

Social Studies Inquiry Method by Elise A. Guyette

Everyone knows about the scientific method, but there is also a *social scientific method*. If social studies are the integration of various disciplines, then its methodology must be an integration of the lenses that professionals in those disciplines use to examine a topic. This inquiry method (see poster) attempts to identify focus questions used by professionals in history and the social sciences. Teachers can then use those questions as building blocks for a social study of any topic in any time and place.

The poster is divided into the same eight sections as Vermont's standards: *Critical Evaluation, History, Geography, Citizenship, Diversity & Unity, Economics, Conflict, and Identity*. Try putting a topic you teach in the center of the poster. Carefully examine the critical evaluation questions when building your unit. You should always have questions from this section, which is why this is the center section of the poster. Then review the questions connected to each pie-section of the circle to choose 2-5 inquiries just right for your topic and grade level. Teaching your students how to answer them will result in a focused, integrated social studies unit full of stimulating content, deep concepts, and exciting activities.

Vermont's standards ask students to critically examine data, knowledge and points of view. They ask us to look at the ways societies work and examine problems and issues from various perspectives. They de-emphasize texts and ask us to use primary resources of all kinds. The standards encourage students to grapple with perennial human problems and interrogate complex concepts such as democracy, human rights, wants & needs, conflict theory, relationships between people & environment, culture & identity.

Grappling with Vermont's standards gives students and teachers opportunities to develop the major skills and concepts important to historians and social scientists. Concepts are abstract ideas that must be built slowly and repeatedly in various contexts. Spiralling concepts (not topics) is the only spiralling promoted by our standards. Each section is a lens through which to view and study the times, places, events, and people of history and the contemporary world. We must give students ample opportunities to practice and understand these major areas of the Social Studies by having them use them time and again.

Use this poster to help you and your students choose the lenses most important to your topic and discover important questions to help focus your social studies!



All of these standards (or lenses) can be applied to topics from various times and places in Vermont, the United States, and throughout the world.

Visit the Vermont Alliance for the Social Studies web page to find a more in-depth description of each category and connected Vermont Standards by clicking on the Social Studies Inquiry Method wheel. Follow the *Stories From The Classroom* link to access lesson plans designed to promote reflective inquiry and watch video clips of teachers using them in their classrooms.

<http://www.vermontsocialstudies.org>

SOCIAL STUDIES INQUIRY METHOD

focus questions

Vermont
Social
Studies
Project

How are people's needs and wants being met within the economic system(s)? What choices have people made? Does it seem fair to all? Has the type of system contributed in a major way to the issues? What sort of choices do people have within this system? Is economic interdependence a major factor? Is there a clash of systems? What roles do governments and people play in the running of this economy? Does that affect the issue?

Through various sources (e.g. primary documents, art, literature, oral histories) put yourself in the minds of the people of the time. Include famous and ordinary people. What are their views, values & multiple perspectives on the topic?

Construct your own interpretation of the events based on the sources you consider most credible. What changed? What stayed the same? How did people react to change? How do these issues manifest themselves in the present?

To help explain

your interpretations,

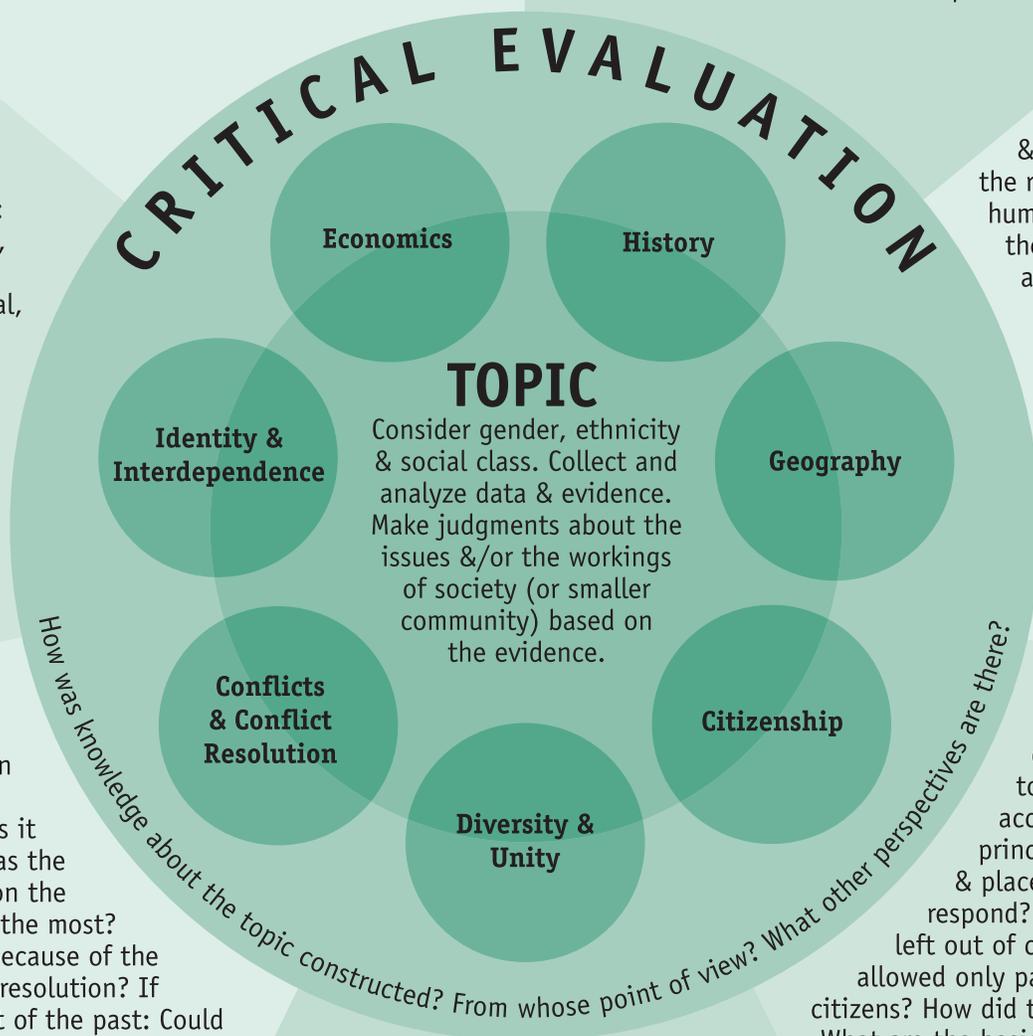
use geography & mapping. What is the relationship between human communities & the environment? Has a strong sense of place affected the issue? How is the use of space involved? Has human movement affected the issue? Were political boundaries changed? What was the impact?

What role did/does identity play in the issue? What type of identity: personal, family, school, state, cultural, national, religious, etc.? Were identities being formed? changed? preserved? How? Whose? To what end?

What are the basic conflicts in this issue? How should it be/was it solved? What was the impact? Who won the most? Who lost the most? What changed because of the conflict and its resolution? If this is a conflict of the past: Could it have been handled better? How? What does this issue teach about conflicts in general & how they might be resolved in the future?

What cultural groups are involved? What are their characteristics? How was the culture learned? Are there any cultures in conflict? Has cultural change taken place? Was there resistance to change? Are there majority vs. minority problems? Are any groups stereotyped or discriminated against? Did diversity unify or cause tensions?

How are citizens *expected* to respond according to the principles of this time & place? How *did* they respond? Are any people left out of citizenship or allowed only partial rights as citizens? How did they respond? What are the basic principles of the government? Did the government live up to those principles? Did the events help to close any gap between the ideal principles & everyday realities? Were documents changed? Ideals widened? What issues of leadership and the use of power did you discover?



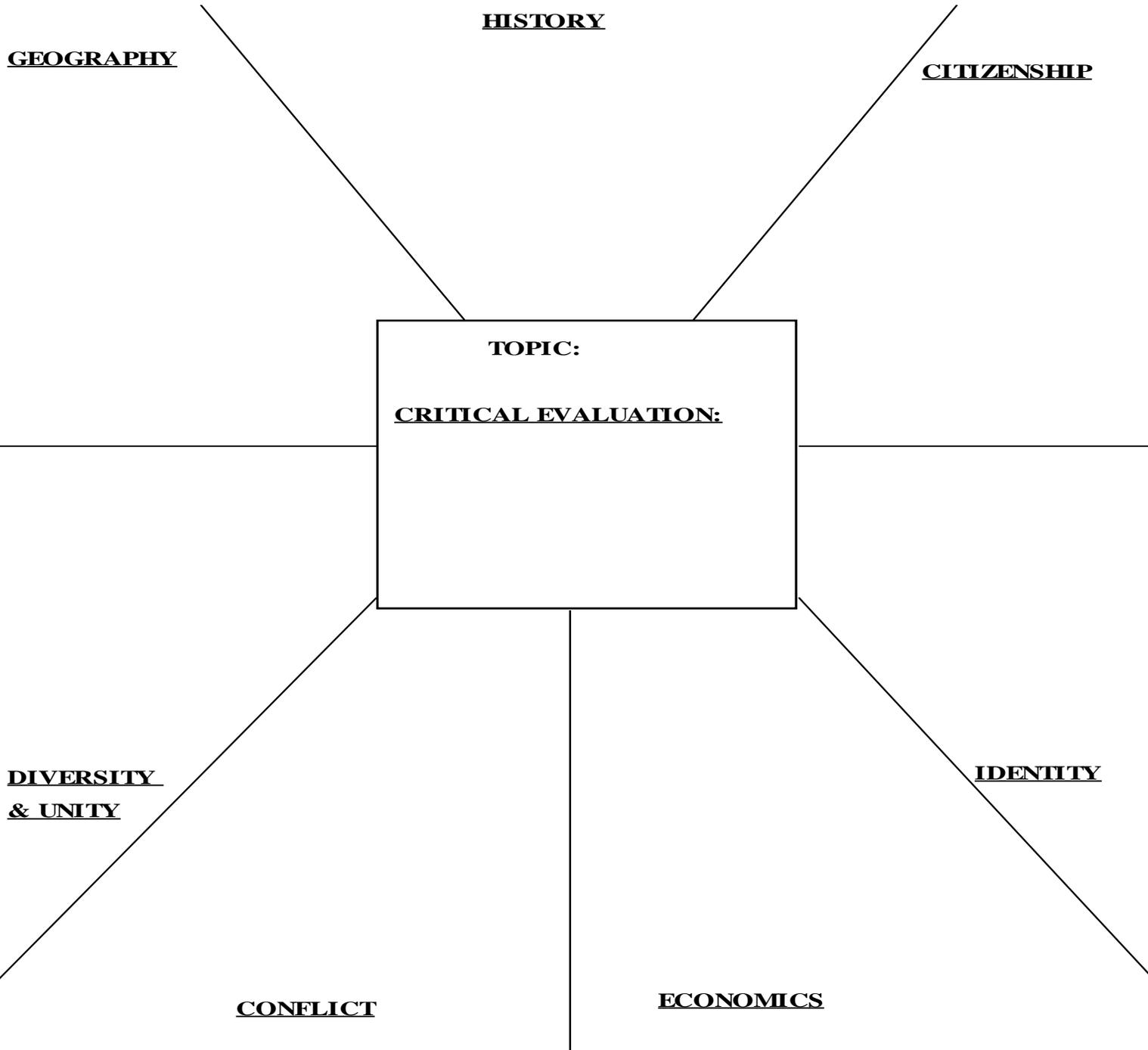
The questions remain the same. Only the topics change!

SOCIAL STUDIES INQUIRY METHOD

the framework

www.vermontsocialstudies.org/vssp





GEOGRAPHY

HISTORY

CITIZENSHIP

TOPIC:

CRITICAL EVALUATION:

DIVERSITY
& UNITY

IDENTITY

CONFLICT

ECONOMICS

Vermont's Framework of Standards for History and the Social Sciences

by Elise A. Guyette

Vermont's standards in history and the social sciences give students and teachers opportunities to grapple with major skills and concepts important to historians and social scientists. Concepts are abstract ideas that must be built slowly and repeatedly in various contexts. These concepts are divided into eight sections: Investigation & Critical Evaluation, History, Geography, Citizenship, Diversity & Unity, Economics, Conflict, and Identity. Each section is a lens through which to view and study the times, places, events, and people of the world. We must give students ample opportunities to practice and understand these major concepts of the Social Studies.

Because the conceptual lenses of the Framework are so important to all grade levels and indispensable in viewing any time and place, we offer the following descriptions of the nature of each major concept. All of these standards (or lenses) can be applied to “various times and places in Vermont, the United States and throughout the world.” For that reason this phrase has been omitted from these standards. Certain Vital Results that pertain to particular social sciences have been added.

Investigation & Critical Evaluation

The primary right and responsibility of a democratic citizen is critical evaluation of one's world. In general, that means careful and exact judgment as to the truth or merit of a situation. This judgment is developed through the practice of higher order thinking skills including analysis of data, relationships, conflicts, and perspectives among individuals, institutions and systems in order to discover and judge how human societies work. How knowledge was constructed and from whose point of view is a primary question to ask of all situations. Such evaluation includes contemporary societies and those from various times and places around the world in order to acquire a deep understanding of the human story.

6.1 *Causes and Effects in Human Society:* Students examine complex webs of causes and effects in relation to events in order to generalize about the workings of human societies, and they apply their findings to problems.

6.2 *Uses of Evidence and Data:* Students understand the varied uses of evidence and data and use both to make interpretations concerning public issues.

6.3 *Analyzing Knowledge:* Students analyze knowledge as a collection of selected facts and interpretations based on a particular historical or social setting.

History: Place in Time

History is more than just a list of facts: dates, names, places and events. Events are always viewed from the various perspectives of those involved (both famous and ordinary folks) AND the perspectives of those who come later to interpret the event's impact on later eras. History, then, is actually a view of events that has been negotiated over time by many different people. One's own view should also enter into the interpretation, even if you are a student! History is one of the two major components of any social study. Social studies should be grounded in a particular time and use perspectives and documents from that time in order to help make it real for our students.

6.4 *Historical Connections:* Students identify major historical eras and analyze periods of transition to understand the past, the present, and the relationship between the two.

6.5 *Traditional and Social Histories:* Students investigate both the traditional and the social histories of the people, places, and cultures under study, including those of indigenous peoples.

6.6 *Being a Historian:* Students use historical methodology to make interpretations concerning issues and events.

4.5 *Continuity and Change:* Students understand continuity and change.

Geography: Place on Earth

The other major component of any social study is "place." Just as *time* affects one's perspectives, so too does *place*. Geography is more than just place names and physical surroundings. It is a three dimensional science that asks such questions as: Why is the capitol in that city? Why is that house shaped like that? Why are the roads placed there? Why is the village organized like that?" It involves the relationship among people, their environment and their culture. Understanding this relationship is a crucial component in understanding human societies. Geography also concerns itself with migrations and the reasons people choose (or are forced) to move and how movements affect culture and the environment. Social studies should be grounded in a particular place and use that particular surroundings - both natural and built - to help students understand the time they are studying.

6.7 *Geographical Knowledge:* Students use geographical knowledge and images to understand the present, communicate historical interpretations, develop solutions for the problems, and plan for the future.

6.8 *Movements and Settlements:* Students analyze the factors and implications associated with the historical and contemporary movements and settlements of people.

4.6 *Understanding Place:* Students demonstrate understanding of the relationship between environment and culture and how each shapes lives.

3.9 *Sustainability:* Students demonstrate understanding of natural and human communities, the ecological, economic, political or social systems within them, and awareness of how human actions affect the sustainability of these interrelated systems.

Citizenship & Governments

Political scientists concern themselves with such questions as: How do people organize themselves? How is power used in this society? What are the important public issues? Is there such a thing as the *common good*? These basic principles of citizenship and governments vary according to time and place. Leadership models include loosely defined models where people follow if they choose and strict models where people must follow the leader or else. Governments can be limited (as in a democracy) or unlimited, totalitarian governments. The ideal principles and ethics of any form of government are embodied in major documents, symbols, or the oral history of the people. People constantly try to make the reality of everyday living match this ideal. Sometimes the "ideal" leaves out certain people, e.g. serfs, slaves, women. This leaves citizens struggling to close the gap between the ideal and the reality of their times or trying change their nation's documents to include them.

6.9 *Meaning of Citizenship:* Students examine and debate the meaning of citizenship and act as citizens in a democratic society.

6.10 *Types of Government:* Students compare and evaluate the philosophical underpinnings and the working of different types of government, including constitutional governments.

6.11 *Institutional Access:* Students analyze the access that various groups and individuals have had to justice, reward, and power, as those are evident in the institutions.

6.12 *Human Rights:* Students identify and evaluate the concept of human rights.

4.2 *Democratic Processes:* Students participate in democratic processes.

Identity and Interdependence

All people are born with a group identity that they preserve, build upon and change in various ways over time. Our initial identity is given to us by our families (both biological and adopted). Over time, this identity extends to include school, interests, occupations, our state, our country, our culture and the like. In other words, we are utterly dependent on each other for our identities. Sometimes people must fight to preserve their identities. This struggle is often accompanied by a search for justice.

6.19 *Identity:* Students understand the variety of influences and impacts of the construction, preservation, and change of identity, within families, other social structures, and nations.

Economics

Economists analyze human behavior as people pursue their needs and wants. They study preferences, motivations, costs, incentives and the secondary effects of peoples' choices. All cultures have developed economic systems to meet their needs and wants. To survive, a culture must satisfy basic needs in a sustainable way to provide for its own continuity. Societies must strike a balance between individual self-interest and the common good. Elements of these systems include labor, production, distribution, and scarcity, among others. Decision makers within the system, decide how to produce and distribute goods and services and what to do in times of scarcity. Systems usually meet the needs of some groups of people better than others, and people are constantly striving to right this imbalance.

6.15 *Knowledge of Economic Principles:* Students use the basic principles of economics to interpret local, state, national, and international economic activity.

6.16 *Impact of Economic Systems:* Students evaluate the impact of economic systems on the needs and wants of people and on the environment.

6.17 *Governments and Resources:* Students understand how governments affect the flow of resources, goods, and services.

Diversity and Unity

Anthropologists tell us that all people have culture: accepted ways of behaving, believing, and doing all things related to life and the afterlife. Many elements of culture can be seen, like clothes, houses, and sports. What can be seen is like the tip of an iceberg. Others are difficult to discern, like relationships, abstract values, motivations, and spiritual beliefs. These are the unseen bulk of the iceberg. Culture is learned through language and role models, not inherited biologically. All cultures change in order to adapt to new circumstances or altered perceptions. Cultural differences, especially if not understood, can cause conflicts among individual people and, sometimes, cultural clashes among large groups. On the other hand, cultural differences bring varied perspectives to issues and can endlessly enrich our lives.

6.13 *Concept of Culture:* Students understand the concept of culture, including the cultures of indigenous peoples.

6.14 *Forces of Unity and Disunity:* Students understand the tensions between the forces of unity and those of disunity.

4.3 *Cultural Expressions:* Students demonstrate understanding of the cultural expressions that are characteristic of particular groups.

4.4 *Effects of Prejudice:* Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of prejudice and stereotyping and their effects on various groups.

Conflicts and Conflict Resolutions

Life is not possible without conflicts; we confront them daily. Some are small, easily handled, and are of little consequence. By studying small, nonviolent conflicts we can learn how to deal with conflicts in positive ways. Some conflicts lead to powerful movements, violence, or major wars that have far-reaching impacts on the history of a nation or the world. On occasion, these major conflicts signal a period of transition from one era to the next. For this reason, the history of the world is sometimes told as a history of these major conflicts. By studying them we can learn how conflicts build to a boiling point and how we might better resolve conflicts in the future.

6.18 *Nature of Conflict:* Students analyze the nature of conflict, how some have been or might be resolved, and how some have shaped the divisions in the world.