

Primary Source Readers

**Content and
Literacy in
Social Studies**

Grades K–3

Based on Respected Research

The Power of Primary Sources

What Are Primary Sources?

Every day, people create and use items that leave clues about their lives and about the workings of governments or businesses. These items include personal papers, letters, notes, photographs, drawings, newspapers, government documents, and more. Historians call this evidence the *historical record*. Though it is vast in scope, the historical record gives us but a tiny glimpse into the past. Much evidence from the past was never documented or has been lost or destroyed. However, people who have been interested in history have purposefully left resources such as journals, diaries, autobiographies, and recorded family trees.

Why Use Primary Sources?

Primary sources add a real-life element to history. With primary sources, history changes from a textbook study of events to a more intimate focus on the humans who participated in those events. Each book in *Primary Source Readers* is designed around primary sources that tell about the subject. When students read a soldier's letter, analyze parts of a famous document, study a picture of a historical figure as a young child, interpret an old map, or read the front page of a decades-old newspaper, they walk in the shoes of those who lived our world's history. Students begin to realize that people throughout history had goals to accomplish and difficulties to endure. Students begin to understand their own ties to the past. They can learn that other generations not only had many differences from people today but also shared many similarities.

“Primary sources provide a window into the past—unfiltered access to the record of artistic, social, scientific, and political thought and achievement during the specific period under study, produced by people who lived during that period. Bringing young people into close contact with these unique, often profoundly personal, documents and objects can give them a very real sense of what it was like to be alive during a long-past era.”

—excerpt from the U.S. Library of Congress website

Primary sources help students

- ◆ develop observation skills.
- ◆ develop vocabulary and reading-comprehension skills.
- ◆ develop inquiry skills.
- ◆ understand that history has local links.
- ◆ develop empathy for the human condition.
- ◆ analyze different points of view.
- ◆ understand that history is a continuum and that everyone makes his or her own personal histories.
- ◆ prepare for state and national tests that use document-based assessments.
- ◆ develop research skills that lead to analyzing sources and forming conclusions.

Fostering Content-Area Literacy

Everyone Should Teach Reading

It is usually regarded as the task of the English or language arts teacher to guide students through the effective use of comprehension strategies as they read. Although students read in almost every subject area they study, some teachers may overlook the need for guiding students through their textbook-based and trade-book-based tasks. Comprehension strategies best serve students when they are employed across the curricula and in the context of their actual learning. It is only then that students can independently use the strategies successfully while reading. Students will spend the majority of their adulthood reading nonfiction expository writing. With this in mind, teachers at all levels must actively pursue ways to enhance their students' ability to understand reading material. To support this goal, each lesson in *Primary Source Readers* focuses on specific reading comprehension strategies.

Social Studies Reading

The goal of literacy in social studies is to develop students' curiosity about the people and the world around them in order to promote effective citizenry in a culturally diverse world. Studying relationships among and between people and the environment helps students make better sense of the people and cultures in the world in which they live. Another important goal of literacy in social studies is to introduce students to the idea of looking at the world and current issues with a historical lens. To accomplish these goals, students must learn how to investigate and reflect on various social, economic, cultural, religious, and geographical topics.

Each lesson in *Primary Source Readers* offers multiple opportunities to foster curiosity, study relationships, and reflect on new learning. With these skills well in hand, students understand the complexity of available information and are empowered to become independent learners and to consider perspectives that they might otherwise overlook.

21st-Century Literacy Demands

The literacy demands of the 21st century are tremendous. Literacy was defined a century ago by one's ability to write his or her own name. In the 1940s, one needed to be able to read at the eighth-grade level to function adequately in the factory setting. To be considered literate today, one needs to be able to read at the 11th- or 12th-grade level (and often beyond) as a part of workplace duties, leisure activities, and civic duties.

We have entered a new era in education—one that is deeply tied to the technological advances that permeate our modern lives. Today, some children can use a cell phone to take a picture before they can speak. Students in school can use the Internet and online libraries to access information from remote locations. Now more than ever, it is the content-area teacher's responsibility to prepare students for the reading demands of our technological age. In order to become effective and efficient readers, students must utilize comprehension strategies automatically and independently. Students need teacher guidance to help them become independent readers *and* learners so that they not only understand what they read but also question it and explore beyond it.

The Reading Process

Teachers can easily optimize reading materials with students by utilizing the three-part framework of the reading process to facilitate social studies learning. Break reading assignments into three comprehension-building steps: before reading, during reading, and after reading. What teachers do during each stage of the reading process is crucial to their students' learning.

Before Reading

Prior to beginning a reading activity, teachers can set the stage for learning by generating interest in the topic, activating and building prior knowledge, and setting the purpose for reading. Teachers should also take the time to introduce key concepts and vocabulary, thereby providing a critical foundation for conceptual understanding.

During Reading

During reading, students actively read text aloud. In this stage of the reading process, students are engaged in answering questions (either self-generated or teacher-generated), monitoring their comprehension of the text, clarifying the purpose for reading, visualizing the information, and making connections.

After Reading

Students expand their understanding of the material after reading the text. During the final stage of the reading process, students build connections among the bits of information they have read, enabling themselves to deepen their understanding and reflect on what they have learned.

This three-part framework is the foundation for each lesson.

Effective Reading Strategies

Before Reading

- ◆ scan visual aids
- ◆ preview the text
- ◆ skim the text
- ◆ brainstorm related ideas
- ◆ make predictions about the text
- ◆ generate questions about the text

During Reading

- ◆ reread for clarity
- ◆ seek answers to questions about the text
- ◆ observe and discuss text structure
- ◆ make connections between ideas
- ◆ visualize content
- ◆ generalize about specific content

After Reading

- ◆ reread to review and locate specific information
- ◆ confirm predictions
- ◆ clarify meaning
- ◆ relate the reading to the reader
- ◆ synthesize new information
- ◆ summarize what was read
- ◆ generate new questions

Writing Across the Curriculum

Teachers may wonder where writing fits within the social studies curriculum. What do run-on sentences have to do with forms of government and geography? Writing is the means through which students are able to articulate complex terms and synthesize concepts. Writing is a tool that students can use to understand and investigate the subject of social studies. Writing allows students to translate complex ideas into words and language that they understand. With this in mind, each lesson in *Primary Source Readers* features activities that encourage students to take action by using what they have learned and applying it through writing.

Research studies (Gere 1985; Barr and Healy 1988) suggest that writing in the content areas does make a difference. Barr and Healy (1988) state that “schools succeed when the emphasis by both teachers and students is on writing and thinking about relevant and significant ideas within the subject areas.” The encouragement of writing across the curriculum leads to higher-order thinking skills (Gere 1985). Shifts in students’ attitudes have also been documented and show a great benefit to writing across the curriculum (Winchester School District 1987).

Effective Writing Strategies

Writing to Learn

- ◆ observation journals
- ◆ freewrites
- ◆ vocabulary journals
- ◆ observation reports
- ◆ topic analyses
- ◆ diagrams
- ◆ charts

Writing to Apply

- ◆ research reports and projects
- ◆ friendly letters
- ◆ diary entries
- ◆ fictional stories
- ◆ poetry
- ◆ business letters and résumés
- ◆ riddles
- ◆ anecdotes
- ◆ memoirs
- ◆ autobiographies

The Reading/Writing Connection

Reading and writing are interactive processes that use similar strategies. When taught together, they reinforce each set of skills and can improve achievement. Together, reading and writing create an atmosphere of communication in which thinking is a critical part of the process. Teachers who promote higher-level thinking with both reading and writing processes will help develop better thinkers. Each lesson in *Primary Source Readers* incorporates writing and promotes the reading and writing connection, thus increasing overall comprehension and concept development.

Readers and writers engage in similar processes for comprehension. Readers have a purpose for reading, and writers have a purpose for writing. Just as readers use prior knowledge to make connections to a particular topic, writers use prior knowledge in order to write about a topic. Readers can change comprehension strategies while reading, similar to the way writers can change and develop meaning while writing. Both strategies require rereading to check comprehension. These are just some of the similarities in processes for reading and writing.

In the article “Success of Children at Risk in a Program That Combines Writing and Reading,” Gay Su Pinnell writes, “As children read and write, they make the connections that form their basic understandings about both. Learning in one area enhances learning in the other. There is ample evidence to suggest that the processes are inseparable and that we should examine pedagogy in the light of these interrelationships. Hence, the two activities should be integrated in instructional settings. Teachers need to create supportive situations in which children have opportunities to explore the whole range of literacy learning, and they need to design instruction that helps children make connections between reading and writing” (1988).

Writing is the expression of ideas and thoughts gathered while reading. Social studies texts are often heavily loaded with difficult vocabulary words and complex concepts that are challenging for students to understand. Encouraging students to both read and write helps them process the information presented. When students read content without writing about it, they miss a crucial step in the process of comprehending the information.

Writing helps create the bridge between content knowledge and understanding. A wide variety of writing assignments and activities can help students become actively engaged in social studies. Additionally, writing activities promote active learning, encourage discussion, engage all students, and develop thinking.

Developing Academic Vocabulary

Decades of research have consistently found a deep connection between vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and academic success (Baumann, Kaméenui, and Ash 2003). Each lesson in *Primary Source Readers* incorporates vocabulary development so that students have experiences with learning the key words and concepts before they encounter them in the text.

Students with wide vocabularies find it easier to comprehend more of what they read than do students with limited vocabularies. The type of reading students encounter in school can be highly specialized, and the words they need to learn can be challenging. This type of academic vocabulary is often not encountered in everyday life or in everyday reading. Therefore, all students need opportunities to be introduced to, interact with, and apply new vocabulary words.

Vocabulary knowledge is essential for success in reading. However, its influence does not stop with reading. Students' knowledge of words impacts their achievement in all areas of the curriculum because words are necessary for communicating the content (Lehr, Osborn, and Hiebert 2004). As classroom teachers know, students have difficulty understanding and expressing the concepts and principles of the content areas if they do not know the specialized vocabulary that represent those concepts and principles.

Indeed, Marzano (2004) maintains that there is a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and background knowledge. Therefore, by building students' vocabulary, we can increase their background knowledge and thereby provide more opportunities for learning new concepts.

Vocabulary teaching is critical for helping students to increase their oral vocabulary, enhance their reading comprehension, and extend their writing skills. Yet in order for students to benefit from their word knowledge, it is not enough for teachers to introduce new vocabulary and share definitions. In short, the quality of a vocabulary program matters.

Research shows that there are several components of an effective vocabulary program:

- ◆ regular opportunities to develop oral language (Nagy 2005)
- ◆ a culture of promoting word consciousness (Nagy and Scott 2000)
- ◆ dynamic, explicit instruction of key words (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan 2002)
- ◆ guidance in independent word-learning strategies (Graves 2000)
- ◆ daily structured contexts for academic word use in speaking, writing, and assessment (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan 2002)
- ◆ students' fluent reading of varied texts (Cunningham and Stanovich 1998)

Differentiating for All Learners

Classrooms have evolved into diverse pools of learners—with English language learners and above- and below-grade-level students. Teachers are expected to meet these diverse needs in one classroom. Differentiation encompasses what is taught, how it is taught, and the products students create to show what they have learned. These categories are often referred to as content, process, and product:

- ◆ Differentiating by content—putting more depth into the curriculum by organizing the curriculum concepts and structure of knowledge
- ◆ Differentiating by process—using varied instructional techniques and materials to enhance learning
- ◆ Differentiating by product—asking students to show their learning in ways that will enhance their cognitive development and personal expression

Below-Grade-Level Students

Below-grade-level students will probably need concepts to be made more concrete. They may also need extra work with vocabulary and writing. With extra support and understanding, these students will feel more secure and have greater success.

- ◆ Allow partner work for oral-reading practice.
- ◆ Allocate extra time for guided practice.
- ◆ Allow for kinesthetic (hands-on) activities where appropriate. For example, students might act out a vocabulary word or a scene from a book to show comprehension.

Above-Grade-Level Students

All students need a firm foundation in the core knowledge of the curriculum. Even above-grade-level students may not know much of this information before a lesson begins. The difference is that these students usually learn the concepts very quickly. The activities and end products can be adapted to be appropriate for individual students.

- ◆ Have students skip activities that they have already mastered.
- ◆ Assign only the most difficult questions.
- ◆ Assign more complex writing assignments.
- ◆ Request oral presentations of the key social studies concepts, which will benefit all students.
- ◆ Have students design their own activities to show their learning instead of using the ones included in the lessons.

English Language Learners

Students who are English language learners are learning concepts and language simultaneously. They need to have context added to the language. Although they may have acquired social language skills (basic interpersonal communicative skills, or BICS), the language of school is academic in nature. One of the keys to success with English language learners is to ensure that they acquire the necessary vocabulary for greater comprehension of the content (cognitive academic language proficiency, or CALP).

- ◆ Always do the vocabulary activities and allow extra time to practice applying the vocabulary to the book.
- ◆ Allow extra time to process the language and the content.
- ◆ Use visual displays, illustrations, and kinesthetic (hands-on) activities.
- ◆ Plan for paired oral rehearsal of the academic language needed to respond to discussion questions.

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