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The Art of the Blueprint: Inquiry in the Classroom

Kathy Swan, John Lee, S.G. Grant, and fellow inquiry travelers

Over the past 10 years, we have asked and reasked our own compelling question, "What is inquiry?" Our first answer to that question came in the form of a standards document, the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards.*[1] We defined inquiry as a set of interlocking and reinforcing dimensions that move from developing questions and planning inquiries to communicating conclusions and taking informed action. Content and skills matter in the C3 Framework, but they do not matter in isolation. Instead, they are integrated into the Inquiry Arc in such a way that they become part of a curriculum and instructional whole. The Inquiry Arc is composed of four distinct but interrelated dimensions: (1) developing questions and planning inquiries, (2) applying disciplinary concepts and tools, (3) evaluating sources and using evidence, and (4) communicating conclusions and taking informed action. Some 38 states have adopted elements or whole sections of the Framework into their state standards such that approximately 35 million students now have opportunities to experience inquiry-based teaching and learning.[2]

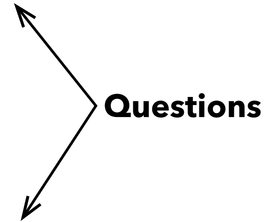
After the publication of the C3 Framework, we again asked, "What is inquiry?" but this time focused on the curricular elements that would enable teachers to model inquiry and to shift classroom instruction to meet the demands/vision of the C3 Framework. Our answer was the Inquiry Design Model (IDM), a theory of inquiry-based instruction centered on a one-page blueprint that defines three essential elements of inquiry-based instruction: questions, tasks, and sources (See the example that follows).[3] Here is a quick rundown of those elements:

- *Questions* are the starting place for inquiry. Compelling questions frame an inquiry by asking a rigorous and relevant question (e.g., What symbol best represents the United States?). Supporting questions sustain the line of inquiry by helping students build necessary background knowledge that help them answer the larger compelling question (e.g., What is a symbol? How do words, actions, and objects represent different ideals that symbolize the United States?).

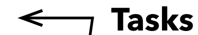
- *Sources* are the building blocks of inquiry. Students use a variety of disciplinary sources (e.g., objects, photographs, film, etc) to investigate compelling and supporting questions and to complete formative and summative performance tasks.

- *Tasks* are the assessment spaces of an inquiry. Formative performance tasks allow students to answer supporting questions by developing key understandings using the sources analyzed in the inquiry process. Summative performance tasks allow students to answer compelling questions through an evidenced-based argument, creative project, or civic action.

How Should We Remember Martin Luther King, Jr.?	
Kentucky Academic Standards for Social Studies	**HS.UH.CH.1.** Examine the ways diverse groups viewed themselves and contributed to the identity of the United States in the world from 1877–present. **HS.UH.CE.5.** Examine the ways in which groups facing discrimination worked to achieve expansion of rights and liberties from 1877-present.
Staging the Compelling Questions	Discuss the following: If *Life* magazine were asking you to select an image that best captures the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., which image would you nominate and why?



Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
Who was MLK and what did he accomplish?	How has MLK been remembered?	Why might the three depictions of MLK be inadequate and/or problematic?
Formative Performance Task	**Formative Performance Task**	**Formative Performance Task**
Create an annotated timeline of events that define MLK's life.	Find evidence to support the three separate claims about MLK, Jr.'s legacy: 1) MLK as Messiah; 2) MLK as Embodiment of the Civil Rights Movement; 3) MLK as a Moderate.	Construct a claim supported with textual evidence that explains why the three depictions of MLK, Jr. might be inadequate and/or problematic.
Featured Sources	**Featured Sources**	**Featured Sources**
Source A: Student's Textbook **Source B**: MLK, Jr. Image Bank	**Source A**: Source packet for MLK as Messiah **Source B**: Source packet for MLK as Embodiment of the Civil Rights Movement **Source C**: Source packet for MLK as a Moderate	**Source A**: Excerpts from *Letter from Birmingham City Jail* (April 16, 1963), Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. **Source B**: Excerpts from *I Have a Dream* speech (August 28, 1963), Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. **Source C**: Excerpts from *Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break the Silence* (April 4, 1967), Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Summative Performance Tasks		
	Argument	*How should we remember Martin Luther King, Jr.?* Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that answers the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources while acknowledging competing views.
	Option 1: Extension	Examine a contemporary monument, *The Embrace* (2023), and discuss the extent to which it captures the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
	Option 2: Taking Informed Action	UNDERSTAND Read and examine the story of MLK told by your history textbook. ASSESS Evaluate the story and whether it captures MLK correctly given the various perspectives investigated during the inquiry. ACT Propose revisions to better capture the legacy of MLK. Alternatively, if the textbook story is complete, write an explanation of your analysis and send a congratulatory note to the textbook publisher.

We see these elements as mutually reinforcing. In other words, you cannot have one without the other. Let's illustrate this interdependence by zooming in on the role of sources and their relationship to questions and tasks. Why are students reading and analyzing sources? They are in search of answers to supporting and compelling questions, questions help frame the "why" of reading and interpreting sources. Students then use those sources to complete formative and summative performance tasks. Sources become the "how" of performance assessments within an inquiry. Students demonstrate their knowledge of *compelling and supporting questions* using information and evidence from *disciplinary sources* in their *formative and summative performance tasks*. It is impossible to remove either questions *or* tasks *or* sources from an inquiry—we argue that they are the "essence" of inquiry.[4]

We have used the IDM blueprint as a tool for making inquiry visible to teachers. In our second book on IDM,[5] we broke down inquiry development into a three-phase, 10-step process where teachers develop blueprints around inquiry topics that are central to social studies. In the first phase, teachers frame an inquiry using a backward design planning process of selecting a topic that is ripe for inquiry,[6] mining that topic for a rich compelling question, and ensuring that the question allows students

to construct divergent arguments. Then, teachers fill an IDM blueprint by focusing on the formative work that students will do to build their background knowledge and capacity for evidence-based summative performance tasks that address the inquiry's compelling question. Lastly, teachers finish their blueprint by putting the finishing touches on their inquiry. In this phase, teachers plan the first and last days of an inquiry experience and provide instructional spaces for students to become curious and invested in the compelling question, to employ a range of old and new technologies to express their arguments, and to use those arguments to make a difference in the world. Together, this process of developing an inquiry helps teachers see the elements of inquiry (questions, tasks, and sources) within the content context of their courses (U.S. history, economics, government, etc.).

Once teachers are able to see these inquiry elements play out on a single blueprint, they are able to begin planning out a series of inquiry experiences for their students. We call this *looping*. At its simplest, looping means offering students opportunities to engage in inquiry in regular intervals and in a coherent fashion within and across grade levels.[7] In our book *Blueprinting an Inquiry Based Curriculum: Planning with the Inquiry Design Model,*[8] we outline five different kinds of blueprints that shrink inquiry down to 1-2 days of instruction (a "focused" blueprint) and give students more instructional agency in forming questions, selecting sources, and defining tasks (a "guided" or "self-directed" blueprint). We use this array of five blueprint types to think about the inquiry experience across a course of study or a curricular inquiry "loop" that features skills and/or concepts that repeat within or across grade levels. Once teachers begin looping inquiry, we start to see real shifts in instructional approaches but also investments in assessment, including standards-based grading approaches calibrated around inquiry. And, Kaboom! Inquiry really takes off when assessment practices change.

Issuing Creative Licenses for the IDM Blueprint

We intentionally created the IDM blueprint to be malleable,[9] enabling teachers to construct questions, tasks, and sources that uniquely animate their course content and instructional practice so it feels like their own. We underscore that flexibility with a creative commons license. Teachers are encouraged to openly share their ideas and for other teachers to adapt those ideas for their own context. In other words, teachers should do what they do best and our field should thrive in the marketplace of inquiry ideas. If you are thinking of the ethos surrounding the common good, you are on the right track!

In the remainder of this article, we introduce you to a group of innovative colleagues who continue to push our thinking about teaching with inquiry through the IDM Blueprint. The following nine *Portraits of Inquiry* are short but powerful vignettes written to demonstrate how the blueprint has taken on different hues and styles and organically come to life in classrooms, districts, and professional learning spaces. We organized these stories so that readers could take a gallery walk approach peering into the classroom studios of some of our most accomplished pedagogical artists. We start with questions and staging questions, move to formative and summative tasks, and then further outward highlighting both innovations (the jigsaw blueprint and assessment) and issues (teaching teachers to teach with inquiry). We conclude with a piece on trust, a teaser on what's to come from the C3 Teachers studio.

Portraits of Inquiry
Teaching for Questions

Ryan Lewis

Questions matter. As science educator Margaret Wertheim remarks, "The problem with most [text]books is that … they focus on the answers. But they don't explain the questions and *why the questions matter"* (emphasis added).[10] In a world of quick and Googl-able facts, the classroom is dangerously close to losing the art of the question. This is a problem. Questions are not just the means to an answer. Questions are also the window into the mind. Question asking reveals levels of understanding and curiosities. As teachers, how we use questions also exposes our teaching philosophies, our view of knowledge, and our own pedagogical dispositions.

Compelling questions surface these dispositions. However, as we get used to seeing units framed by compelling questions, I wonder if this familiarity will breed inertia? Become rote? A task list? If so, my call to teachers is for us to re-evaluate how we ask our questions, and to challenge ourselves not to lose the magic of questioning.

Walter Parker and Diana Hess posit a subtle but powerful distinction in the way teachers use classroom discussion: teaching *with* discussion and teaching *for* discussion.[11] Each reflects the mindset of the teacher: discussion as a vehicle to gather information (teaching *with*), and discussion as a goal worthy of its own end (teaching *for*). I think this simple distinction can apply to questions. Within the IDM, compelling questions are centered as the prime movers of learning. But not all of us approach inquiry this way. Just as teachers might use discussion in their classrooms but not make it the focal point, teachers might teach with questions without ever truly centering them. Here, I offer two dispositions for inquiry: teaching *with* questions and teaching *for* questions. This distinction, I believe, is key to harnessing the power of compelling questions in our classrooms.

What does it look like to teach *with* questions? The goal of questions is to gather information rather than explore it, to focus on the breadth of a topic versus its depth, writing that emphasizes recall over interpretation, and envisions the teacher as a "gatekeeper" that sifts out conflicting information. Most crucially, compelling questions become rigid and ornamental.

On the other hand, teaching *for* questions means compelling questions initiate transformation rather than frame facts. There is a focus on exploring the depth of a topic rather than its breadth. Writing focuses on interpretation rather than recall. The teacher becomes a "facilitator" and fellow questioner. Finally, compelling questions are dynamic, flexible, and full of possibilities. Compelling questions evolve, eliciting different ideas, prompting new directions, and challenging perspectives.

Why does this distinction matter? Because, questions matter.[12] Consider the evolution of a series of compelling questions from my own classroom addressing the Civil Rights Movement:

Was the Civil Rights Movement Successful?

Is the Civil Rights Movement Finished?

What is the Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement?

With each new iteration of the question, the scope of what is possible changes. For each question, there is a change in what my students are prompted to consider. By the third question, the Civil Rights Movement is no longer time-bound and fixed. It is a true movement, crossing borders and creating new

interpretations and ways of historical remembrance.

Perhaps why we teach *with* questions rather than *for* questions is that as teachers, we already know a lot about the answers. Questions become ornamental and fixed because they frankly do frame the answer. They become a pedagogical "paint by numbers." However, if I have learned anything, teaching *for* questions isn't a destination. It is a roadmap for teachers who want their students, and themselves, excited about questions. Teaching *for* questions is about engaging the question so that we are in it. The transformation keeps us on our toes as we think differently about the answers, allowing us to paint a new canvas alongside students.

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Engaging with Staging

Christy Cartner

Covid changed inquiry. Researchers are trying to get to the bottom of the post-Covid student, but in the classroom, there has been a seismic shift on what I know for sure about my students. Where points of student interest and engagement were once fairly predictable, many students now struggle to pay attention or to even care about social studies.

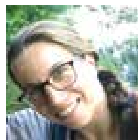
One way I have learned to mitigate this challenge is through Staging the Compelling Question. When I first started teaching with the IDM blueprint, my focus was on the summative performance tasks—what were students going to ultimately *do* in the inquiry. I now focus much of my efforts on a good staging exercise as the pedagogical tipping point that might motivate students to linger in the complexity of a well-formed compelling question.

This past school year, I expanded the staging component into a more elaborate "social studies lab" in an effort to center students' own lives and soften students' entry point of wrestling with big ideas and deliberating tough, but relevant concepts.[13] Each social studies lab offers more than an introduction to the inquiry that follows. The lab is created so that students draw on their own stories, engage in a shared experience, and/or take on the role of a historian, photographer, or interviewer. For example, one staging lab asks students to photograph examples of how gender is portrayed in everyday settings such as their homes, the grocery, the mall, or online, prior to an inquiry on the feminist movement before tackling the compelling question, "x." Another lab asks students to conduct street-style interviews of friends and family, asking "what is a radical?" as a precursor to an inquiry on the Cold War, "Who's to Blame for the Cold War?"[14]

These labs can also create conceptual bookends with the Extension or Informed Action elements of an IDM. Here, I have created examples that range in scope and scale using an inquiry published on C3 Teachers about the development and legacy of Reconstruction.

Compelling Question: What does it take to secure equality?			
Original Staging - Introduce Topic and Build Curiosity (10-20 minutes)	Option 1 **Social Studies Lab** - Identify Patterns and Make Connections (20-30 minutes)	Option 2 **Social Studies Lab** - Make Connections and Curate Questions (45-90 minutes)	Option 3 **Social Studies Lab** - Research from the start of inquiry (Homework + Class)
Examine the picture *The Fifteenth Amendment. Celebrated May 19th 1870* and predict what could have prevented African Americans from experiencing the freedoms shown in the picture.	Use the news filter on a search engine to collect headlines and images published within the past six months using search terms "civil rights," "racial justice," "racial equality," etc. Work in groups to sort and group the articles based on topic, theme, and proximity to students' community.	Where do we see individuals and groups working to advocate for their rights in our community? Collaborate to create a class directory of organizations that includes who they represent and what they want. Develop a list of questions you'd ask their members about how/why they do what they do.	Interview a friend or family member using any of the questions below. Use followup questions to get as much detail from their responses as possible. What does political, social, or economic equality look like? What does it take to secure political, social, or economic equality? Work in small groups to look for patterns in responses.

What I know for sure about inquiry is that Staging the Compelling Question has become an essential gateway for the inquiry. The old adage about students knowing we care before they care what we know is amplified when students are centered in the inquiry from the very first moments of it.



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When a T-Chart Isn't Just a T-Chart

Meghan Hawkins

When I was first introduced to IDM inquiry, the blueprint was clearly innovative, but I was confused by formative tasks. They seemed to be exactly what I was *already* doing in my classroom. I *already* assigned students T-charts. My students would read a source, write down some phrases on each side of the chart, share out, and then the class moved on. Simply put, students were learning, and yet my classroom did not feel particularly innovative or effective.

What I did not understand in these early attempts at inquiry, was that the IDM infuses a clear purpose into formative tasks. They aren't just formative tasks—they are formative *performance* tasks. Students *perform* a series of exercises so that they practice critical inquiry skills, acquire important content, and show me that they are ready for the summative argument task. Now, paired with a thoughtfully curated source

set, a T-chart becomes so much more than a graphic organizer when guided by a robust compelling question and in service of a summative argumentative task. No longer an activity to dutifully complete (or stubbornly ignore), the T-chart becomes an exercise in critical thinking that students return to when crafting a claim. When I started using the formative tasks in this way, students stopped asking the pervasive "*Why* do I have to do this?" and I started really understanding the inquiry process.

Formative performance tasks may not be glamorous. They may appear simple. Yet this seeming simplicity belies the integral role of formative performance tasks in getting students to really grapple with the questions, wrestle with sources, and find their voice in summative performance tasks.

Formative performance tasks are most powerful when the task logic develops the skills students need to complete the summative task.[15] For example, the C3 Teachers' inquiry "Why Was the US on the Winning Side of World War II?"[16] was designed for students with inquiry experience—the formative performance tasks did not work for my inquiry novices. Based on the needs of my students, I built an identifying evidentiary task logic[17] to develop an initial skill in the inquiry process—reading a source and finding evidence. By the end of the series, students had accumulated key pieces of evidence that would help them build their claims about why the United States was on the winning side of World War II.

Formative Performance Task 1	Formative Performance Task 2	Formative Performance Task 3
Create a T-chart documenting the homefront and its impact on the war front.	Create a timeline highlighting American contributions to Allied victory in Europe.	Create a fishbone diagram of the causes that led to Allied victory in the Pacific.

After practicing how to identify evidence, the next inquiry's task logic focuses on identifying an author's argument. As students grapple with the C3 Teachers' inquiry "Who is to Blame for the Cold War?,"[18] the task logic allows students to discover that where agency is ascribed, whose behavior is described, and the choice of descriptors can help identify an author's claim.

Formative Performance Task 1	Formative Performance Task 2	Formative Performance Task 3
Create a T-chart of actions taken by the US and USSR that heightened tensions.	Make a list of the examples of problematic behavior by the USSR that each author provides.	Use a T-chart to record the adjectives and verbs the author uses to describe the US and the USSR.

And so it goes in my classroom, one task logic begets the next, begets the next. Sourcing skills stack upon claim-making skills, stack upon increasingly complex argumentation skills.

So, when you enter my classroom, you will likely see students with T-charts, Venn diagrams, concept webs, or timelines. You will see them reading sources and writing things down, as you would have in my first year of teaching. But, if you stop to listen, you will also hear students engaging in conversations about the sources, linking the sources back to their lives, and frequently repeating the compelling question somewhat quizzically as they grapple with what kind of claim they might make later in the summative task. And, if you come back a few days later, you will see students with the same T-charts, spread out on their desks with their other formative tasks, as they search for evidence to build an effective argument in support of a claim. The T-charts are no longer just T-charts.

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The Jigsaw Blueprint: Learning to Flex with the IDM

James Carlson and Joel Hinrichs

Last year, the social studies department of Branford Public Schools in Connecticut began the process of "refreshing" our curriculum, a cycle that happens every 5-10 years in our district. This time around, we engaged in professional development around the Inquiry Design Model (IDM).[19] We started with a high school Current Issues course, which acts as our eleventh-grade core social studies course as well as our state-mandated course in Civics and American Government.

Our first challenge in writing an inquiry-driven curriculum was understanding how inquiries relate to larger units. Could an inquiry be an entire unit? Or, does an inquiry exist within a unit? Or, does an inquiry serve as the end product of a unit? The good news was the answer turned out to be "all of the above." An inquiry can serve as a standalone unit, a focused case study within a unit, or a culminating activity at the conclusion of a unit.[20] Furthermore, we went on to learn that the IDM blueprint template could be just as adaptable as the idea of inquiry itself. We took these insights about inquiry as a license to further flex the blueprint.

We started with an inquiry focused on Sino-American relations and the U.S. role in the Middle East. We wanted students to look at the region from a broad perspective so that they evaluated the complexity of economic, national security, and human concerns and their role in formulating U.S. policy. As we began to consider what ideas students needed to grapple with to formulate a more holistic U.S. policy, the list became daunting. How could we get students to fully consider a variety of issues and perspectives within the constraints of a high school schedule? The perennial challenge of breadth versus depth confronted us as we tried to do right by the IDM.

That's when we began to flex the blueprint. We played with a cooperative learning jigsaw approach for the formative work that would allow us to cover more content ground.[21] And then, inquiry magic! We adapted the IDM blueprint to accommodate a jigsaw. Below, we walk through elements of our blueprint innovation.

The compelling question, "How should the U.S. respond to China?" anchored the inquiry along with a Staging the Compelling Question exercise that asked students to read a story on growing concerns about TikTok and have a discussion about how the United States should respond.

How Should the US Respond to China?	
Staging the Question	Listen to the NPR story (2022), "FBI says China could use TikTok to spy on Americans including government workers." Discuss the growing concerns about TikTok and what should be done (if anything).

From there, we developed a foundational supporting question and formative performance task that establishes a baseline for all students' understanding of the challenges of Sino-American relations with the supporting question, "What makes China so formidable?" Students are then placed into five expert groups to examine a particular aspect of China, including trade, security, human rights, geo-political, and environmental. Each group is assigned a supporting question for the expert group:

- Group 1 (Trade): How should the U.S. deal with China on **trade**?
- Group 2 (Security): How should the U.S. respond to China regarding **espionage**?
- Group 3 (Human Rights): Why should the U.S. respond to China's **human rights** record?
- Group 4 (Geo-Political): Why should the U.S. respond to China's aggression towards **Taiwan**?
- Group 5 (Environmental): How should the U.S. respond to China's **environmental** record?

The expert groups use a variety of featured sources to complete a formative performance task which includes constructing a claim with evidence answering their unique supporting question. (See formative work from the blueprint that follows).

Foundational Supporting Question	Group 1 Supporting Question	Group 2 Supporting Question	Group 3 Supporting Question	Group 4 Supporting Question	Group 5 Supporting Question
	Trade	Security	Human Rights	Geo-Political	Environmental
What makes China so formidable?	How should the US deal with China on **trade**?	How should the US respond to China regarding **espionage**?	Why should the US respond to China's **human rights** record?	Why should the US respond to China's aggression towards **Taiwan**?	How should the US respond to China's **environmental record**?
Formative Performance Task	**Formative Performance Task**	**Formative Performance Task**	**Formative Performance Task**	**Formative Performance Task**	**Formative Performance Task**
Create a 1-page infographic that shows how China is formidable geographically, economically, militarily.	Construct a claim with evidence on why the US should worry about trade with Chinese.	Construct a claim with evidence on why the US should worry about Chinese espionage.	Construct a claim with evidence on why the US should worry about China's human rights record.	Construct a claim with evidence on why the US should worry about China's aggression towards Taiwan.	Construct a claim with evidence on why the US should worry about China's environmental record.
Featured Sources	**Featured Sources**	**Featured Sources**	**Featured Sources**	**Featured Sources**	**Featured Sources**
Source A: CIA World Factbook: statistics, images, and map of China **Source B**: China on the World Stage, *Choices*, Background Essay **Source C**: Rise of China, Newsela.	**Source A**: People's Republic of Capitalism, Discovery Channel, Ted Koppel.	**Source A**: What the balloon saga tells us about China's espionage program, *Washington Post*, 2023. **Source B**: The China Threat, FBI, video and article	**Source A**: "Who are the Uyghurs and why is China being accused of genocide?", BBC News, 2022. **Source B**: "China Facial recognition and state control", The Economist, 2018 video.	**Source A:** China and Taiwan: A Simple Guide, BBC, 2022 **Source B**: "Why China-Taiwan relations are so tense." Council on Foreign Relations, 2022.	**Source A**: China's Environmental abuses, United States Department of State, 2021 **Source B**: Why China's climate policy matters to us all, BBC, 2021

We thought of these expert groups as small committees that could then "brief" the entire group in the summative argument task, almost like a classroom Model United Nations. Instead of constructing an argument, students are asked to answer the compelling question, "How should the U.S. respond to China?" with the following:

> *Prepare a brief for the Classroom Council that summarizes the issues that should worry the U.S. Report to the council any evidence that substantiates your claim about why the U.S. should worry about China.*

After the Classroom Council, students engage with an extension and action. See the excerpted blueprint that follows.

Summative Performance Task	**ARGUMENT** ***Why should the US worry about China?*** Prepare a brief for the Classroom Council that summarizes the issues that should worry the US. Report to the council any evidence that substantiates your claim about why the US should worry about China.
	EXTENSION Analyze a series of political cartoons on the relationship between China and the US. Write a caption for the cartoon using what you have learned in the inquiry and detailing the artistic techniques used to convey a message.
	TAKING INFORMED ACTION: ***How should the US respond to China?*** **Understand:** Conduct additional research on a worrisome issue that faces the US because of worsening Chinese relations (trade, espionage, human rights). **Assess:** Examine options for how the US might address the issue noting the controversy and complexity of the possible responses. See handout for getting started. (Trade example) **Act:** Write a letter to your U.S. Representative or Senator advising them on how to handle the future relationship between the US and China. Supporting posters can also be made.

We are proud of our "jigsaw" IDM blueprint and the way it supports and structures a unit-based approach allowing us to overcome the breadth-depth dilemma. We have gone on to create additional jigsaw inquiries as we continue to flex our inquiry muscles in all of our social studies courses.

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Joel Hinrichs is a social studies teacher and coach in the Branford, Connecticut public school system.

When Questions Have No Right Answer

Bonnie Lewis

The presence of search engines on the internet can make us think that every question has an answer. Worse, our reliance on soundbites and social media posts can make it seem like every question has a *right* answer. But most questions worth asking don't have a clear answer, which is usually why we ask—and keep asking—them. *What defines a people? How do we make peace with the past? How do we make our voices heard?* The C3 Framework and the IDM blueprint are about the journey *and* the destination when asking and answering compelling questions.[22] During an inquiry, students engage in deliberation before constructing arguments so that they can wrestle with the evidence before taking a stance. This process is an essential practice of democratic citizenship that gets lost when we only engage in debating and arguing. Argumentation within the C3 Framework and IDM blueprint is so much more than writing claims backed with evidence. It is about students learning how to think for themselves within the classroom so that, one day, they can do so in their communities.

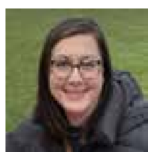
Today, social studies is in the hot seat. It is not the first—or presumably the last—time this will happen. However, it does mean that what is foundational to inquiry-based social studies, asking and answering questions, can create contention within communities and classrooms. Social studies speaks to our humanity: who we are, who we have been, and who we hope to be. Each year, as we march through our curriculum maps, we implicitly ask and try to answer these questions. Social studies is controversial today because it feels personal. It is personal. Yet, the controversy does not stop us from engaging in the act of teaching good social studies but instead requires us to thoughtfully design our inquiries around

compelling questions that have multiple correct answers.

In my roles as a pre-service teacher, in-service teacher, and now teacher educator, I have observed countless teachers teach using IDM blueprints. The compelling question makes or breaks the inquiry, especially when the topic is contentious. In 2021, I was a part of a team that wrote inquiries around *hard histories* for Syracuse City schools.[23] We used inquiry to engage in the hard parts of our past during a national moment of reckoning and political pushback. We knew that the compelling questions we crafted needed to be able to hold their own as rigorous, intellectually stimulating, and, above all else, *deliberative*. Each compelling question had to be designed in such a way as to have multiple ways it could be answered using evidence so that the inquiry encourages independent thinking. Designing compelling questions this way did two things. First, it guarded against accusations of indoctrination by allowing space for different perspectives. Second, it protected teachers and students from tangentenal arguments by grounding student responses in curated sources.

For our inquiry on American Reconstruction, we used the compelling question, *What does Reconstruction say about the U.S.?* This compelling question provides the opportunity for multiple evidentiary arguments. For example, by using voting records from the 1870s and images of Black congressmen as evidence, students could argue the Reconstruction period shows that the U.S. cares about equal representation in government. On the other hand, students could argue that Reconstruction shows that the U.S. did not follow through on its promises to extend freedoms to Black citizens, citing evidence from voting records from the 1880s and the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan. Both would be right, despite arguing different stances.

We need inquiries that reflect the complexity inherent in questions that matter. In the years that I have engaged with the C3 Framework and IDM inquiries, I have come to see the argument stems from compelling questions as the most important and innovative piece of designing an inquiry. Compelling questions open classrooms to civic deliberation by helping students understand that there is more than one way to construct an evidentiary claim addressing a compelling question. These types of questions teach us that *both can be true*.



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Seeing Democracy

Ryan New

When you walk into a music room, you expect to hear music. When you walk into an art room, you expect to see and experience art. When you walk into a social studies classroom, you should expect to see and hear democracy. Taking Informed Action (TIA) provides an instructional opportunity for seeing democracy.[24] Yet, taking *informed* action can be seen as the most overwhelming part of the inquiry. There is no textbook, no teacher's edition, and often no right answers. In the following sections, I suggest several ways that teachers can overcome some of the hurdles of making TIA more visible in social studies.

1. **Start small, start with the familiar.**
   An accessible first Taking Informed Action is to invite a guest speaker. Recently, a fifth grade social

studies classroom investigated the compelling question, "How Can Power Lead to Oppression?" and students invited their principal to discuss power and oppression in their school. Students worked in small groups to develop, refine, and prioritize questions to ask. The first question the principal was asked was, "Have you ever accidentally oppressed a student and how did you use your power to fix it?" The principal, moved by the students' thoughtfulness, answered with candor, regret, and hope. Students listened to their principal's honest reflection, transformed by their own agency. A seemingly small action became a profound moment. The lesson for us was don't be afraid to go small!

2. **Use the IDM to ensure Taking Informed Action is authentic problem solving.**
   TIA exercises make connections beyond the classroom, helping students learn the real world power of making a difference in their own communities. The following two examples show how we have used the Inquiry Design Model to animate action in our work with two different communities, the Kentucky's Frazier History Museum and the U.S. Census Bureau.

Example 1: In a high school inquiry, "How Does Where You Live Affect How You Live?" students explore redlining and connect it to Kentucky's Frazier History Museum West of 9th Exhibit.

Taking Informed Action	**UNDERSTAND** After learning about the impact that history has on the way people live today, consider which aspect of your neighborhood you would like to know more about. **ASSESS** Interview 1-2 members of your community to understand how they experience the neighborhood they live in. **ACT** Compose a classroom blog of compiled interviews conducted in your school.

Example 2: In the middle school inquiry, "What Story Does the Census Tell Us?" students address barriers by partnering with the U.S. Census Bureau to complete the 2010 decennial census.

Taking Informed Action	**UNDERSTAND** Investigate barriers that might result in undercounting residents of Kentucky (e.g., language barriers, perceptions of Census's use of data, etc.). **ASSESS** Examine potential ways to overcome those barriers and make the Census more accessible to Kentucky residents. **ACT** Create an information campaign that will make the community aware of the Census's importance to ensure an accurate count for the 2020 Census.

These two TIAs show the power of moving from a compelling question to an authentic issue in the community. True, students can construct wonderful arguments, but by concluding the investigation with a real-world experience, students connect to the community and can leave a lasting legacy about the real power of social studies.

3. **Don't go it alone: Partner with civic organizations that specialize in civic action.**
   The MIKVA Challenge is an action civics program we adopted as a cornerstone for Taking Informed Action in Jefferson County, Kentucky. It often serves as the Taking Informed Action part of our blue-printed curriculum. For example, *Project Soapbox* provides opportunities for students to write and deliver a speech about an issue that is important to them. Students from third grade to seniors in our district have called us to action around diverse topics such as mental illness, gun control, microplastics, need for school nurses, the eviction crisis, political polarization and sexual assault. Student speeches are a reminder that our classrooms are porous places, and we have a responsibility to help students address issues facing them.

One of the greatest threats to democracy is apathy, disillusionment, and inertia. Taking *Informed* Action is our music, our art, and our pedagogical tool for helping students see democracy.

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Knuffle Bunny in the Blueprint?
How Social Studies and ELA Connect in the Elementary Classroom

Laura Darolia

In November of 2022, my kindergartener came home with a paper grocery bag cut into the shape of a vest and scribbled with various designs he'd created. When I asked what (in the actual heck) this craft was, he responded, "my Indian outfit." In January 2023, my second grader wrote a piece about if he "had a dream," a common elementary social studies lesson on Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy. My son wrote that his dream is "to win the World Cup."

It is a common assumption that young children cannot think critically and should not engage with complicated topics.[25] However, elementary teachers who use inquiry in their classrooms know this is not true. The examples I provided represent missed pedagogical opportunities. Using the same lessons year after year and offering the same superficial content to children robs them of the chance to think deeply and to develop and sharpen their skills of analysis and argumentation.

In what other ways could elementary teachers teach about Thanksgiving and Martin Luther King Jr.? What happens when *questions* are posed that ignite curiosity in a room of five and six year olds, who are already inherently curious? What light bulbs turn on when young children dive into *sources* (photographs, maps, videos, artifacts) to help them make sense of content? In what ways is thinking challenged and expanded when our youngest learners complete *tasks* that show how they grapple with content?

The IDM Blueprint offers teachers a starting point by outlining questions, tasks, and sources for an inquiry rooted in academic standards.[26] In an elementary school classroom, sources—the meat of the inquiry—can take a variety of forms. Visual sources like photographs, artifacts, or artwork remove reliance on decoding words, which provides pre and emergent readers access to analysis. Teachers can modify text-heavy sources in a variety of ways (annotating, excerpting, simplifying vocabulary) to make them more accessible to young students. Additionally, trade books—a staple of elementary school classrooms—can be used as meaningful sources in inquiries.

One significant challenge is that time dedicated to social studies is limited in elementary classrooms. English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics are prioritized, for the sake of standardized test scores. It is true, however, that social studies lessons include intentional opportunities for students to read, write, listen, speak, and create, and to do so like historians, economists, political scientists, and geographers.

Notably, social studies instruction has a positive impact on reading improvement in young children, while increasing minutes of ELA instruction does not.[27]

Consider a first-grade inquiry guided by the compelling question, "How can two people see the same event differently?" This is an introduction to multiple perspectives, which is an important foundational concept to studying history (and life in general). Instruction is organized around supporting questions, tasks, and sources that create space for children to grapple with the idea of perspective.

Can two people see the same event differently?	
Staging the Question	Show students this optical illusion (faces or a vase?), then ask students to share what they see. After exploring the illusion, ask students if they can see both images.

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
Why do people sometimes get upset?	How might people react to the changes in their lives?	How do we let people know how we feel?
Formative Performance Task	**Formative Performance Task**	**Formative Performance Task**
Students record reasons for disagreement in the story and then make a text-to-self connection.	Students complete a chart diagramming the changes and corresponding emotions for each character in the story.	Students pick a character in the story who expressed a problem, then answer questions about its resolution.
Featured Sources	**Featured Sources**	**Featured Sources**
Source A: Knuffle Bunny by Mo Willems	**Source B**: The Terrible Thing That Happened at Our House by Marge Blaine	**Source C**: The Day the Crayons Quit by Drew DeWalt

Summative Performance Task	
Summative Performance Task	**ASSESS** Can two people see the same event differently? Construct an argument (e.g., a sentence with a picture, a drawing, an answered question) that evaluates differing viewpoints using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources while acknowledging competing views.
	EXTEND Students watch the final minute of a major sporting event (Packers, Brewers, Badgers, Bucks, Herd, etc.) and discuss the reactions of fans from both teams.

Note that the sources included in this inquiry are all trade books. First graders, who are likely used to sitting on the carpet listening to their teacher read a story aloud, do so with intent through this inquiry. While listening to the classic tale of *Knuffle Bunny*, they think about why people get upset and then connect the idea of disagreements to their own lives. *The Terrible Thing That Happened at Our House* focuses students on life changes and the ensuing emotions. Considering how to communicate feelings is the pulse of *The Day the Crayons Quit*. While students may be familiar with these books, posing supporting questions and assigning meaningful tasks adds an extra dimension to the stories, allowing students to engage with them through a different lens.

The IDM Blueprint provides a structure to design lessons rooted in social studies content that incorporate ELA skills. This is effective and efficient teaching and elementary students are ready for it.

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Measuring What Matters: IDM Assessment

Beau Dickenson and John Hobson

What we measure shows what we think *matters* in the classroom. Unfortunately, students in social studies have historically been assessed on low-level and often random bits of knowledge, rather than what they can actually *do* with that knowledge.[28] This situation has often produced a tedious curriculum that focuses on memorizing discrete facts and teachers "teaching to the test." Ultimately, this approach has been boring for students and bad for social studies.

Educators have found creative ways to navigate these obstacles during the No Child Left Behind era, and after more than a decade, their creative energies coalesced into a new paradigm in the form of the C3 Framework[29] and the ensuing Inquiry Design Model.[30] IDM provided an ideal framework to fundamentally change the social studies classroom and finally move beyond the discipline's persistent content dilemma: **curricula** was made more viable through an emphasis on conceptual understandings and authentic source material; **instruction** was backwards-designed, thoughtfully scaffolded, and framed through compelling questions; and **assessments** were skills-based so that content knowledge could be used as *evidence* in support of student reasoning.

Consider the following assessment items students encountered in Virginia over the past 20 years—the first one is a multiple-choice question about the Harlem Renaissance adapted from the Virginia Standards of Learning test for seventh graders; the second is an inquiry-based assessment about the same content which was implemented in Albemarle County Public Schools. The multiple-choice question simply asks, *What was the literary and artistic movement centered on African-American culture during the 1920s known as?* followed by the typical options of A, B, C, and D with three distractors and the correct answer. The second assessment asks students to respond to the open-ended question, "*How can art be used as a tool for resistance?*" Both questions assess student knowledge of the Harlem Renaissance, however, the first trivializes the content while the latter deepens understanding and connects to universal themes such as resistance and cultural expression, all the while engaging students in a rich exploration of an artistic movement. The implications for teaching and learning are dramatic if our assessment items challenge students to actually do something with the content.

The backwards design, formative assessment, and instructional scaffolding embedded within IDM ensures that the summative assessment of an inquiry is a valid measure.[31] Framing this summative exercise through a compelling question that challenges students to make evidence-based claims further elevates the learning experience by making the assessment *authentic*. Valid and authentic assessment should matter in a classroom because it will support better instruction. If we teach through inquiry and then assess through a knowledge-based multiple-choice test, a fundamental disconnect will persist, and the principles of the C3 Framework will never fully be realized in the social studies classroom.

Over the past few years, Virginia has been leading the way in shifting towards a more authentic assessment model. In 2015, the Virginia Social Studies Leaders Consortium (VSSLC) worked with legislators to eliminate the traditional Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in third grade, U.S. History I, and U.S. History II and replace them with locally-developed performance-based assessments.[32] While this was a welcome change, there was little infrastructure to support such a fundamental shift toward C3 principles. The Virginia Social Studies Leaders Consortium continued these efforts in 2020 by working with the Virginia Department of Education in consulting with C3 Teachers to utilize the IDM as a framework for

performance assessment across the Commonwealth. This has since evolved into menus of inquiries as state assessments through which students can obtain high school credits in social studies courses.

Virginia's journey has shown that teacher advocacy is essential in working with legislators and policy-makers to realize the inherent value of these assessment practices, as well as how they have the potential to finally unlock the historic barriers to instructional innovation in the social studies classroom. And, if best practice is any indicator, we should always begin with the end in mind and first ensure that what we *measure* reflects what truly *matters*.

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What's Better than One IDM Inquiry?

Nick Stamoulacatos

Inquiry needs to be more than a once-in-a-while experience. After all, inquiry is the essence of social studies, and we know students need lots and lots of practice to get better at it. But social studies is typically a hard sell for elementary teachers; adding inquiry to the mix could create some serious resistance. And yet, elementary classrooms are perfect for both. Our youngest citizens are filled with curiosity and hope and they want to make a difference in the world. In the Syracuse City School District, we used the Inquiry Design Model (IDM) to revolutionize our third-grade curriculum.

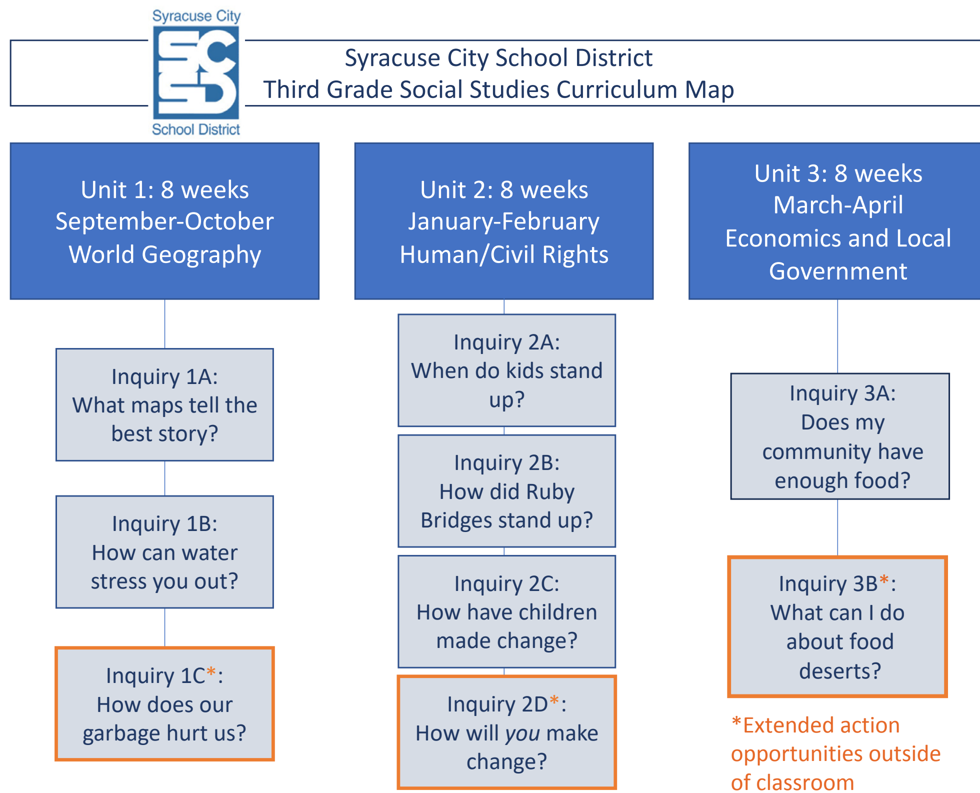
Like many districts across the country, social studies gets short-shrift in elementary classrooms. Social studies often shares time with science, and so teachers toggle between the two in eight-week units. One of the things we wanted to do in Syracuse is make the third-grade content more relevant and interesting. To that end, we created an inquiry loop of three units and nine IDM inquiries around powerful topics to brighten up social studies for our third graders.[33] We focused our efforts on three core topics: World Geography, Human/Civil Rights, and Economics/Government.

In the World Geography unit, we focus on maps, water, and garbage—three essential elements of geography and ones students can relate to. In the final inquiry of the unit, "How does garbage hurt us?" students learn about the journey that garbage takes once it is thrown away, including its local and/or global destination, the impact it has on water supplies, and its influence on human populations. The culminating inquiry asks students to take informed action by conducting a waste audit of their school, generating solutions to reduce waste, and proposing a school-wide initiative.

In the Human/Civil Rights unit, students work through four inquiries. The first three look at children who have stood up for a cause: children marches during the Civil Rights Movement; Ruby Bridges and the dangers she faced; and children who are activists in their communities around the world. Together, these three inquiries set the stage for students to complete the fourth inquiry, "How do I make change?" where they investigate how they can make an impact on their community. Students examine an issue that is important to them, assess what can be done to help with the issue and the challenges that might ensue and plan ways they can take action on their issue.

In the last unit on Economics and Local Government, students complete three inquiries investigating food deserts. In the first, students consider what causes an area to be classified as a "food desert," the detrimental impacts food access problems can have on populations, and the need and means to advocate for a "food oasis." In the second inquiry, students synthesize what they have learned by investigating

Syracuse's food deserts. Students research the factors impacting the health of the city and then begin to evaluate how they can contribute to addressing this concern. The final inquiry enables students to take action and address Syracuse's food environment with school or city stakeholders.



Third grade teachers and students love the new curriculum for several reasons. First, throughout the inquiries, students read a variety of texts including trade books, informational texts, photographs, and maps. This intentionality around sources helps them with their literacy goals. Second, the focus on culturally relevant topics (e.g., food deserts) and real opportunities for action makes the curriculum authentic in the very best sense of that word. With inquiry at the helm, there is always a question; answering that question with evidence-based arguments and informed actions gives students a real-word experience. Finally, at this point in our inquiry journey, I do not have to say to our teachers or students, "we are going to do inquiry" because, at this point, inquiry *is* social studies and social studies *is* inquiry.

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Zoom in, Focus, and Take the Shot: Reflections on Teaching Inquiry

Lauren Colley, Emma Thacker, and Rebecca Mueller

As we reflect on our past decade working with K-12 pre-service and in-service social studies teachers, we notice three shifts in how we help teachers learn to teach with inquiry.

Zooming In to Zoom Out: Questions, Tasks, and Sources

Teachers are often overwhelmed by the breadth and depth of the social studies content and skills needed for their students to complete a full inquiry. We have found this to be particularly true with our pre-service teachers who are learning how to effectively design instruction for the first time. In order to tackle this challenge, utilizing focused inquiries or the *"essence of inquiry"* allows teachers to zero in on a lesson-sized piece of inquiry construction and implementation before scaling up to the full IDM.[34]

Centering on questions, tasks, and sources within a focused inquiry, allows teachers to narrow the cognitive load by shrinking the question and amount of formative and summative work thereby creating a more manageable inquiry.[35] In a focused inquiry, there is still a compelling question to be answered by an evidenced-based argument, but the question is narrower in scope and the argumentative task could consist of a single claim and counterclaim. It also allows them time to practice inquiry design and implementation in ways that more closely mimic their everyday classroom praxis. Once they feel more experienced with focused inquiries, scaling up to a full-sized IDM feels less daunting because teachers have built skills they can apply in the IDM. Teachers can then zoom out and ask broader compelling questions and build more complex sourcework for their students in the IDM.

In and Out of Focus: The Importance of Questions

Questions can prove especially tricky for teachers, and both compelling and supporting questions provide unique challenges. Many teachers overcomplicate the compelling question in the desire to promote deep thinking. The compelling question should inspire and focus the inquiry, but an array of instructional decisions contribute to the intellectual rigor of the inquiry. When implemented effectively, a simple question can be the most compelling. Teachers may be more comfortable crafting supporting questions, but it is easy to think of them in isolation and lose focus on how the questions work together.

Compelling question types provide a useful scaffold.[36] Teachers can draft and stress-test different types of questions for the same topic and consider which best brings their instructional goals into focus. We have also learned that an important step in developing a cohesive inquiry is prompting teachers to share how they would explain the question logic to students.[37]

Questions are tough, and we have found that workshopping questions with colleagues often produces the best results. We use example inquiries on C3teachers to support teachers in understanding compelling and supporting questions and question logic and to model the reality that questions can and should evolve throughout the inquiry-development process.

Taking the Shot: Classroom Realities

Inevitably, when we introduce teachers to the idea of teaching with inquiry, we are met with a healthy dose of skepticism. Sure, the IDM seems like a useful tool and inquiry sounds good in theory, but who has time to actually use it in the classroom when we barely have time to go to the bathroom? We invite teachers to suspend disbelief and try it.

We model teaching with inquiry in our methods classes so students experience the IDM as learners prior to being asked to design inquiry-based instruction. Before jumping into the steps of designing inquiry, we now invite teachers to explore existing inquiries on C3teachers.org. There is little point in re-creating the wheel when there are strong existing resources out there, and we have shifted to supporting teachers to adapt existing inquiries to meet the needs of their students and curricular contexts. We are still happy to support teachers in designing inquiries from scratch but have found that it has been helpful to familiarize them with practical examples prior to doing so.

Shifting how we approach preparing teachers to teach with inquiry has helped us prepare a more attractive canvas for teachers, and we will continue reflecting and trying new approaches. The more examples of inquiry that teachers can experience for themselves, the better.

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What's Ahead? Trusting Inquiry and Teaching with the Inquiry Design Model

Trust has surfaced in every conversation with an inquiry teacher and in every classroom visit as evidenced in each of the previous Portraits. Why trust? Students need space to figure things out in an inquiry. Teachers need to trust students and give them that space. And students need to trust teachers to make that space meaningful and to be there when they lose their way. Sometimes that space is uncomfortable and teachers will need to nurture students and scaffold the process so that they can ultimately embrace that intellectual freedom.

Arriving at trust has been a *Eureka!* moment for us further deepening our curiosity about trust and its relationship to inquiry. But trust is one of those words that is kind of squishy, and a platitude like, "just trust your students" seems unsatisfying and possibly frustrating for teachers wanting to engage with inquiry-based instruction. So, *trust* us, you are going to want to read on!

We have landed on three key inquiry processes that build a culture of trust in the classroom: deliberation, collaboration, and production.[38]

Deliberation involves instructional practices that enable students to listen to each other's ideas and speak about their own. These practices might include a Harkness Discussion, Think-Pair-Share, Take a Stand debate, or Socratic Discussion. These types of deliberative experiences engender respect for others and an appreciation for a pluralistic democracy where people hold different perspectives on life. Deliberative exercises build trust by fostering respect for ideas and *empathy* between students and between teacher and students because they show that teachers trust their students to think about big ideas.

Collaboration involves instructional practices that allow students to work with others to problem solve through teamwork. These practices might include a Jigsaw task, a Question Formulation Technique exercise, or a Structured Academic Controversy. During collaborative experiences, students negotiate with others and learn to respect other ways of knowing and doing. If a task is "group worthy," students learn to value team members' strengths and to value their own contributions to the whole. These kinds of experiences build trust by creating *interdependence* between students and demonstrating that a teacher trusts

their students to work with others.

Production involves instructional practices that allow students to construct meaningful work. These practices could include an evidentiary argument or a summative project (e.g., public service announcement, museum exhibit) or it could include important formative work like a map, timeline, or T-Chart. When students produce work, they risk putting their ideas out there and cultivate *agency* in the process. Healthy inquiry cultures allow students to explore frontiers and create forgiving spaces to learn and grow. In doing so, they build classroom trust.

By allowing students space to think (**deliberate** ideas), talk (**collaborate** around ideas), and do (**produce** ideas), teachers build a culture of classroom trust with their students that engenders key attitudes of empathy, interdependence, and agency that can accelerate inquiry-based learning in the classroom. While these processes and attributes are not exclusive to social studies, they do connect deeply to the mission of preparing students for civic life.

So, fellow inquiry travelers, stay tuned! We will expand on the three processes above with specific guidance on instructional exercises that enable a trust-worthy classroom in an upcoming book. In the meantime, let's keep trusting inquiry!

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