

Strategies for Improving History-Social Studies Virtual Learning for Elementary Students

by
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We certainly didn't expect to see ourselves teaching our students from behind a screen, especially for so long but, here we are, demonstrating our flexibility and versatility, those quintessential hallmarks of good teaching. We are logging on, monitoring multiple screens, chats, apps, connectivity, parent correspondence, student assignments, grades, student engagement, attendance, interventions, the list goes on... all while planning engaging, meaningful lessons for both synchronous (everyone is together at the same time) and asynchronous (learning occurs at any place and at any time) class times. We juggle and multi-task in much the same way we do in our actual classrooms. Although a new format with different tools, some things remain the same: kids are kids

and good teaching is good teaching. It is our careful planning that makes our (virtual) classrooms a success.

Best pedagogical practices in social studies class, center on inquiry. Inquiry means we shift from "studying" to "doing" social studies. Inquiry learning provides the opportunity for students to put on the lenses of a historian, geographer, economist, or political scientist to gain knowledge and deepen their understanding of the past and the world today. As teachers, we want to plan the inquiry, guide the process, inspire curiosity, motivate discussion, and spark new ideas in our students. The question is: How can we do this in a virtual setting? How can we best plan our lessons to keep our distance learning students active and engaged and doing

social studies?

An Inquiry is grounded in questions, open-ended compelling questions. The answers to the questions are multiple, yet justified in research and evidence. For example, a traditional focus question might be “What were the hardships on the Oregon Trail?” That covers a fifth-grade standard, but is it compelling? Does it have relevance to students’ lives now? What is required to answer it? The truth is it doesn’t require much conceptual thinking. There’s no rigor there. A better, more compelling question might be “Is moving to a new location worth the risk?” This question is overarching, open-ended, relevant, rigorous, and still hits the traditional focus question mentioned above if used when studying U.S. expansion. You would have to know the hardships of the Oregon Trail (and others) to make the determination if moving to California at that time was “worth the risk”. As you begin planning, start with a strong compelling question in mind.

The next thing to do in the planning stage is to think about the final project. Here is where the beauty of asynchronous virtual learning really shines. It allows for the gift of time. Students have the time to work at their own pace, dive into research, and extend their learning long past the confining minutes of a traditional social studies in-person lesson. As teachers, we can link lessons to a wide array of accessible sources while utilizing fairly easy-to-use tools. Students can use Google Slides or Google Jamboard to make visual presentations, or they can create a Public Service Announcement or share their 3 dimensional Lego community by videotaping and presenting on camera. From simplistic to so-

phisticated, many technology tools motivate, engage, and allow for creative and novel projects. With a compelling question and a final destination in mind, your lesson is ready for day-to-day plans.

As school districts across the state pivoted to distance and hybrid learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of sample lessons were created to support instruction in English Language Arts, Mathematics and Science. To support history-social science, the BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: California History-Social Science Lessons Optimized for Distance Learning Project, a collaboration among the History-Social Science Regional Leads of the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) was born. The goal of the project was to fill the void of high-quality distance learning lesson plans aligned to the *California History-Social Science Framework and Standards*, *California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts*, and the *California English Language Development Standards*.

An effective model for distance learning is the 5 Es: Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate. The 5 E model of instruction was first developed as part of a *Biological Sciences Curriculum Study* (1987) to improve the science and health curriculum for elementary schools. Because it focuses on students constructing knowledge and meaning from their experiences, it works well in a synchronous/asynchronous distance learning situation. Providing synchronous and asynchronous experiences in each of the 5 Es allows for high student engagement, individualization, and the ability of the teacher

to constantly monitor and adjust.

The project began with the development of a distance learning lesson plan template for history-social science utilizing the 5 E model: Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate. The 5 E model of instruction was first developed as part of a Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (1987) to improve the science and health curriculum for

elementary schools. Because it focuses on students constructing knowledge and meaning from their experiences, it works well in a synchronous/asynchronous distance learning situation. Providing synchronous and asynchronous experiences in each of the 5 Es allows for high student engagement, individualization, and the ability of the teacher to constantly monitor and adjust.

5 E Model of Distance Learning Instruction

Engage	Tap and build prior knowledge Foster interest Cultivate curiosity Get students ready to learn
Explore	Learning Experiences
Explain	Synthesize new knowledge Ask questions Seek clarification Boost understanding
Elaborate	Apply what was learned Develop deeper understanding Create/investigate further Cement knowledge
Evaluate	Observe, monitor and adjust Writing, project, etc.

Once the distance learning history-social science lesson plan template was created, county offices of education proceeded to

contract with teacher leaders to create distance learning lessons for grades K-12 including lessons for Grade 12 Government

and Economics courses. Each lesson was reviewed by history-social science teacher leaders across the state. These lessons are now available for classroom use along with "how to" webinars for teachers, at no cost at www.californiahss.org

The lessons prioritize open, creative assignments and projects that lead your students to the information and skills necessary to answer the compelling question and successfully complete the culminating activity. Inquiry-based virtual lessons along with consistent classroom routines, regular digital citizenship reminders, and collaborative structures give students the opportunity to successfully construct knowledge at levels perhaps deeper than before.

A Kindergarten Distance Learning lesson utilizing the 5 Es model, shown in synchronous and asynchronous class time follows. This lesson, like the others developed, can be adapted to any grade level/any standard.

California History-Social Science Distance Learning Lesson Plan

Title of Lesson	Together We Learn		Grade Level	K
Learning Objective	Students will be able to explain why rules are important for the virtual classroom, the physical classroom, the neighborhood, and the country.			
Compelling Question	How can we learn and work together?			
Duration of Synchronous Learning	4 class sessions	Duration of Asynchronous Learning	4 class sessions	
CA History-Social Science Standards/Framework	<p>Standard K.1 Students understand that being a good citizen involves acting in certain ways.</p> <p>Framework Students explore the meaning of good citizenship by learning about rules and working together, as well as the basic idea of government.</p>			

**Common Core
Literacy
Standards**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.1

With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.10

Actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K.8

With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.K.1

Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups*.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.K.2

Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.K.6

Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.K.6

Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts.

**English Lan-
guage Devel-
opment
Standards**

Section 2: Elaboration on Critical Principles for Developing Language and Cognition in Academic Contexts, Part I: Interacting in Meaningful Ways

EXPLAIN	How can students EXPLAIN their observations and findings in a variety of ways?	Duration
	<p>Synchronous:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Sharing drawing on camera● Uploading picture of drawing● Verbally explaining drawings <p>Asynchronous:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Sharing drawing with family member● Engage in discussion with family member● Note examples of rules and law in around home/neighborhood● Role play following rules/laws and the consequences, role play not following rules/laws and the consequences (SEL integration) <p>Formative Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Drawings with explanation	

	How can students ELABORATE on their learning?	Duration
<p>ELABORATE</p>	<p>Synchronous:</p> <p>Review the rules of the virtual classroom. Ask students to think about these rules. Do any need to be added to or changed? Orally provide a response frame such as, “We should add/change a rule because _____.”</p> <p>Show students The United States Constitution. [6]</p> <p>Lead a discussion:</p> <p>What do you observe?</p> <p>When do you think this document was written?</p> <p>What do you think this document says?</p>	<p>30 min.</p>
	<p>Tell students that this document is the United States Constitution. It tells us the laws of our country. It is designed to protect us and keep us safe. It was written a very long time ago, but it can be added to or changed.</p> <p>Show the painting of The Signing of the Constitution.</p> <p>Share the identity of some of the people depicted.</p>	<p>30 min.</p>
	<p>Asynchronous:</p> <p>Watch and listen to We the People (Constitution Song)</p> <p>Challenge students to learn the song and sing along or create dance movements to accompany the song. (Visual and Performing Arts Integration)</p> <p>Students go on a virtual tour of the National Archives in Washington DC, where the United States Constitution is kept.</p> <p>Formative Assessment:</p> <p>Students recognize the United States Constitution and can explain that guides the laws/rules of our country.</p>	<p>15 min.</p>

