Introduction to Social Studies

The primary goal of Social Studies is to give students the knowledge, skills, and competencies to be active, informed citizens who can think critically, understand and explain the perspectives of others, make judgments, and communicate ideas effectively.

Through Social Studies, students can gain an understanding of the people, places, issues, and events that have shaped the world in which they live. By studying some of the many different cultures and ways of life that exist and have existed throughout the world, students will develop not only a deeper understanding of the differences between peoples but also an appreciation for aspects of the human experience shared across time and space.

The redesigned Social Studies curriculum offers the opportunity for students to gain an understanding of their place in the world and the connections between the human and natural environment. The increasing cultural and economic connections between societies and the growing awareness of the importance of environmental sustainability make geographic understandings a crucial part of informed citizenship. Students will see the interdependence of economies and how economic decisions can have consequences at individual, local, national, and international levels.

The Social Studies curriculum also provides opportunities for students to learn about Canadian society, Canada’s democratic institutions, and the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizens. Students explore how they can have an impact on the decisions made in their society and advocate for causes important to them. In addition, they will gain an understanding of the importance of being open to new ideas and tolerant of those with whom they disagree in creating a healthy and vibrant democracy.

Features of the redesigned Social Studies curriculum

Required content
The learning standards in the redesigned Social Studies curriculum are less detailed and prescriptive than past curricula and allow teachers and students to go in directions of particular interest or local relevance. The goal of this curriculum is to allow teachers to spend more time delving deeper into fewer key topics and focus less on rushing through a long list of factual details in an attempt to cover all of the required topics.

Greater emphasis on key disciplinary thinking skills
A reduced number of Content learning standards places greater emphasis on acquiring and developing key disciplinary thinking skills. These skills are built around six major historical and geographical thinking concepts: significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, perspective, and ethical judgments. The focus on disciplinary thinking means that students will be involved in developing their understanding of important concepts, rather than simply receiving that knowledge from books, teachers, or other authoritative sources.
Aboriginal perspectives
Aboriginal topics and perspectives are embedded in all grades in the Social Studies curriculum to build greater understanding of Aboriginal history and culture. The Curricular Competencies also ensure that students consider topics from multiple perspectives and are able to question the justification and evidence for interpretations of events and issues.

Focus on inquiry
Throughout the Social Studies curriculum, students investigate significant issues so they can make informed decisions. Making an informed decision about an issue requires an understanding of the key historical, geographical, political, economic, and societal factors involved, and how these different factors relate to and interact with each other. Students reach these deeper understandings by investigating open-ended questions; debating and discussing historical and contemporary issues; and developing and supporting their own hypotheses, solutions, and conclusions.

Design of the Social Studies curriculum
The redesigned Social Studies curriculum has the same format as all other areas of learning and is based on the Know-Do-Understand model of learning. The four key features of the curriculum design are the Content, Curricular Competencies, Big Ideas, and Elaborations. More information about the model is available at www.curriculum.gov.bc.ca.

Content
The Content learning standards reflect the “Know” component of the learning model, and identify the concepts or topics that students will learn about at each grade level. In addition to being rich in information, the Content acts as both a supporting structure intended to assist students in demonstrating the Curricular Competencies and a foundational element leading students to the Big Ideas.

Curricular Competencies
Curricular Competencies are action-based statements that reflect the “Do” component of the curriculum model and identify what students will do to demonstrate their learning. The Curricular Competencies have been written to promote as much flexibility and creativity as possible, enabling students to explore and find multiple ways to demonstrate their learning.

The Curricular Competencies are linked to the Core Competencies — Communication, Thinking, and Personal and Social. Identified and developed through provincial consultation, the Core Competencies are the intellectual, personal, social, and emotional skills that will contribute to lifelong learning. The Core Competencies also support the development of habits of mind (e.g., thinking interdependently in groups and teams; creating, imagining, and innovating new ways to accomplish tasks) that are important to the development of Curricular Competencies.
Big Ideas

The Big Ideas represent what students are expected to understand as a result of their learning — the “Understand” component of the learning model. Collectively, the Big Ideas progress in both sophistication and degree of connection to the lives of students throughout the curriculum. The examples below show how the Big Ideas advance as students progress through the curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big Ideas</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>9</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our communities are diverse and made of individuals who have a lot in common.</td>
<td>People from diverse cultures and societies share some common experiences and aspects of life.</td>
<td>Economic self-interest can be a significant cause of conflict among peoples and governments.</td>
<td>Disparities in power alter the balance of relationships between individuals and between societies.</td>
<td></td>
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Elaborations

There are Elaborations (included as hyperlinks) for most of the Curricular Competencies and Content in the Social Studies K–9 curriculum. The Elaborations take the form of key skills, key questions, and sample topics. They provide additional information and support for both teachers and students and can serve as potential places to begin teaching and learning.

Important considerations

Establishing a positive classroom climate

Teachers are responsible for establishing a classroom climate in which students feel comfortable learning about and discussing Social Studies topics. The following guidelines may help teachers establish a positive classroom climate:

- Allow class members sufficient time and opportunities to become comfortable with each other before engaging in group discussion. It is important that the classroom climate encourage students to relate to one another in positive, respectful, and supportive ways. Be prepared to facilitate any potentially controversial discussions.
- Establish clear ground rules for class discussions that require students to demonstrate respect for privacy, diversity, and the expression of differing viewpoints.
- Activities and discussion that are related to some topics in Social Studies 11 may evoke an emotional response from individual students. When any concern arises, inform an administrator or counsellor and ensure that students know where to go for help and support.

Inclusion, equity, and accessibility for all learners

British Columbia’s schools include young people of varied backgrounds, interests, and abilities. The Kindergarten to Grade 12 school system is committed to meeting the needs of all students. When selecting specific topics, activities, and resources to support the teaching of Social Studies,
teachers are encouraged to ensure that these choices support inclusion, equity, and accessibility for all students. In particular, teachers should ensure that classroom instruction, assessment, and resources reflect sensitivity to diversity and incorporate positive role portrayals, relevant issues, and themes such as inclusion, respect, and acceptance.

**Working with the Aboriginal community**

The Ministry of Education is dedicated to ensuring that the cultures and contributions of Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia are reflected in all provincial curricula. To address these topics in the classroom in a way that is accurate and that respectfully reflects Aboriginal concepts of teaching and learning, teachers are strongly encouraged to seek the advice and support of local Aboriginal communities. As Aboriginal communities are diverse in terms of language, culture, and available resources, each community will have its own unique protocol for sharing local knowledge and expertise with the school system.

To begin a discussion about possible instructional and assessment activities, teachers should first contact Aboriginal education coordinators, teachers, support workers, and counsellors in their district who can facilitate the identification of local resources and contacts, such as Elders, chiefs, tribal or band councils, Aboriginal cultural centres, Aboriginal Friendship Centres, and Métis or Inuit organizations.