

The TCI Approach

The TCI Approach consists of a series of instructional practices that allows students of all abilities to experience key social studies concepts.

Theory- and Research-Based Active Instruction

Lessons and activities are based on five well-established theories.

- **Understanding by Design**

Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe believe that teaching for deep understanding requires planning backward—first determining the big ideas students are to learn and then working backward to identify methods to reach those goals and ways to assess the effectiveness of teaching.

- **Nonlinguistic Representation**

Many psychologists believe that we think and remember better when we store information in both linguistic and nonlinguistic forms. Research by Robert Marzano and colleagues demonstrates that teaching with nonlinguistic activities such as graphic organizers, mental images, and movement helps to improve students' understanding of content.

- **Multimodal Learning**

The most effective lessons offer multiple ways for students to access content, including captivating visuals, videos, interactive exercises, group work, and lively debates. According to Howard Gardner's theory, everyone learns in different ways. Using a

variety of modalities helps reach all learners and strengthens their understanding of key concepts.

- **Cooperative Interaction**

Elizabeth Cohen's research has led her to conclude that cooperative groupwork leads to learning gains and to higher student achievement. Cohen has found that if students are trained in cooperative behaviors, placed in mixedability groups, and assigned roles to complete during a multiple-ability task, they tend to interact more equally. This increased student interaction leads to more learning and greater content retention.

- **Spiral Curriculum**

Educational theorist Jerome Bruner championed the idea of the spiral curriculum, in which students learn progressively more difficult concepts through a process of step-by-step discovery. With this approach, all students can learn once a teacher has shown them how to think and discover knowledge for themselves.

Theory in Practice

Standards-based Content Dynamic lessons that integrate hands-on learning and content reading build mastery of state and national social studies standards while consistently achieving high-quality social studies instruction.

Preview Activity A short, engaging activity at the start of each lesson helps you preview key concepts and tap students' prior knowledge and personal experience.

TCI Teaching Strategies

TCI's research-based instructional strategies make social studies engaging and approachable for every student.

- **Visual Discovery**
Students view, touch, interpret, and bring to life compelling images, turning what is usually a passive, teacher-centered activity—lecturing—into a dynamic, participative experience.
- **Social Studies Skill Builder**
This strategy turns the traditional, rote tasks usually associated with skill-based worksheets into more dynamic, interactive activities.
- **Experiential Exercise**
These short, memorable activities make abstract ideas and distant events accessible and meaningful through immersive learning, allowing students to engage with social studies concepts firsthand.
- **Writing for Understanding**
These activities give all learners, even those with lesser linguistic skills, something memorable to write about.
- **Response Group**
This strategy helps students grapple with the ambiguities of issues in social studies, recognize the complexity of historical events, and discuss the consequences of public policies.
- **Problem Solving Groupwork**
This strategy teaches students the skills necessary to work together successfully in small groups, both in the classroom and later in life.

Strategies in Practice

Considerate Text Carefully structured reading materials enable students at all levels to understand what they read. Uncluttered pages present content in digestible “chunks.” Engaging images reinforce content while consistent vocabulary development improves student comprehension.

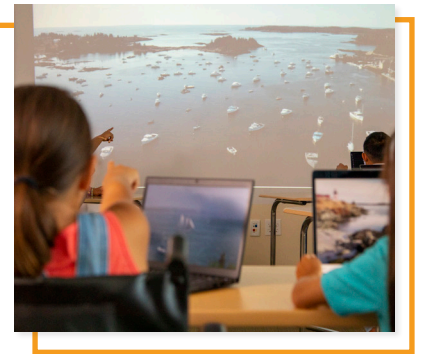
Graphically Organized Reading Notes Comprehensive graphic organizers help students record key ideas and make meaning out of what they read. By using graphic organizers that display the underlying logic of and interconnections among concepts, students improve their comprehension and retention of content.

Processing Activity An end-of-lesson processing activity, involving higher-order thinking skills, challenges students to apply what they have learned in a variety of creative ways.

Assessments to Inform Instruction Carefully designed tests move students through a progression of thinking skills, from comprehension to skills application to critical thinking. Test results in these three areas show you where students are succeeding and where they need more instruction.

Develop Visual Literacy and Inquiry Thinking Skills

Drawing from Jerome Bruner's and Robert Marzano's work, TCI's **Visual Discovery** strategy leverages relevant, powerful images to help students develop **visual literacy skills**. With intentional techniques, teachers can deliver content that not only "sticks" with students, but supports the related reading. When students successfully interpret visuals, it builds context background to help them understand key concepts and motivates them to read.



Strategy Best Practices

- **Select primary and secondary source images.** The key to a successful Visual Discovery is using a few powerful images that represent the key concepts of the lesson. When you display an image, make it as large as possible to generate more interaction and interest.
- **Encourage classroom interaction.** By interacting with each other and the image, students will be able to identify important details.
 - Ensure that students can easily form pairs to discuss the images.
 - Leave space in front of the screen the image is projected on so students can interact with the image and point out details.
- **Support inquiry thinking with sequenced questions.** For each image, ask a series of questions that spiral from basic to complex, critical-thinking questions. This will give students the building blocks they need to understand the most important concepts in each image.
- **Challenge students to apply what they learned.** Students are motivated to read about the image in order to answer questions. Have students highlight the text and complete notebook questions to process what they learned. Students use what they learned from the Visual Discovery alongside TCI texts to think critically and answer complex questions.

Tips for Engagement

Pairs Share Have students conduct visual analysis in pairs and brainstorm answers to questions.

Detective Analogy Encourage students to analyze visuals like detectives investigating a scene. Use spiral questions:

- Level 1 - Evidence: What details can you see and touch in the image?
- Level 2 - Inferences: What ideas or conclusions can you draw from the visible evidence?
- Level 3 - Hypotheses: What do you think is happening in the scene, and why?

Magic Paper Zoom in on details by holding a blank sheet of paper over parts of the projected image. For added fun, call it "magic paper."

Dive Deeper Get a closer look at TCI's approach to high-quality instructional materials. Explore our online resources at teachtci.com/teaching-strategies.



Experiential Exercise

Create Memorable Experiences to Understand and Process Key Concepts

TCI's **Experiential Exercises** are **short, memorable activities** that make events and ideas meaningful for students. This strategy taps into the research behind non-linguistic representation and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, allowing students to “experience” social studies concepts firsthand. They experience key concepts like the strengths and weaknesses of the Roman Empire or the hardships of trench warfare. By **immersing** themselves in these experiences, students gain an appreciation of history and build a deeper understanding of the content.



Strategy Best Practices

- **Prepare students for a safe and successful experience.** Strong emotions—frustration, joy, apprehension, and camaraderie—sometimes surface during these activities. To set your class up for a meaningful experience, consider:
 - Whether the activity is appropriate for your students based on their maturity level and personal connections to the content.
 - Notifying administrators and parents to address concerns when appropriate.
 - Allowing time during the activity to diffuse powerful reactions such as frustration or anger.
- **Make the experience as authentic as possible.** These activities may require you to assume a persona, keep a straight face, or use props and costumes to create an experience that is as real as possible for your students. These are the classroom activities your students will remember and enjoy, so bring your creativity and performance flair.
- **Conduct a thoughtful debrief that connects student experience to the content.** Experiential Exercises must be debriefed so that students can make connections to the relevant concepts. To conduct a meaningful debrief:
 - Debrief the activity during the same class period.
 - Establish a safe environment that promotes open communication for students, free from judgment.
 - Ask carefully crafted questions that connect the experience with social studies concepts.

Tips for Engagement

Choose Wisely Standards-based social studies content demands that you cover a lot of territory in a relatively short time, so it makes sense to conduct Experiential Exercises only when they are easy to implement and will have the greatest impact.

Keep Them Short It's important that the activity can be completed and debriefed in a single class period so that students are able to express their emotions and understand how their experience connects to actual historical events and concepts.

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Analyze Sources with Fast-Paced Interactive Tasks

Social Studies Skill Builders are fast-paced activities that teach **skills and content** at the same time. After quickly modeling a skill, such as interpreting a political cartoon, you can turn your students loose to practice the skill repeatedly. Afterward, conduct a **debrief** that challenges students to apply their new skills to gain greater insight into key concepts.



Strategy Best Practices

- **Select relevant primary and secondary sources.** Provide a diverse set of sources, such as audio clips, photographs, and excerpts, related to the lesson.
- **Ensure the task allows students to use multiple modalities.** Tasks should be skills-based and encourage students to analyze sources. It's also important to incorporate other modalities into the task—things like sketching, analyzing, and recording—to engage all students.
- **Teach the skill through modeling and guided practice.** Quickly demonstrate and explain the steps your students will follow as they develop the skill so that they can successfully work on their own. Be sure to set clear expectations for how you will evaluate their work.
- **Give immediate feedback.** If you check work and award points, students will be motivated to work quickly and do high-quality work. Create a game-like atmosphere to make the exercise more enjoyable for your students.
- **Debrief activity to analyze findings and connect to students' lives.** When most students have finished working, start a lesson debrief.
 - Have pairs report out what they discovered over the course of the activity and the rest of the class take notes. This allows students to share their understanding while also letting students who did not finish access the content.
 - In the debrief, challenge students to think holistically about the content they acquired during the activity. For example, have students arrange the information in some type of order—a political or values spectrum, a continuum, chronology, or logical categorization.

Tips for Engagement

Circulate the Room To avoid a logjam of students waiting to have their work reviewed, circulate around the classroom rather than have students come to you.

Pairs or Small Groups When students interact, learning increases. Have students work in pairs or small groups and encourage them to discuss their findings.

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Response Group

Facilitate Scholarly Discourse and Debate with Small Groups

The **Response Group** strategy promotes dynamic and meaningful class discussions. Students begin by working in **small groups**, analyzing sources, exploring multiple perspectives, and discussing critical thinking questions. Following this, a **rotating group presenter** shares their findings with the entire class. This approach taps into Elizabeth Cohen's research on **cooperative groupwork** and effectively prepares students to articulate detailed and thoughtful answers.



Strategy Best Practices

- **Place students in small groups to discuss complex issues.** Many social studies issues are complex and nuanced, motivating students to debate. Help students grapple with these topics by putting them in small groups where they help one another and work collectively.
- **Challenge groups to analyze difficult sources, problems, or perspectives.** In their groups, students analyze difficult sources, solve a problem, or dig into multiple perspectives on an issue. Offer them rich, diverse materials to enhance their engagement.
- **Prepare critical thinking questions for scholarly discourse and civil debate.** To generate passionate discussion, give students something exciting to discuss and enough background information to do so with intelligence. Then, pose subjective questions that encourage different perspectives and prompt students to analyze, compare, explore, and hypothesize.
- **Allow time to evaluate evidence, draw conclusions, and construct arguments.** Students need sufficient time to discuss, refine, and record their responses to the critical thinking questions. During this step, you should see high levels of interaction in the small groups—leading to increased gains in learning. Assign the role of presenter for each question and have each student record answers during their small group discussion.
- **Have a lively class discussion.** After their small-group discussion, students should have plenty of ideas to share with the entire class. Begin by asking presenters from two or three groups to share their answers or facilitate an intellectual debate.

Tips for Engagement

Groups of 3 Grouping students in threes helps spark discussion and healthy disagreement. Aim for a mix of abilities in each group.

Presenter Guidelines At the beginning, assign the role of presenter to one member of each group. Explain that this student will act as the group's leader and will share the group's findings with the class. Rotate the role of presenter for each critical thinking question.

Guidelines may include:

- Presenters should stand when they speak for the group.
- Give presenters a sentence stem to get started ("Our group chose...")

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Inspire Disciplinary Writing with Rich Sources and Experiences

Writing for Understanding activities offer a fresh approach to integrating writing in social studies. These activities immerse students in **rich social studies experiences** with interesting sources and perspectives to inspire thoughtful written work. The writing process challenges students to clarify, organize, and express their thoughts, **leading to deeper learning**.



Strategy Best Practices

- **Prepare sources, perspectives, or discussion topics.** Powerful writing should be based on memorable, interactive experiences. Start the activity by leveraging powerful images, diverse perspectives, or a discussion of complex issues to help students develop ideas and form opinions before they begin writing.
- **Have students gather evidence and organize their thoughts with a prewriting activity.** To write effectively, students need to gather concrete details to generate ideas. Using structured matrices and charts or Venn diagrams helps students organize their thoughts and gives them a foundation for writing assignments.
- **Provide students with authentic writing assignments.** There is often more authenticity in their work—and a greater sense of purpose—when students write dialogues, poetry, stories, newspaper eulogies, speeches, or letters. When students care about writing assignments, inspired writing almost always follows.
- **Guide students through the writing process.** Investing time in a step-by-step writing process yields powerful writing and increases learning. The steps of the writing process are:
 - Provide a handout that outlines guidelines and deadlines.
 - Once students finish collecting their ideas, have them experiment with an organizational structure in a rough draft. Quickly review their drafts and note any suggestions.
 - Require students to make revisions. Students should use the feedback they received from you and their peers to revise and improve their original drafts.
 - Require students to have their final drafts edited by someone else: a classmate, a parent, or another teacher before turning them in.

Tips for Engagement

Peer Feedback Groups

Arrange students in groups of three or four. Before students move into groups, emphasize the importance of honest, constructive, and specific feedback. Within the groups, students exchange papers and carefully mark any issues, provide comments, and then pass the paper to another member of the group.

Writing Solo For the final writing assignment, have students work independently and complete the task on their own.

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Prepare All Students for Effective Collaborative Group Projects

Problem Solving Groupwork fosters collaboration and learning by providing clear **guidelines for cooperation**, individual and group accountability, and representing a full range of abilities. Drawing from **Elizabeth Cohen's research**, this strategy avoids the pitfalls of traditional group projects, ensuring high engagement and effective collaboration among students.



Strategy Best Practices

- **Challenge students with multimodal tasks.** Nothing kills the enthusiasm and meaningful interaction of a small group faster than a simple task with discrete answers, such as labeling physiographic landmarks. Problem Solving Group tasks are complex and require multiple modalities to complete.
- **Give group members clearly defined roles and requirements.** Assign roles to ensure that each student contributes to the groupwork task, while maintaining interdependence among all parts of the task. The successful completion of the groupwork task relies on the cooperative efforts of all members.
- **Give groups autonomy and time to prepare high-quality products.** Your role is not to directly supervise student work or even to check for accuracy. Instead, monitor progress and challenge groups to figure out procedures on their own. This will allow you to support groups that are stuck, provide additional resources, and recognize achievements.
- **Have students explore primary and secondary sources from multiple perspectives.** Plan ahead and try to have quality websites, books, magazines, art supplies, music, or other resources available to maximize students' use of class time. If students need additional resources, prepare the school librarian to assist in handling their needs.
- **Have groups present their work.** A critical piece of the tasks is having students showcase their work. These presentations provide accountability to the groups and allow other class members to learn the content. After all groups have presented, hold a class discussion that ties together everything students saw and heard. A few well-chosen questions will challenge students to use critical thinking skills.

Tips for Engagement

Cooperative Norms Teach students cooperative norms such as introducing themselves, eye contact, listening and taking turns, disagreeing in an agreeable way, and following directions.

Props Think of ways students can use props—masks, posters, costumes, backdrops, physical objects—not only to make their presentations more dramatic, but also to put them more at ease. Keep a box of props in your room. You will marvel at how creative your students can be when presented with the simplest items—towels, sheets, hats, and old clothes. Let them have fun.

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