Disciplinary Literacy in Social Studies for the Elementary Classroom

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What is Disciplinary Literacy?

Experts in various fields read their respective texts quite differently!

Disciplinary literacy is the application of discipline-specific practices as a way to access, comprehend, synthesize, and communicate knowledge. It is a tailored skill set that students must have in order to navigate an array of complex, informational texts within the discipline.
“Textbooks, articles, manuals and historical primary source documents create specialized challenges for learners. These texts often include abstracts, figures, tables, diagrams and specialized vocabulary. The ideas are complex and build across a number of paragraphs requiring focus and strategic processing. To comprehend and produce this type of text, students must be immersed in the language and thinking processes of that discipline and they must be supported by an expert guide, their teacher.”

Carnegie Report, 2010
Why is Disciplinary Literacy Important?

Each discipline has specialized

- habits of mind or ways of thinking,
- language and vocabulary,
- nuances and subtleties,
- text types to comprehend,
- ways of communicating in writing,
- and career requirements,

and students must be equipped to recognize these things.
Why Use Disciplinary Literacy?

“The Common Core asks students to read stories and literature, as well as more complex texts that provide facts and background knowledge in areas such as science and social studies. Students will be challenged and asked questions that push them to refer back to what they’ve read. This stresses critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills that are required for success in college, career, and life.”

Common Core State Standards Initiative
Why Use Disciplinary Literacy?

C3 Document

Dimension 1: Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries

Dimension 2: Applying Disciplinary Tools and Concepts

Dimension 3: Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence

Dimension 4: Communication Conclusions and Taking Informed Action

C3: College, Career, and Civic Life Framework
Why Use Disciplinary Literacy?

“In middle grades, students will develop and apply disciplinary literacy skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. As students seek answers to compelling and supporting questions, they will examine a variety of primary and secondary sources and communicate responses in multiple ways, including oral, visual, and written forms. Students must be able to select and evaluate sources of information, draw and build upon ideas, explore issues, examine data, and analyze events from the full range of human experience to develop critical thinking skills essential for productive citizens.”

ADE Social Studies Frameworks, 2015
"Asking a teacher to become a reading teacher is distinctly different from asking a teacher to help students master texts within the teacher’s own field. In fact, subject-area teachers are best qualified to help their students master texts in each course. Subject-area teachers should not be expected to teach basic reading skills, but they can help students develop critical strategies and skills for reading texts in each subject."

Southern Regional Education Board
2009 Policy Statement, page 5
What Should Disciplinary Literacy Involve in Upper Grades?

“..‘disciplinary literacy’ – advanced literacy instruction embedded within content-area classes such as math, science, and social studies – should be a focus of middle and secondary school settings. Moving beyond the oft-cited ‘every teacher a teacher of reading’ philosophy that has historically frustrated secondary content teachers, Timothy and Cynthia Shanahan present data collected during the first two years of a study on disciplinary literacy that reveal how content experts and secondary content teachers read disciplinary texts, make use of comprehension strategies, and subsequently teach those strategies to adolescent readers.”

Harvard Educational Review, Spring 2008 Issue
“Teaching Disciplinary Literacy to Adolescents: Rethinking Content-Area Literacy”
What Does Disciplinary Literacy Require?
A Shift in Teacher Perspective and Instruction

**Content Area Reading**
Generalized approach to develop better readers in order to understand the content

Strategies are implemented across disciplines

Focus on generic reading processes or strategies (summarizing, questioning, inference)

Shanahan, 2012

**Disciplinary Literacy**
Specific approach to unveil how reading and writing are uniquely used in the discipline being studied

Primary focus on language and text demands within a discipline

Focus on specialized processes in the discipline (sourcing, generating a hypothesis, justifying a claim)

Shanahan, 2012
A Shift in Student Perspective and Learning

- Fact collecting
- Textbook
- Notice who, what, where, chronology
- Truth statements

- Notice why and how
- Variety of texts read critically
- Notice cause/effect relationships and hypotheses
- Arguments
Disciplinary Literacy in Social Studies
Disciplinary Reading In Social Studies

Involves a comprehension of:

- Text features and text structures
- Conceptual vocabulary
- Prior knowledge
- Perspective
- Visual information (multiple formats)
Disciplinary Writing In Social Studies

- Choosing words, information, formats, and structures deliberately
- Using technology strategically to create, refine, and collaborate on writing
- Gathering information, evaluating sources, and citing material accurately
- Formulating claims and counter-claims, and defending the position through textual evidence
The Use of Historical Thinking Skills

- Sourcing
- Corroborating
- Contextualizing
- Close-reading
- Identifying the subtext
The Lenses of Social Studies

- History
- Geography
- Economics
- Political Science
What Does Disciplinary Literacy in Social Studies Look Like?

Reading Like a Historian

Exploring Emigration: Maps and Migration

Keep It or Junk It: A Student-Run Lesson
So what do I need to do?
Be knowledgeable of your frameworks, the CCSS, and C3 - You are the expert!

- ADE Social Studies Curriculum Shifts, 2015
- ADE Social Studies Frameworks for Grades 5-6, 2015
- ADE Social Studies Frameworks for Grade 7, 2015
- ADE Social Studies Frameworks for Grade 8, 2015
- ADE Arkansas History Frameworks for Grades 7-8, 2015
- Common Core Literacy in Social Studies
- College, Career, and Civic Life C3 Framework
Read non-fiction historical texts regularly in your classroom. Use multiple sources and perspectives as much as possible.

- Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal
- Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People
- Coretta Scott King Book Awards
- Common Core State Standards Appendix B: Exemplar Texts
- Common Core Scholastic Book Lists
- ReadWorks
- Library of Congress Primary Source Sets
- Newseum
- Pinterest
Provide direct, explicit instruction about text features and text structures as they appear in class readings.

Mini-lessons concerning interpretation and comprehension of the content-specific materials, especially in regard to text features, should happen organically (seize the “teachable moments”) whenever possible – the learning must mean something to the student (this does not mean it can’t be teacher-influenced).
Use consistently the common language and vocabulary of reading and writing within the discipline of social studies.
Use multiple, varied primary sources to answer your compelling questions.

- Interviews
- Journals and diaries
- Oral histories
- Transcripts
- Court documents
- Photographs
- Artwork
- Music and lyrics
- Poetry
- Political cartoons
- Objects and artifacts
- Documentary film
- Maps, charts, and graphs
Use multiple, varied primary sources to answer your compelling questions.

- Chronicling America
- Radio Diaries
- Reading Like a Historian
- Library of Congress Geography Lessons
- National Geographic Teacher Resources
- National Archives - Docs Teach
- Online Museums and Virtual Field Trips
- Education World - Virtual Field Trips
- Library of Congress - Primary Source Sets
Why use primary sources?

Primary sources provide a window into the past—unfiltered access to the record of artistic, social, scientific and political thought and achievement during the specific period under study, produced by people who lived during that period.

Bringing young people into close contact with these unique, often profoundly personal, documents and objects can give them a very real sense of what it was like to be alive during a long-past era.

-Library of Congress
Use compelling questions to drive your instruction.

- Does the passing of government legislation guarantee compliance with the law?
- Was the New Deal a success?
- Was Rosa Parks’s protest the result of a spontaneous decision on her part?
- Was President Eisenhower’s response to the crisis at Central High School appropriate?
- Could the United States have won the Space Race without the contributions of German rocket scientists?
- Was Lincoln racist?
- Was there a particular event that sparked the Civil Rights Movement?
The Integration Crisis at Central High School

Compelling Question:

Was President Eisenhower’s response to the integration crisis in Little Rock appropriate? Why or why not?

Supporting Questions:

What was happening in Little Rock that prompted the President to intervene?

How did Eisenhower’s involvement influence the atmosphere at Central High School?

What were some reactions to the President’s involvement?
Document Set

- Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture - Desegregation of Central High School
- Little Rock Central High School Memory Project
- Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library - Little Rock School Integration Crisis
Graphic Organizers

- Library of Congress - Teaching with Primary Sources
- Teaching with Documents - Analysis Response Sheets