

Breakwater School
K-5 Social Studies Curriculum Overview
April 6, 2006

Kindergarten

Kindergarten children are beginning to understand themselves in relation to others and to make better sense of the community in which they have daily experiences. Our social studies curriculum in Kindergarten builds on their basic understandings of both social structure and an individual's impact on others and the environment. Curriculum topics include animal life in and around their community; uses of money; origins of foods we eat; language, traditions and foods from different cultures; and stewardship of the natural environment.

First and Second Grades

The Social Studies curriculum is integrated with the daily activities of school life, and offers an exposure to the community through both field trips and visitors who come to the classroom to share information and expertise. A large part of social development at this age is centered on learning and talking about feelings, developing and understanding tolerance, and developing communication skills and group process skills. The goal is to understand ourselves and the world around us.

Different themes and activities throughout the school year include: families; self awareness, values, and consequences; holidays; famous people; cultural traditions; globes and maps; community awareness; and communication of feelings and ideas.

We make extensive use of the World Book Encyclopedia and current children's literature. We also start the process of guiding students' use of the Internet to research assigned subjects.

Third and Fourth Grades

The Social Studies program includes multicultural studies, geography, and a community service component. During our two-year social studies cycle, we also learn about Maine history and an ancient culture one year, then Portland history and westward expansion the next.

Throughout the school year we emphasize the role of the individual within the classroom community and beyond. Time is spent working on how to balance a student's own needs with the needs of others.

Geography, both political and topographical, runs throughout the curriculum all year. Map making and map reading are also important components. We focus on a basic knowledge of the geography of Europe and Asia. Going hand in hand with maps and geography is an awareness of current events throughout the world and discussion of contemporary issues facing our world.

Community Service explores our roles as members of communities; our school, our town, our state, our nation, our world. Children frequently participate in local efforts like the annual food pantry drive and our ongoing recycling efforts. We participate in a various national or international efforts from time to time, such as raising money for hurricane, tsunami or earthquake victims, or helping families overseas with a donation to a charity such as Heifer International. We look for tie-ins that will help us connect these efforts with our academic curriculum in a variety of ways, making both the community service and the academic topics more meaningful for children.

Multi-cultural Studies promote an understanding and respect for diverse cultures. Our whole school Multi-cultural Immersion Week is a celebration of both the diversity and the commonalities of world cultures. Within our classroom we will study one country in depth and construct a "museum" of that country to share with the rest of the school.

Field trips, individual and group projects, computer simulations, and classroom visits enhance all of our social studies work. Within the microcosm of our own classroom we have an opportunity to regularly practice many group process skills, such as conflict resolution and peacemaking, as we grow to appreciate our roles as citizens beyond the local community into the global realm.

Fifth Grade

Social Studies is a capstone discipline in that it involves Reading, Writing, Critical Thinking skills, and often Science and Mathematics. The fifth grade Social Studies program concentrates on expanding the students' world view, reinforcing their understanding of the importance of community service, developing an appreciation of history, instilling an awareness of our system of government, and gaining geographical knowledge.

In our efforts to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the information which we learn, we have two primary focuses: process and content.

Process Component

The study of Social Studies provides an excellent vehicle for students to learn how to explore an unknown discipline. As they progress through their school years they will be expected more and more to master an unknown subject area. Thus the process component of the Social Studies curriculum helps fifth graders to acquire study skills that can be applied to any subject from anthropology to zoology. This component of our program promotes mastery of study skills through the following objectives:

- Fostering comprehension. Two principles guide us in constructing meaning from what we read and hear in Social Studies:
 - (1) Comprehension involves relating new information to what is already known about a topic. Students are guided in making connections between what they are about to study and what they already know.
 - (2) Organizing and classifying new information determines how well it will be understood and remembered. Students learn a variety of techniques for managing new information.
- - Learning and using effective study strategies. In order to study effectively, students must learn to select and apply appropriate strategies for specific tasks. The study strategies we use include strategies for organizing information so that it can be understood, strategies for retaining and recalling information, and strategies for using and presenting information most effectively. The students learn techniques for brain-storming, outlining, summarizing, surveying, note-taking, and paraphrasing.

Content Component

The content component of our Social Studies program provides opportunities for students to acquire new historical, geographical, cultural, biographical, and civic knowledge about the world in which we live. Topics vary from year to year, and are chosen to represent a cross-section of the many disciplines that are encompassed by the term Social Studies. The following list is a sample of disciplines and possible topics covered:

- History. Topics may include Colonial history, black history, U.S. history, states and capitals, Native Americans, world history, leaders, explorers, presidents, women's history.
- Geography and Cultures. Topics may include maps and map-making, regions of U.S., ancient cultures (Egyptians, Mayans, Medieval Studies, Vikings), study of other countries, diversity studies, Multi-Cultural Week.
- Civics. Topics may include U.S. government, U.S. Constitution, local government, legal system, mock trial, current events, citizenship, elections and National Student Mock Election.
- Sociology. Topics may include problem-solving, conflict resolution, families, growth and development, fifth grade self-designed field trip, personal goals and accomplishments.
- Community Service. Opportunities may include Pre-school and Kindergarten Helpers program, Pre-school story time, food pantry collection and food distribution, Learning Buddies, Breakwater School beautification projects, Refugee Resettlement Program student backpacks project.
- Maine Studies. Topics may include Portland, State of Maine, coastal studies.
- Natural History and Ecology. Topics may include solar system and astronomy, environmental education, Earth Week, Survival Overnight, nature observations.
- Economics. Topics may include monetary systems, exchange rates, personal checkbooks, industry and manufacturing, examination of wants versus needs, analyzing advertising techniques.