their lens, graphic memoirs offer a first-person account that can be analyzed for perspective, bias, and purpose.

Many, if not most, graphic memoirs address topics that are not necessarily aligned with social studies curriculum, such as Alison Bechdel's (2006) *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* or David B.'s (2005) *Epileptic*. Both are powerful memoirs, but neither is aligned with what is typically conceived as being social studies content. That said, there are a great number of graphic memoirs that directly address content typically taught in social studies classrooms. Example social studies content-related graphic memoirs include *Run: Book One* (Lewis, et al., 2021) and *Dark Room: A Memoir in Black and White* (Weaver, 2012). Both explore perspectives of the civil rights movement in the 1960s; one from the perspective of a civil rights leader (*Run*), and the other from a Latinx girl living in Alabama (*Darkroom*). *They Called Us Enemy* (Takei et al, 2019) and *Citizen 13660* (Okubo, 1946) are memoirs about Japanese imprisonment during World

War II. However, they are told from different perspectives. Takei's memoir is from the perspective of a child written more than 60 years after the event, while Miné Okubo's memoir is the story of an imprisoned adult published a year after World War II. These four books are but a handful of graphic memoirs available for social studies teachers to use in their classrooms.

Graphic memoirs have the potential to be impactful texts to use in the social studies classroom. Events that are distanced from students, either by time or location, can be difficult for them to conceptualize. Because of the visual, yet not overly realistic, nature of most graphic memoirs, these texts offer an accessible entry into the event in question. The graphic memoir makes the presented content both palpable and palatable. As previously discussed, graphic memoirs are presented through the lens of an author's emotions. The emotions depicted on the page help to connect students to the content; they can relate to the events through an emotive empathetic response (Chisholm et al., 2017). The palatability of graphic memoirs references a student's ability to grapple with potentially highly disturbing content through images that are less realistic than a photograph or a video. For example, Kenji Nakazawa's (2004) *Barefoot Gen* depicts the destruction of Hiroshima when the United States dropped an atomic bomb on the city. The images of horses on fire, children with glass embedded throughout their body, and people with skin dripping off their face while unpleasant in a cartoon would be nightmarish in photographs. By using a comic, in this case a graphic memoir, a teacher can approach a potentially disturbing topic in such a way that students can process the information, yet not experience a significantly negative emotional reaction.

Similar to movies and traditional texts, teachers may choose to use excerpts of a graphic memoir to highlight a specific idea or theme. Using excerpts from a graphic novel (whether a graphic memoir or a different genre) is also beneficial to the teacher due to time constraints associated with the traditional structure of class periods. While reading a graphic novel will take considerably less time than reading a traditional novel or information text, it would still take more time than a teacher may have to dedicate to this one resource.

Listed below are three lesson activities designed to accompany three two-page spreads of *Crude: A Memoir* by Fajardo, Tardy-Joubert, Chute, and Roudeau (2021). The three activities are designed to be used at three different grade levels, elementary (Activity 1), middle grades (Activity 2), and high school (Activity 3). That said, all three of the activities can be successfully modified for use in a high school social studies class.

#### **Teaching with *Crude: A Memoir***

*Crude* (Fajardo, et al, 2021) is a graphic memoir written by Ecuadorian lawyer, Pablo Fajardo. Through richly colored illustrations and succinct text, the memoir chronicles his efforts to hold Texaco accountable for the damage it did during the twenty years (1972-1992) of drilling for oil in Ecuador's Amazonian Rainforest. During that 20-year period, the region's environment was drastically impacted by the waste and by-products of oil drilling in what was previously a pristine ecosystem (Barrett, 2014). Whether through negligence or neglect, Texaco allowed oil to seep into local water sources, impacting both the wildlife and human populations. Residents of the Ecuadorian rainforest, which are largely indigenous populations, were severely impacted by

the carcinogens associated with oil production (Vargas et al., 2020). Disproportionately high levels of stomach and uterine cancer, miscarriages, and leukemia are seen in the areas closest to Texaco's drilling locations. When Texaco left in 1992, the company's actions continued to adversely affect both the environment and the local populations. Despite the Ecuadorian government certifying that Texaco had cleaned the areas where it drilled, the reality was that the company merely buried the evidence of its pollution.

Pablo's story does not have a happy ending. The resources of a multinational energy company, when combined with the questionable decisions of a government more concerned with profit than environmental impacts, made Pablo's legal fight against Texaco an uphill battle. Thirty years later, Pablo Fajardo and his colleagues are still fighting for the Ecuadorian rainforest and the health of its indigenous people (Barrett, 2014; Fajardo et al, 2021; Vargas et al., 2020) .

*Crude: A Memoir* (Fajardo, et al, 2021) is a text that addresses several interdisciplinary topics within social studies content. The activities listed below use *Crude* (Fajardo et al, 2021) to examine human impacts on the environment (a geography-focused construct), the idea of civic agency and identity, and the realities of the rise of multinational corporations in this Second Gilded Age (which is an economic as well as historic topic).

### **Activity 1**

Although students may have extensive experience with animation and some experience reading comic strips, it is necessary to spend time teaching them how to read and make meaning from the panels, text, and gutters of a graphic novel (Clabough & Sheffield, 2022). The first part of Activity 1 will require students to examine the structure of the comic, analyzing the use of panels, gutters, and text boxes. The second part of the activity focuses on the geography-focused content embedded on pages 46 and 47 of the graphic memoir.

#### *Part 1: Reading a Comic*

Ask students to look at the two types of text boxes used on pages 46 and 47. Have the students describe the text boxes and the type of text depicted in the two different box formats. The students should notice that the boxes with the straight lines are narrative text, where the author is speaking directly to the reader. The text boxes that have a more fluid shape are conversational. They depict the spoken interaction between the characters on the page. Within this two page spread, these fluid text boxes reflect the conversation between Pablo and Doña Maria, a woman living in a rural settlement.

Now task students with examining the panels on the two pages. Students should read the panels on page 46 first. Ask them to identify what is happening in these four panels. Who is depicted in the scenes and what action is taking place? Then, have students read the six panels on page 47. While looking at these panels, ask the students to explain how the cartoonist used the different panels to focus their attention to a particular topic or event.

Finally, ask students to identify what is happening in the gutters between the panels. These gutters are not just blank spaces. Rather, there is action implied within that space. What is the action inferred in the gutters on pages 46 and 47?

Through the analysis of the comic components prior to asking students to do a close reading of the pages, students are well-situated to make evidence-based inferences about the content depicted in the comic.

*Part 2: Human Impact on the Environment*

The events depicted on pages 46 and 47 are both highly memorable and accessible to students of all grade levels. In this spread, Pablo visits a rural community where he meets a woman who shares with him that her pig died suddenly. When the animal's stomach was opened, it was full of oil. The waste from Texaco's drilling seeped into the water and soil, polluting the food sources available to animals and humans, alike. Students can use the graphic organizer found in Appendix A to analyze the information presented on these two pages. The graphic organizer tasks students with asking the who, what, where, why, and so what of the depicted event. Students will be expected to support their answers to the graphic organizer's questions using evidence from the memoir excerpt.

The negative impact of Texaco's oil drilling on the environment and people of Ecuador cannot be overstated. The two pages selected for this activity capture in a particularly visceral way how the actions of an oil company can have a direct negative impact on a local community. In this case, the family lost its livestock because oil polluted the water and soil where the family lived and the animal ate.

**Activity 2**

Social studies teachers need to help middle school students construct their civic identities (Clabough, 2017). Democratic citizenship is not a passive process as citizens elect politicians and support or oppose public policies that may or may not become law (Parker, 2015). This means that middle school students need learning opportunities to grasp how people's values, biases, and beliefs are shaped by public issues and events in their lives and how these experiences shape their involvement in society (Evans, 2021; Oliver & Shaver, 1966). Middle school students can examine pages 42 and 43 from *Crude* (Fajardo et al., 2021) to see how working with the Franciscan fathers shaped Pablo's worldview. Specifically, Pablo was outraged by the extreme health conditions that people in Ecuador endured due to Texaco's actions.

Students start by reading pages 42 and 43 from *Crude* (Fajardo et al., 2021) in pairs. Then, they complete Pablo Fajardo's Civic Character Graphic Organizer, which is provided in Appendix B. The pairs draw Pablo Fajardo in the right column and include items that they feel reflect his civic character. The items added might be a picture of a lion next to Pablo to signify his courage or an epithet like Social Justice Warrior or Environmental Champion of Ecuador. The pairs will explain their artistic decisions in the last question. The left-hand column includes several questions that connect to Pablo's civic identity that can be discerned from reading pages 42 and 43.

The teacher should walk around and help students as they complete this graphic organizer. After pairs complete this graphic organizer, there is a gallery walk where they share their responses. This activity sets up a reflection writing piece for students to consider factors in their lives that impact their civic identity. Students can answer similar questions as those that

appear in Pablo Fajardo’s Civic Character Graphic Organizer. Some questions that the teacher might use include what issue impacts your civic identity the most and explain your reasoning, and how would you take civic action like Pablo to help address a public issue in your local community? This learning opportunity gives students experience grappling with the contours of public issues and helps see the root causes of issues (Blevins et al., 2018; Journell, 2016). Students also get opportunities to reflect on and do research on issues that they are passionate about and consider ways that they can be involved in their local communities. These considerations can plant a seed for activism in our students that can flourish as they get older (Clabough, 2017; Martell & Stevens, 2021).

### **Activity 3**

*Crude* (Fajardo et al., 2021) captures aspects of the Second Gilded Age that has emerged over the last 40 years. Large corporations have gained increased power and political influence inside the United States and around the world (Bartels, 2016; Perlstein, 2020). High school students in pairs read pages 60 and 61 to see the Second Gilded Age that has emerged as large corporations exerted their influence on a global scale in the 1980s. Then, they complete the chart found in Appendix C. The chart is designed to help students grasp the differences between the methods employed by Pablo and those opposed Texaco’s actions in Ecuador as discussed on page 60 and the corporate lawyer for Texaco, Ricardo Reis Veiga, as discussed on page 61.

By reading pages 60 and 61 from *Crude* (Fajardo et al., 2021) and completing the chart in Appendix C, high school students grasp the economic, social, cultural, geographical, and political differences of those supporting and opposing Texaco. Pairs share their responses to the chart in a class discussion. Students add onto their charts based on peers’ responses. This class discussion helps students focus on page 61 with how Texaco tried to use its wealth and political influence in Ecuador to manipulate the levers of power in order to win its court case. The teacher asks some follow-up questions to explore the subtle threats that Chevron used to attempt to coerce Alberto Dahik, Ecuador’s Vice President, to support Texaco’s case. One question asked might be the following. How does Ricardo Reis Vega subtly hint that Ecuador’s economy would be negatively impacted if Texaco does not win the lawsuit? Use evidence from page 61 to support your arguments. The completion of this activity allows high school students to grasp how Texaco tried to use its staggering wealth to influence Ecuador’s government. Students are able to hone in on the extremely different ways that Texaco and its opponents try to take civic action. Additionally, students discuss how the artist drew contrasts of these two pages to show the vast wealth inequalities. All of these steps help students grasp the ways that Texaco tried to leverage its political influence through its financial might to not be held accountable to the damage the company caused in Ecuador.

### **Afterthoughts**

In this article, we defined graphic memoirs, discussed benefits of using this type of graphic novel, and modeled three classroom activities for using *Crude* (Fajardo et al., 2021) in K-12 social studies classrooms. This was done to give social studies teachers a better understanding for the potential of using graphic memoirs in their classrooms. Social studies

teachers also gain another type of text that can be utilized to strengthen their students' disciplinary thinking, literacy, and argumentation skills as argued for in the C3 Framework. Due to the arguments for best teaching practices advocated for in the C3 Framework, social studies teachers need to search out and integrate social studies texts in their classrooms to develop their students' geographic, civic, economic, and historical thinking, literacy, and argumentation skills. The three activities in this article demonstrate the potential for graphic memoirs to do just that.

Literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is changing. The various technology mediums through social media platforms are changing how we communicate with each other. Our students are constantly encountering messages that use texts and visuals on diverse social media platforms from politicians and special interest groups to support or oppose public policies. These public policies will not only impact our students' daily lives but also the members within their local communities, state, and nation (Clabough, 2020; Journell, 2020). K-12 social studies teachers must meet the challenge of adapting their classroom instruction in order to address their students' learning needs. Graphic memoirs are valuable tools that K-12 social studies teachers can use to meet their social studies standards but more importantly prepare students to be literate and contributing members of a democratic society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## Appendix A

## Human Impact on the Environment

**Directions:**

Read pages 46 and 47 of *Crude*. Answer the questions below about the scene depicted in these two pages. **Be sure to provide support for your answers by using information from this excerpt.**

**Who** are the people shown in these two pages?

**Where** do the events in these two pages take place?

**What** happened to the people and/or animals in these two pages?

**Why** did it happen to the people and/or animals in these two pages?

**So What?** What is the message of the story being told in these two pages?

**Appendix B****Pablo Fajardo's Civic Identity**

<p><b>What health issues did citizens in Ecuador face? Use evidence from these two pages to support your arguments.</b></p>	<p><b>Image of Pablo's civic identity.</b></p>
<p><b>How would the health concerns of Ecuador's citizens impact Pablo's civic identity? Use evidence from these two pages to support your arguments.</b></p>	
<p><b>How does your drawing show Pablo's civic identity? Why did you include certain items in your drawing to capture Pablo's civic identity? Use evidence from these two pages to support your arguments.</b></p>	

## Appendix C

**The Second Gilded Age: Grassroots Activism vs. Corporate Action**

<b>Pablo Fajardo's Actions</b>	<b>Ricardo Reis Veiga's Actions</b>
<p><b>How is Pablo Fajardo and opponents of Texaco depicted on page 60? Use evidence to support your arguments.</b></p>	<p><b>How is Ricardo Reis Veiga depicted on page 61? Use evidence to support your arguments.</b></p>
<p><b>How are Pablo Fajardo and opponents of Texaco taking civic action on page 60? Use evidence to support your arguments.</b></p>	<p><b>How is Ricardo Reis Veiga taking civic action on page 61? Use evidence to support your arguments.</b></p>
<p><b>Why did the artist depict Pablo Fajardo and opponents of Texaco the way that he did on page 60? Use evidence to support your arguments.</b></p>	<p><b>Why did the artist depict Ricardo Reis Veiga the way that he did on page 61? Use evidence to support your arguments.</b></p>
<p><b>Why did the authors and artist create this two-page spread to highlight the differences between how Pablo Fajardo and Ricardo Reis Veiga tried to impact the court case with Texaco in Ecuador? Use evidence from pages 60 and 61 to support your arguments.</b></p>	