

Name/Date:

What is Social Studies?

Social Studies is not just one thing. While we often focus on history, it also includes other ways of looking at the world including geography, philosophy, sociology, and so on. Geography is about places and spaces -- and how these are woven together with history and society. Philosophy and sociology are very much about about the ideas shape our society and result in social and political change. Other “disciplines” (areas of study) have a part in Social Studies, too -- it is somewhere in between the “Humanities” and the “Sciences” and is a meeting place for many interesting ways of thinking.

Here’s how the BC Curriculum defines Social Studies:

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

The knowledge and skills part might be quite familiar to students -- that’s the stuff you learned about and did in past Social Studies classes. The “competencies” part might be a new idea. These are the research and inquiry processes that are common in Social Studies, and six thinking concepts that you will become familiar with during the course -- the following pages explain these in more detail.¹

Case study notes:

¹ The following five pages are taken from a new SS resource I helped write called “Thinking it Through: A Sourcebook for Social Studies.” published by Pearson Education and available in Sep 2017. I will edit this content and replace with unpublished material as soon as I get a change to revisit this document.

Using Historical Thinking

These thinking concepts will help you examine different perspectives, weigh evidence, explain causes and consequences, and make critical judgments. They will help you put on a historian's cap so that you can do the thinking. You can use the concepts to respond to the sources and questions in the Sourcebook, or you can work from the other direction and use the Sourcebook to help you understand the concepts.



Significance

You can:

Make decisions about the importance of a person or event from the past, while understanding different perspectives on what is important.

Sample questions:

- What importance should all Canadians place on the legacy of Indigenous residential schools?
- What has been the impact of residential schools on the families and communities of Indigenous peoples?

Evidence

You can:

Evaluate different sources or information and make decisions based on sound evidence.

Sample questions:

- What evidence do we have that chemical weapons were used in WWI?
- What evidence would tell us how medical facilities, doctors, and nurses coped with the impacts of gas attacks during WWI?



Continuity and Change

You can:

Understand that some things change while some things remain the same over time.

Sample questions:

- How have the rights of women, including voting rights, changed over time in Canada?
- How are women's protest marches of today similar to those of the early 1900s?



Cause and Consequence

You can:

Examine what creates change and evaluate the impacts of change.

Sample questions:

- What led to the execution of Louis XVI?
- What impact did the French Revolution have on other European powers?

Perspective

You can:

Understand that we do not all view the world in the same way, and that our experiences of the same events can differ.

Sample questions:

- Compare and contrast the responses of the federal and provincial governments to immigration from India in the past and today.
- How do Indo-Canadian recollections of the *Komagata Maru* incident compare with reports published in Canadian newspapers?



Ethical Judgment

You can:

Make informed judgments about the fairness of a decision or whether people made the best choices in the past.

Sample questions:

- What can modern artistic representations of a past “historical wrong” conceal and reveal about the events?
- What steps should modern governments take to address the legacy of Indigenous residential schools?

Using Geographic Thinking

Similar to the historical thinking concepts, these concepts will help you examine different perspectives, weigh evidence, explain causes and consequences, and make critical judgments. They will help you understand the role and characteristics of place and location in all aspects of human society. You can use the concepts to help respond to the sources and questions in the Sourcebook, or you can work from the other direction and use the Sourcebook to help you understand the concepts.



Significance

You can:

Make decisions about what aspects of geographic locations and phenomena make them important or noteworthy.

Sample questions:

- What is this monument? Why is it there? Why should we care?
- Why is the land surrounding the Vimy Memorial considered "a part of Canada"?

Evidence

You can:

Develop interpretations based on different kinds of social, geographic, and scientific data.

Sample questions:

- How do we know that vegetation and animal habitats have been affected in areas of resource extraction?
- What evidence can you see of climate change in your community?



Continuity and Change

You can:

Identify how patterns and trends related to specific places vary and stay the same over time and compared to similar locations.

Sample questions:

- How do physiographic regions relate to the boundaries of traditional Indigenous territories compared with modern political borders?
- How have cultural and economic adaptations to Canadian regions evolved over time?

Cause and Consequence

You can:

Understand how humans and the environment interact and how they influence each other.

Sample questions:

- What is the association between open-pit mining and greenhouse gas emissions?
- How do mining companies address the consequence of open-pit mining?



How long have I known you, Oh Canada? ... I have known you when your forests were mine; when they gave me my meat and my clothing. I have known you in your streams and rivers where your fish flashed and danced in the sun, where the waters said 'come, come and eat of my abundance.' I have known you in the freedom of the winds. And my spirit, like the winds, once roamed your good lands.

But in the long hundred years since the white man came, I have seen my freedom disappear like the salmon going mysteriously out to sea. The white man's strange customs, which I could not understand, pressed down upon me until I could no longer breathe. When I fought to protect my land and my home, I was called a savage. When I neither understood nor welcomed his way of life, I was called lazy. When I tried to rule my people, I was stripped of my authority. . .

Oh God in heaven! Give me back the courage of the olden chiefs. Let me wrestle with my surroundings. Let me again, as in the days of old, dominate my environment. Let me humbly accept this new culture and through it rise up and go on.

—Chief Dan George, July 1, 1967

Perspective

You can:

Understand that each of us has our own sense of place that results from our experience of the human and physical characteristics of our environment.

Sample questions:

- Is there a common perspective among Indigenous peoples concerning the relationship of humans to the environment?
- How have the contributions of Indigenous leaders such as Chief Dan George influenced society's perception of environmental issues?

Ethical Judgment

You can:

Make informed judgments about the responsibility of practices and results of a particular action related to human or physical environments.

Sample questions:

- Explain why not all climate scientists agree on the causes of the global rise in temperature despite the weight of evidence.
- How are examples of scientific evidence used differently to convince the public to take action on environmental issues?



Doing Sourcework—An Example

SOURCE A Letter from the Front

Letter sent by Trooper John Newton with the Canadian Army Corps in France, to his brother, Cam, in British Columbia, December 7, 1915. The spelling in the letter is unaltered.

France
Dec. 7th 1915.

Dear Cam.

Thanks for your letter of Nov 15th which reached me yesterday. Yes, we are getting now what we have been waiting for almost a year, we have been into it on three different occasions. Trench fighting is no picnic at this time of the year, one is plastered with mud from head to foot all the time. The mud is more than knee deep in lots of places. We just get the dugouts & parapets nicely fixed up when Fritz gets wild & knocks them all down again. I would certainly like to have a look at the German trenches, our artillery put over about ten times as many shells as they they do, & I think their trenches must be in a devil of a mess. Quite a few of our fellows have been knocked out already. We don't see much of the Germans but the trenches are so close together we can hear them talking quite plainly, some places they are only 40 yds. Rats are just about as plentiful as mosquitos in Saskatchewan, they crawl into bed with one in the dugouts & sit up on the parapet right beside you & just wink when a rifle is fired. We are obliged to store out rations in tin boxes, the first time I went in 3/4 of a loaf of bread mysteriously disappeared.

We are in action about half the time, the balance of the time we stay in a cow barn a few miles from firing line. The most ticklish part of this job is the listening post on nobodies land between trenches, one has to remain perfectly silent & give the signal if necessary of any movement Fritz may be making & all of a sudden one finds himself staring right into the eyes of a big squareheaded German crawling through the grass on the same duty. The listening post carries a rifle & ammunition but has orders not to fire unless absolutely necessary, so we don't stop to argue the point. By the way there is generally an extra ration of rum on this post, which helps considerably. One is just given enough to cultivate the fighting mood, but some fellows say it makes them feel like going over to Fritz & shaking hands.

I think Lance is at Marsielles now, he was about thirty miles from here until just lately. He is in a far better branch of the service than this, we are supposed to be a mounted regiment but are doing just the same work as infantry. We have broken in two lots of horse & had them taken away from us again. There is only one squadron of mounted Canadians who have been allowed to keep their mounts out here. My address is Trooper J.L. Newton #109529. B. Squadron. 4th C.M.R. 2nd Brigade C.M.R. Canadian Army Corps. B.E.F. France.

Let me have a another line from you, I will guarantee you an early reply. I expect it will be about Christmas time when you receive this, so I will close by wishing you a happy Xmas & a prosperous New Year.

From Your Affect. Bro
Jack.

Scan the source before you look at the questions—a quick read will let you know what kinds of evidence you are dealing with. Notice that Source A is a letter home from a Canadian soldier in the front lines of WWI. Then, try the “Thinking It Through” questions that follow the sources.

? Use Source A to answer questions 1 to 6.

1. Make a list of “special terms” used in the letter in Source A that represent WWI to you. Explain how and why these terms are important to your understanding of the war. Which these stand out to you as particularly representative of the war?
2. How does the author feel about the enemy? Supply some evidence from the letter to back up your response.
3. Why do you think the soldiers at listening posts were given instructions not to fire unless absolutely necessary?
4. Letters from the Front were censored—screened by officials to ensure that Canadians at home didn’t learn war secrets or read condemning statements about the Canadian army or its allies, nor reports about Allied soldiers dying in serious distress. In what way does the author write the letter such that it passes the censors? Supply some evidence from the letter to back up your response.
5. The author came from a farming community in Saskatchewan, and kept horses. Given the new technology being used during the war, why were horses necessary? How do you think someone who kept horses would react to the uses of horses during the war?
6. What does this primary source offer that a secondary source might not? What are the limitations of this primary source?

Look through the Expressing Understanding section below. These questions and activities are meant to extend your learning and push your creative as well as critical thinking.

Expressing Understanding

1. Thousands of letters from soldiers at the front have been preserved. On their own, they are limited in their significance, but as a collection they form an impressive body of evidence about conditions and perceptions during the war. At what point would a letter become noteworthy enough in its own right as an important historical document? What criteria should be used to determine whether a source is historically significant?
2. Find out more about the role horses played in WWI. Make some comparisons to other uses of animals in warfare in the past. What factors do you think played the greatest part in changing this practice in the twentieth century?
3. Build a simple trench diagram that includes elements mentioned in Source A.
4. Create a storyboard to narrate the letter using a sequence of drawings.

Applying Historical and Geographic Thinking

At any point as you work with sources, you can apply the historical or geographic thinking concepts. For example:

Significance: Do individual letters from soldiers have any lasting impact on history, or do they simply refer to events and subjects that are significant? What was the legacy of trench warfare on the landscapes of Western Europe?

Evidence: How do historians use sources like this? Is this source reliable as an explanation of trench warfare in WWI? What efforts have been made to document the location of Canadian-built trenches?

Continuity and Change: What aspects of weaponry and combat from the source can still be seen in modern warfare?

Cause and Consequence: What caused the need for the trenches in the first place? Where and when were trenches first used? What were some consequences of WWI trench warfare in Western Europe?

Perspectives: Who is “Fritz,” why is “he” called that? What can you learn about “his” perspective on trench warfare in WWI? How did the German trenches differ from Allied trenches?



Ethical Judgment: Can we objectively examine the use of horses in WWI without introducing our present-day values and ideas about the treatment of animals?

Using the Social Studies Inquiry Process

Inquiry in Social Studies is similar to detective work. Historians search for evidence that gives us insight into the life and times of people living in the past. Geographers use a similar process to understand the role of place.

"The Past" includes everything that happened, but "history" is an account created by people as they investigate what happened in the past. Historians and other social scientists are very interested in primary source evidence, which is created by people living at the time of the events. Historians, journalists, geographers, and other observers look back into the past and construct their own interpretations of a certain event, person, movement, or phenomenon. They analyze, review, and summarize primary sources. The new accounts they make are called secondary sources.

As you encounter new historical or geographical evidence, start by trying to determine whether it is a primary or secondary source.

Examples of Primary Source Evidence	Examples of Secondary Source Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letters • diaries • photographs • physical artefacts • oral tradition • newspapers of the time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • biographies • documentaries • journal articles • textbooks • videos • social media
	

With the introduction of electronic communications, many people were worried about the loss of primary source evidence. They were afraid that the words, ideas, and images carried by the telegraph, telephone, and Internet would be lost. Now, with the revelations of Edward Snowden, an ex-CIA agent who leaked government information, it appears that many people's communications have been captured or hacked by government agencies and others. Will computer hard drives and computer servers be the archives for historians of the future? Does material ever disappear from the Internet?

Through various activities in this Sourcebook, you will have the opportunity to learn about historical inquiry and to search for and review many sources. You will be expected to construct your own interpretations about certain events and people using relevant evidence from the past. When new evidence is found, students of history need to adjust their interpretations and conclusions. There is not one single, absolute interpretation of an event in the past. The diagram of the historical inquiry process on the next page is designed to help you be aware of the process and feel comfortable applying it.