

The logic behind a TCI lesson

A logic model for TCI's K–12 social studies programs, prepared to the criteria the Every Student Succeeds Act sets for Tier 4, Demonstrates a Rationale.

TCI prepared this logic model. It is program documentation rather than a third-party evaluation.

1. About TCI and the TCI Approach

Teachers' Curriculum Institute (TCI) publishes K–12 social studies and K–8 science curricula. The company was founded by classroom teachers, and its programs are built on a research-based instructional approach published as a methods guide for teachers, *Bring Learning Alive!* The TCI Approach is designed to keep students focused, motivated, and ready to learn. Incorporating ideas from prominent experts like Elizabeth Cohen and Robert Marzano, the approach is built on five key principles:

- All students can learn with a spiral curriculum.
- Students learn best through multiple modalities.
- Cooperative interaction boosts learning.
- Clear learning goals are essential.
- Both linguistic and nonlinguistic experiences are important.

The approach starts from a straightforward claim: students learn social studies by doing the work of the discipline alongside each other, not by reading about it alone. Five principles define it, and every TCI lesson in every program is built from them.

This document sets out those premises, traces them through a single lesson, and describes what the design is meant to produce over the course of a lesson, a unit, a year, and a full K–12 sequence.

This approach is used in TCI's social studies programs, including those in these series: *Social Studies Alive!*, *History Alive!*, *Geography Alive!*, *Civics Alive!*, *Economics Alive!* and *Government Alive!*

2. The problem these programs address

Social studies instruction leans heavily on textbook reading and teacher presentation. In classrooms with wide reading-level ranges and substantial numbers of English learners, that model concentrates access to content on students who already read well and who already speak up.

Two things follow. Students reading below grade level encounter less content rather than differently presented content. And the same few students carry the discussion, so the students who would gain most from talking an idea through are the least likely to do it. Both compounds across grades.

3. The five premises

PREMISE	WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE
Multiple entry points	The same content is reachable through more than one kind of activity, so a student's strongest way of working is available to them at some point in every lesson.
Cooperative interaction	Students learn more when they discuss the content with each other. Structured groupwork is what makes that talk happen for every student rather than a few.
Spiral curriculum	Questions and concepts move from the concrete to the complex, within a lesson and across grades, so students build the footing they need for harder work.
Understanding by design	What students should understand is decided first. The activity and the assessment are designed backward from it.
Nonlinguistic representation	Students handle content in words and also in images, movement, and organized visual notes, because information held in more than one form is easier to retrieve.

The approach draws on established work in learning and instruction: Jerome Bruner on the spiral curriculum, Elizabeth Cohen on cooperative interaction and status in small groups, Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe on designing backward from learning goals, and Robert Marzano on nonlinguistic representation.

4. The premises in one lesson

Every TCI social studies lesson moves through the same four stages. The content changes by grade and subject. The shape does not. Quotations below are from the TCI teacher methods guide.

STAGE 1 Connect to prior knowledge

IN THE CLASSROOM	WHAT STUDENTS DO	WHAT IT ENGAGES	WHAT IT BUILDS
<i>"Students should first explore an event, idea, or personality by using elemental cognitive skills."</i>	Students surface what they already know about a topic and raise questions of their own before any new content is introduced.	Spiral curriculum. Opening with the concrete and the familiar gives every student footing for the harder questions later in the lesson.	A shared starting point that does not depend on prior reading, and questions students want answered.

STAGE 2 Conduct an activity

IN THE CLASSROOM	WHAT STUDENTS DO	WHAT IT ENGAGES	WHAT IT BUILDS
<i>"If students are trained in cooperative behaviors, placed in mixed-ability groups, and assigned roles to complete during a multiple-ability task, they tend to interact more equally."</i>	Students work through one of six teaching strategies. Most place them in mixed-ability groups where each member holds a defined role on a task no single ability can complete alone.	Cooperative interaction and multiple entry points. Assigned roles and tasks needing more than one ability mean participation distributes across the group instead of concentrating in a few students.	Every student contributes something the group needs. Interaction per student rises, and with it the amount each student learns.

STAGE 3 Analyze primary and secondary sources

IN THE CLASSROOM	WHAT STUDENTS DO	WHAT IT ENGAGES	WHAT IT BUILDS
<i>"When students, especially those without strong linguistic skills, experience success at interpreting visuals, they are more motivated to read."</i>	Students examine documents and images, compare what different sources show, and build an argument from the evidence in front of them.	Multiple entry points and spiral questioning. Working from an image or object first gives students who read below grade level a way into the same content, and questions move from observation to interpretation.	Practice using evidence to support a claim, and access to grade-level content that is not gated on reading fluency.

STAGE 4 Assess student understanding

IN THE CLASSROOM	WHAT STUDENTS DO	WHAT IT ENGAGES	WHAT IT BUILDS
<i>"Requiring students to put their thoughts in writing challenges them to form their thoughts into explicit, detailed, and tangible ideas."</i>	Students put their understanding into their own words, in writing, in a presentation, or as a claim supported by the evidence they gathered.	Understanding by design and multimodal processing. Writing forces a loose idea into a specific one, and the task was designed backward from what students were meant to understand.	Evidence of what each student actually understands, in a form the teacher can act on before the next lesson.

5. The six teaching strategies

Stage two is where the lesson varies. Six strategies fill it, each giving students a different way into the content. Every lesson uses the one that fits what students need to learn.

STRATEGY	WHAT STUDENTS DO	PREMISE IT DRAWS ON MOST
Visual Discovery	Examine, interpret, and act out compelling images to discover key concepts.	Multiple entry points, spiral curriculum
Social Studies Skill Builder	Practice disciplinary skills in pairs through fast-paced, repeated tasks.	Cooperative interaction, spiral curriculum
Response Group	Prepare in a small group, then discuss questions with more than one defensible answer.	Cooperative interaction
Experiential Exercise	Experience an abstract idea or distant event firsthand through a short, memorable activity.	Multimodal experience
Writing for Understanding	Write from a shared class experience rather than from a blank page.	Understanding by design, spiral curriculum
Problem Solving Groupwork	Take an assigned role on a group project so every member contributes.	Cooperative interaction

6. What accumulates

A single lesson produces a small result. The design depends on those results compounding, which is why outcomes are set out here by time horizon.

HORIZON	WHAT STUDENTS CAN DO	WHAT A SCHOOL WOULD SEE
One lesson	Explain a concept in their own words and point to the evidence behind it.	Every student contributed to the work, not only the students who usually speak.
One unit	Use more than one source to support a claim, and take a position they can defend.	Students reading below grade level worked with the same content as everyone else.
One year	Retain content past the assessment, and hold a discussion that stays on evidence.	More equal participation has become the classroom norm rather than an event.
A K-12 sequence	Handle a concept at greater depth each time it returns, because the earlier encounters are still there.	Cumulative content knowledge, and less time each year spent rebuilding from nothing.

The final horizon depends on adoption across consecutive grades. Where a school adopts a single grade band, the first three are the ones to hold the program to.

7. What the design depends on

These are the conditions under which the design does what it is meant to do.

- **Implementation.** Teachers run the strategies as designed rather than using the materials as a supplementary reader.
- **Task design.** Group tasks genuinely require more than one ability. Assigned roles on a single-ability task do not redistribute participation.
- **Time.** The schedule allows the activity stage, not only the reading and the assessment.
- **Teacher support.** Teachers have access to training on the strategies and on the platform.

Teacher support is included

Self-paced professional development courses inside every teacher account, covering program basics, platform navigation and the teaching strategies. An on-demand library of recorded webinars. And the annual Back to School Summit, a free virtual event led by classroom teachers.

TCI also offers live district training tailored to a district's goals, delivered virtually or in person, and the TCI Coaches Program, which certifies teachers to lead implementation in their own schools.

8. The same model in conventional format

STANDARD ELEMENT	IN THIS MODEL	SECTION
Inputs	Print and digital student and teacher materials. Six teaching strategies. Embedded student supports including read-aloud with word-level highlighting, adjustable reading levels, Spanish text, main-idea view and annotation. Teacher professional development.	3, 5 and 7
Activities	The four lesson stages, and the strategy chosen for stage two.	4 and 5
Outputs	Lessons completed with every student in a defined role. Student writing and presentations supported by source evidence. Grade-level content reached by students reading below grade level.	4
Short-term outcomes	More equal participation in academic discussion. Improved use of evidence in argument. Retention past the assessment.	6
Long-term outcomes	Cumulative content knowledge and disciplinary literacy across a K–12 sequence.	6
Moderators	Largest effects expected for students reading below grade level and for English learners.	1
Assumptions	Implementation fidelity, genuine multiple-ability tasks, instructional time, teacher support.	7

9. How TCI keeps testing this

Evidence about instructional materials is never finished. Standards move, assessments change, and the questions districts ask about a program today are not the questions they asked twenty years ago. TCI treats the research behind its programs as work that continues.

Underway now

- **District outcomes.** TCI examines publicly reported assessment results in districts using its programs, most recently in Florida. These describe outcomes in real implementations at scale rather than establishing that the programs caused them.
- **Independent program reviews.** TCI submits its programs for third-party review and state evaluation on a continuing basis, including Learning List reviews, state adoption evaluations, and the ISTE Seal.

- **Case studies and success stories.** TCI documents how its programs work in real classrooms and districts, collected at teachtci.com/success-stories. These accounts describe classroom practice and locally reported results. They are not controlled studies.

Earlier research

In 2006, Empirical Education Inc. reported a randomized experiment on *History Alive!* in one California district, conducted under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Students using the program performed comparably to students using a conventional textbook program, and lower-achieving students using it outperformed their counterparts in the control group. The study covered nine teachers in a single district and measured against an assessment California has since retired, so it is included here as historical research rather than current evidence.

What comes next

TCI is interested in partnering with districts and independent researchers to examine how this approach improves outcomes for students who read below grade level, and welcomes approaches from districts willing to share outcome data for that purpose.