Lesson Plans Designed for and Inspired by the C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards

C. Frederick Risinger

Last year, at the NCSS Annual Meeting in New Orleans, I went to several sessions that presented, described, and discussed the C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards. I was quite impressed by the partnerships and support from professional organizations such as the American Bar Association, the American Historical Association, and the Council for Economic Education. I was also impressed with the number of states that have adopted all or part of the C3 Framework or blended them into their own state standards. Finally, I was quite impressed and excited when I heard that a generous grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, in partnership with the National Center for Literacy Education, had developed free professional tools and resources to help teachers across the nation learn about and use the C3 Framework. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is internationally focused on bringing enhanced health care to the world’s people, ending extreme poverty, and improving U.S. high school and post-secondary education.

As most of you know, I have been lukewarm on the Common Core national standards and many state and local standards and guidelines because they have an emphasis on factual knowledge rather than inquiry. But they didn’t discuss national or international issues in light of the historical, civic, geographical, economic, and sociological knowledge students were learning in class. I have believed throughout my teaching career at the high school and university level that the goal of K-12 social studies is citizenship education. That requires knowledge, of course, but it also should include looking at the contemporary world—local, national, and international—to see what that knowledge suggests about social and political issues and what we might be able to do about them. That is citizenship education.

I once received a letter from a young woman who had been in my U.S. government class about 10–12 years before. I kept it framed on my office wall the rest of my career. It read, “Mr. Risinger, you probably won’t remember me, but I was in your Problems of Democracy class several years ago.” (I looked at the signature and recognized her maiden name and remembered her as a quiet, but very smart, young lady who loved small group sessions about political issues.) She continued, “You always said that if we felt changes should be made in the world, then we should see what we can do about them. I just want you to know that I am currently serving as Speaker of the House in [state withheld because I couldn’t track her down to ask her permission]. The other day, my son brought his new history textbook home, and I was leafing through it. I saw you were one of the co-authors. I just want you to know that it makes me feel good to know that, in a way, my son has my favorite teacher as his teacher.”

Again, as many of you know, I use this column to highlight websites and other Internet resources that will help classroom teachers. Whether it’s an historical issue, such as World War I, a political issue, such as the role of immigration in the 2016 presidential election, or a major world issue that must (or should) be dealt with, such as global warming, Internet resources can frequently provide up-to-date and innovative information. I frequently try to find sites that provide lesson plans that teachers can use directly or as guides to help them produce lessons specifically for their students and their course’s goals.

Many of these recommended sites contain lesson plans made specifically by teachers using the C3 Framework as their guide. Some sites have impressed me in the past with the quality of their
lesson plans and are now listed as using the C3 Framework. In states such as New York, Arkansas, Illinois, and Connecticut, C3 is part of state standards development. I encourage you to take a look at most, if not all, of these sites. I think you’ll find some interesting lessons and links to other resources for your classroom or for teachers you supervise.

**Share My Lesson**
https://sharemylesson.com/partner/national-council-social-studies

Here’s the site where you can find a large number of lesson plans based on C3 guidelines in partnership with NCSS. You can select lesson plans by grade level (K-2 and 3-5), middle, and high school. The lessons are really great! I loved the NCSS article, “Manifest Destiny and the Cherokee Removal” (being part Cherokee myself). But you wouldn’t be able to design this lesson if you were bound by the Common Core standards. Please, check this site out.

**C3 Teachers**
www.c3teachers.org/about-c3-teachers/

This is a great site that clarifies the primary goals and elements of C3 lessons and instruction, such as “The Inquiry Design Model.” The “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” lesson asks the question, “Can words lead to war?” One inquiry, titled “Needs and Wants,” is designed for kindergarten and is part of the New York C3 effort. The New York C3 hub offers 84 inquiries distributed across all grade levels.

**Los Angeles County Board of Education**
www.lacoe.edu/CurriculumInstruction/HistorySocialScience/C3Framework.aspx

Los Angeles County has done an excellent job of bringing the C3 Framework to the local level and developing Lesson Plan Templates that will help teachers benefit from C3 while, at the same time, meeting state guidelines. Even for people who are not particularly familiar with the Framework, these templates guide you through the process in such a way that you learn the goals of C3 and design a lesson plan that fits your curriculum and course. I strongly encourage you to work in groups with 1-3 other teachers to develop a few lessons. You will have some great lessons and you will gain a greater understanding of the C3 Framework’s philosophy and goals.

**American Bar Association**
www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/resources/lesson-plans/high-school/news_literacy.html

The American Bar Association’s Division for Public Education developed lessons for grades 6-8 & 9-12 on news literacy aligned with the Common Core and the C3 Framework. They are very much “step to step” lesson plans, with directions, “What is the headline for the main news story?” followed by “What words in the headline grab your attention?” The ABA is an important organization and having all these lessons made available is a nice partnership product.

There are several more lesson plan sites I could have listed, but just search “C3 Framework, lesson plans” and you find several more. Check out New York State Education’s site and you’ll find another example of a state blending C3 with their own standards. Arkansas and Illinois have done the same. The C3 Framework is one of the best NCSS ventures that I can recall since I joined in 1970.

C. Frederick Risinger is retired from the School of Education at Indiana University. He welcomes input and suggestions for both column topics and websites that would be helpful for teachers at risinger@indiana.edu. He believes that social studies/citizenship teachers need to work together to help all Americans realize how important social studies is to this nation.