

**Implementing the Common Core Learning Standards in Grade Three: Teaching for College and
Career Readiness through the Social Studies Content Area**

by

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Implementing the Common Core Learning Standards in Grade Three: Teaching for College and
Career Readiness through the Social Studies Content Area

by

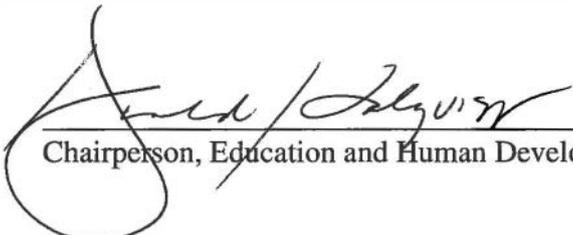
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Abstract

With the current state of the economy and job market in the United States, it is imperative that students are college and workforce ready when they complete their public school education. Standards-based education provides solid foundation for educators to plan learning experiences that build from the prekindergarten to grade twelve. Standards-based education is widely accepted and utilized as we prepare today's students for success when facing tomorrow's challenges.

As politicians, administrators, educators and parents work closely to ensure that the public education is equipped to meet the demands of the twenty first century, new and improved standards have been developed to challenge and extend what is currently in place. Through this collective thought process the new Common Core Learning standards were created and are now being adopted by states across the continent. These standards represent great hope for American youth, but also expose some of the gaps and challenges that exist in moving towards a higher level educational system.

The upcoming unit plan was designed to implement the new standards through the social studies content area. The curriculum addresses the standards and gaps through material analysis, instructional strategies and the differentiation process. Considering all factors to be a part of the whole, it moves us towards comprehensive planning that encompasses multiple facets for achieving the ultimate goal of college and workforce readiness.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Currently, educational institutions are transitioning to align with the Common Core Learning Standards. The Common Core Standards require read a balance of literary and informational texts (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Additionally, the standards incite teachers to provide learning experiences that involve student engagement with complex texts across content areas and produce text-based responses that are based on common texts.

Problem Statement

The existing third grade social studies curriculum lacks anchor texts that are complex yet leveled. There are not adequate complex non-fiction texts to support implementation of the common core standards for grade 3 social studies curriculum in my classroom in the West Irondequoit Central School District to provide equal access to all learners. The following are the research questions:

1. Is the current grade 3 social studies curriculum aligned with the common core standards?
2. What are the resources to support the current grade 3 social studies curriculum?
3. Are there adequate resources to support the current grade 3 social studies curriculum?
4. What are the components of complex non-fiction text in the grade 3 social studies curriculum?

Significance of the Problem

The Common core standards require students to "... read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, at the high end of the grades 2–3 text complexity band independently and proficiently" (CCSSO, 2010, p.14). According the authors of the Common Core Standards, There is a major discrepancy in the amount and

complexity of nonfiction texts that students are required to read in grades K-12 as compared to the requirements in college as well as the work force (CCSSO).

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to develop a 3rd grade Social Studies curriculum that is aligned with the Common Core learning Standards. Currently, there are insufficient resources to support the 3rd grade curriculum in my classroom. This curriculum provides students access to the social studies curriculum through complex non-fiction texts and learning experiences that employ other sophisticated resources and learning experiences that support critical thinking and problem solving by analyzing materials, instructional strategies, and differentiating across venues.

Rationale

Public education must prepare students to be college and work-force ready. One component of readiness is a student's ability to comprehend and apply information gathered from complex nonfiction texts. In addition, students must be able to apply critical thinking and problem solving skills to new situations.

Definition of Terms

Common Core Standards: The Common Core Standards are "a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The standards were developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts, to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce" (CCSSO, 2010, p.1).

Complex Text: The Common Core Standards define Complex Text as:

The Standards' model of text complexity consists of three equally important parts.

(1) *Qualitative dimensions of text complexity.* In the Standards, *qualitative dimensions* and *qualitative factors* refer to those aspects of text complexity best measured or only measurable by an attentive human reader, such as levels of meaning or purpose; structure; language conventionality and clarity; and knowledge demands.

(2) *Quantitative dimensions of text complexity.* The terms *quantitative dimensions* and *quantitative factors* refer to those aspects of text complexity, such as word length or frequency, sentence length, and text cohesion, that are difficult if not impossible for a human reader to evaluate efficiently, especially in long texts, and are thus today typically measured by computer software.

(3) *Reader and task considerations.* While the prior two elements of the model focus on the inherent complexity of text, variables specific to particular readers (such as motivation, knowledge, and experiences) and to particular tasks (such as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the questions posed) must also be considered when determining whether a text is appropriate for a given student. Such assessments are best made by teachers employing their professional judgment, experience, and knowledge of their students and the subject. (Lexile range 450-790). By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature [informational texts] at the high end of the grades 2–3 text complexity band independently and proficiently (CCSSO, 2010, p. 4).

Non-fiction: A text genre that provides factual information. “Non-fiction is the opposite of fiction. Books that are non-fiction, or true, are about real things, people, events, and places” (The Difference Between, n.d.).

Rigorous: "The standards will include high-level cognitive demands by asking students to demonstrate deep conceptual understanding through the application of content knowledge and skills to new situations" (CCSSO, 2010, p. 2).

Summary

There are not adequate complex non-fiction texts to support implementation of the common core standards for grade 3 social studies curriculum in my classroom. There is a need for a 3rd grade Social Studies Curriculum that is aligned with the new Common Core Standards and accessible to all learners.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Currently, public education has moved into an era of standards-based instruction with increasing expectations and benchmarks at all grade levels. Coupled with demands of high stakes testing, educators and administrators are working furiously to meet the challenges. This literature review examines the new Common Core Learning Standards and the coinciding implications for grade three social studies instruction. Integral components investigated in this review include complex non-fiction text, current social studies curriculum, and differentiation, as well as implications for instruction.

Common Core Standards

With the competitive demands of the 21st-century job market, educational institutions are raising the expectations for students across the globe. The goal is to ensure that students are college and workforce ready when they leave the public education system (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The push for educational reform can be noted throughout the United States and across interest groups including politicians, administrators, teachers, and parents. A set of educational standards known as the Common Core Standards has been designed to outline the skills and knowledge that students must have mastered upon graduation from high school and serve as a guide for teachers in the planning process. In an effort to move forward, many states are adopting the Common Core Learning Standards as a platform for preparing students to attain the highest levels of academic achievement. This literature review will examine implementation of the Common Core Standards through the current grade three social studies curriculum in my classroom in the West Irondequoit Central School District.

Some would argue that the modern standards-based instruction movement was inspired by the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. The authors claimed that American students were lagging in skills and knowledge in English Language Arts, Mathematics and Science (Johanningmeirer, 2010). Shortly thereafter a sense of urgency ensued related to academic achievement and preparing students to be competitors in a global society. Educational goals that are grade and content specific have been developed to answer the call for higher achievement and accountability. Many progressive and constructivist educators would argue that such standards are limiting and do not support authentic learning experiences (Klock, 2010). On the contrary, supporters of the movement contend that standards-based education is not intended to be the sole construct upon which learning experiences should be designed. Conversely, proponents rationalize that standards should simply act as a guide to determine the skills and knowledge that students must attain within content areas providing a roadmap for planning throughout grade levels (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

The Common core standards are a state-led initiative intended to provide clear and consistent learning expectations that are evidence based, college ready and workforce aligned, internationally benchmarked, rigorous and realistic (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). Development of the standards has been derived through evaluation of exemplar models currently employed across the United States as well as across the globe. The National Governors Association Center (NGA) for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) refer to the standards as key building blocks for a high-quality education that will prepare today's students for college and career success (2010). Furthermore, the NGA and the CCSSO (2010) incite teachers and administrators to remain cognizant of the fact the Common Core Standards are integral yet other essential components of a high-quality education such as instructional strategies and

implementation techniques are left to the discretion of states, districts, administrators, teachers, and parents.

Complex Text

Thorough understanding of the new Common Core Standards in conjunction with insight as to how these standards differ from educational standards that are reflective of the past is crucial to efficacy of the standards themselves. In an effort to facilitate the implementation process, The New York State Department of Education (2011) has drafted an outline of the key shifts of focus that are prominent within the Common Core. A central theme throughout the six shifts in the Common Core English Language Arts standards include increased levels of sophistication and complexity as they relate to text genre, structure, academic vocabulary, verbal and written response, and application across disciplines. Specific perspective within these shifts is the charge to engage and immerse students in learning experiences in which they access new information through a balance of informational and literary texts. In a recent article in *The Journal of Children's Literature*, authors Zarnowski and Turkel (2011) refer to high quality nonfiction literature as:

Books and articles that have a chronological sequence; include people we can care about; describe locations we can visualize; involve risk, choice, challenge, and even danger; deal with moral, ethical, or political issues; contain debatable issues; and explore important and appealing content (p. 36).

According to the NGA & CCSO (2010), elementary students engage in approximately seven to fifteen percent instructional reading of informational texts creating a need for careful scrutiny of current curriculum guides and available resources to achieve the new standards for learning.

Along with the shift to a balance in literary and informational texts is the component of text complexity. The Common Core Standards define Complex Text as:

The Standards' model of text complexity consists of three equally important parts.

(1) *Qualitative dimensions of text complexity.* In the Standards, *qualitative dimensions* and *qualitative factors* refer to those aspects of text complexity best measured or only measurable by an attentive human reader, such as levels of meaning or purpose; structure; language conventionality and clarity; and knowledge demands.

(2) *Quantitative dimensions of text complexity.* The terms *quantitative dimensions* and *quantitative factors* refer to those aspects of text complexity, such as word length or frequency, sentence length, and text cohesion, that are difficult if not impossible for a human reader to evaluate efficiently, especially in long texts, and are thus today typically measured by computer software.

(3) *Reader and task considerations.* While the prior two elements of the model focus on the inherent complexity of text, variables specific to particular readers (such as motivation, knowledge, and experiences) and to particular tasks (such as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the questions posed) must also be considered when determining whether a text is appropriate for a given student. Such assessments are best made by teachers employing their professional judgment, experience, and knowledge of their students and the subject. (Lexile range 450-790). By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature [informational texts] at the high end of the grades 2–3 text complexity band independently and proficiently (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 4).

The NGA and CCSSO (2010) explain that the rationale for establishing criteria to determine text complexity is based on a body of evidence that supports the need for such a criterion. The

research indicates that over the last fifty years the level of reading skills required in post-secondary institutions, the workplace, and citizenship affairs has steadily increased. While the reading task demands are far more sophisticated at the collegial level than that which students engage in at the high school level, there also higher expectations for independence and accountability (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). Concurrently, researchers found a decrease in the level of complexity embedded in texts specifically in terms of sentence length and vocabulary throughout grade levels prior to college (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). When students are interacting with expository text, there are additional concerns that scaffolding and text structures such as glossaries and summaries provided by the teacher are inhibiting higher level thinking and independence when confronted with rigorous task demands (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

Current Social Studies Curriculum

The Social Studies Ad Hoc Committee (2009) in the West Irondequoit Central School District created a standards-based social studies curriculum that is closely aligned with state and national standards. The curriculum document clearly defines learning outcomes, enduring understandings and assessment tools for formative and summative purposes. The enduring understandings and district learning outcomes strongly reflect the Common Core Reading Standards for informational text. Commonalities include but are not limited to determining main idea, distinguishing point of view, comparing and contrasting key information, and determining relationships.

Sung (2010) investigated the Korean National social studies standards in an effort to assess the potential impact that learning objectives have on promoting democratic citizenship. Within the study, three professional raters analyzed two hundred and twenty-one learning objectives for the achievement standards contained in the South-Korean social studies

curriculum. Grades seven through nine were used as the sample for this study because they cover the three major content areas of social science, history and geography. Data gathered during the study underwent a content analysis process involving coding schemes and calibrated scales. Sung (2010) found a significant discrepancy in the emphasis that the curriculum places on analyzing factual information and data and acquisition of critical thinking skills through active participation. Sung went on to argue that learning should be connected to doing things such as problem solving and decision making rather than memorizing facts, classifying, comparing and generalizing (2010). While this conclusion supports the NGA and the CCSSO (2010) in their impetus to have students access the world through active engagement with complex non-fiction texts, it also exposes current gaps exist and interfere with implementation of the new Common Core Standards. Educators are left with questions as to the availability of complex non-fiction texts that can be accessed by all learners to support the implementation of the new Common Core Learning Standards through the current third grade social studies curriculum.

Researchers Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere, and Stewart (2008) embarked upon a case study that sought to determine perceptions related to teaching social studies with a focus on and catalysts and hindrances. The sample for the study included thirteen teachers and six principals across six elementary schools in the Midwest. The methodology for data collection used for this was the Interactive Qualitative Analysis chosen for its' collaborative nature utilizing exercises between researchers and participants to engage in systematic analysis targeted phenomena. While the researchers noted that this data was preliminary and much further research was required, they did assert that certain implications can be ascertained (Boyle-Boise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere, & Stewart, 2008). Based on teacher participants responses, social studies instruction is perceived to be less important and receives minimal instructional time. Moreover,

teachers are apt to expend instructional time allocated to social studies to teach reading skills through the content topics. When teachers did engage in teaching of social studies skills and concepts, they often took a teacher centered approach where they were the primary conveyors of information through a lecture type format with little opportunity for the use or development of critical thinking skills by students. The authors further purport that these notions and practices among teachers are the unfortunate results of the No Child Left Behind Act and standardized testing (Boyle-Boise, et al., 2008).

Despite the fact that the results of this case study carry a negative connotation regarding the current state of social studies instruction, they also expose a domain of education that should be utilized more effectively and efficiently to promote development of critical thinking skills high academic achievement for all students (Boyle-Boise, et al., 2008). Demir scrutinized the effects of a new social studies curriculum on students' critical thinking skills (2008). The new curriculum integrated information acquisition, student expectations, and learning experiences with problem solving and decision making. According to Demir (2008), descriptive research methods and scanning techniques were used to analyze growth in critical thinking skills among fourth and fifth grade students in Turkey. The sample population of six hundred twelve students was randomly selected from twenty primary schools. Demir (2008) stated that "analysis, evaluation, inference, interpretation, explanation and self-regulation scales were used to analyze changes in students' critical thinking skills" (p. 113). Through analyses of these skills and related sub skills a notable positive change was determined in the application of critical thinking skills.

While the current social studies curriculum in the West Irondequoit Central School District embodies the skills and sub skills suggested in the previous study for advancing critical thinking, and it is strongly aligned to the new Common Core Standards, it lacks appropriate and

adequate supportive text resources. Compilation of such resources should reflect careful consideration of constituent factors related to Common Core and current research implications. The social studies block imparts ample opportunity for students to increase engagement with non-fiction texts. In an attempt to close the gap between the seven to fifteen percent of informational text that students are currently interacting with and the fifty percent engagement with informational text needed to meet the new standards, all content areas should be considered as a venue for non-fiction text immersion. Some teachers may become disillusioned by the mandate to abandon prior practices that incorporated a greater volume of literary text and move to a balance of informational and literary texts throughout learning experiences. Press, Henenbers, and Getman (2011) describe reasons why teachers should reconsider hesitant attitudes towards increased use of non-fiction texts in elementary classrooms. Boy readers have a tendency to be more interested in the factual information that they learn from non-fiction texts than literary elements and story lines found in other text genres. Additionally, the authors propose that non-fiction text appeals to children's interests, fosters development of content knowledge and vocabulary, and assists student's ability to reveal multiple purposes for reading (2011). The demand to balance students' experiences in reading literary and non-fiction text raises the question as to where to locate the quantity of non-fiction texts that are needed to create a balance, as well as texts that are accessible by all learners. In education, the word "text" often refers to and is often presumed to equate to print sources. Although this assumption is true in many instances, educators must not disregard the vast supply of text that can be retrieved via the internet. Frye, Trathen, and Koppenhaver (2010) cited the position of the National Council for the Social Studies when they embarked upon a study of the use of internet workshops as a best practice for the teaching of social studies in the twenty-first century classroom. According to

Frye, Trathen, and Koppenhaver (2010), use of internet workshops and sources in the social studies classroom provides students with extensive opportunities to critically evaluate and analyze internet texts and enhance their technological skills and knowledge. The current gap in the expectations set forth by the Common Core Standards and the available complex nonfiction print sources available can be rectified to a great extent through use of internet sources. As teachers implement the new Common Core Learning Standards through the social studies content area they should consider not only the quality of the material and resources to be used, but also the efficacy of instructional strategies and differentiated experiences that accommodate all learners within the classroom.

Differentiation

A primary constraint in attaining a balance in learning experiences that encompass both complex literary and informational text is the limited availability of such resources. Friese, Alverman, Parkes, and Rezak (2008) refer the vast body of research that indicates that informational text is deemed important by teachers, holds high interest for students, yet is lacking in classroom libraries. While gathering materials to create a social studies unit related to local community, I was only able to locate seventeen non-fiction print sources within the entire district which equates to less than two resources available per school. Of equal concern is the fact that sixteen of the seventeen resources were above a sixth grade reading level signifying inaccessibility for elementary students at any level. Thus the assumption can be made that limitations in available resources will require teachers to augment their current differentiation practices in order to employ the new Common Core standards with fidelity. The notion that immersing students in rigorous reading tasks involving high quality complex text is a sensible and promising approach to elevating the eminence of learning experiences. Beecher and

Sweeney (2008) found that one school's attempt to close the achievement gap through enrichment and differentiation as opposed to remediation was a successful one. Although the intent is sound and supported by research, there are gaps that inhibit implementation of such tasks in classrooms that embody diverse learners with wide range in abilities.

Implications

The proceeding curriculum project will depict a third grade social studies unit that encapsulates the necessary elements to implement the Common Core Standards through the current social studies curriculum in my classroom in the West Irondequoit Central School district. The bank of Standards that will be referenced in this unit come from the Common Core Reading Standards for Informational Text K-5:

1. Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.
2. Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.
3. Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.
4. Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a *grade 3 topic or subject area*.
5. Use text features and search tools (e.g., keywords, sidebars, hyperlinks) to locate information relevant to a given topic efficiently.
6. Compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event or topic; describe the differences in focus and the information provided.

7. Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).
8. Describe the logical connection between particular sentences and paragraphs in a text (e.g., comparison, cause/effect, first/second/third in a sequence).
9. Compare and contrast the most important points and key details presented in two texts on the same topic (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 14).

For the purposes of this curriculum project non-fiction text will be defined as a text genre that provides factual information. “Non-fiction is the opposite of fiction. Books that are non-fiction, or true, are about real things, people, events, and places” (The Difference Between, n.d.). In conjunction with the standards themselves, complex nonfiction text will be selected for the unit using the Three-Part Model for Measuring Text Complexity as a guide (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). In addition, recommendations from Zarnowski and Turkel (2011) previously stated will be considered when making complex text selections as well as their suggestion to seek out literature that reflects real life scenarios where actual people apply their knowledge and skills to solve problems. Student point of view will also be taken into account when selecting texts. Gentry, Fowler, and Nichols (2007) investigated parents', teachers' and students' perspectives related to social studies textbooks. The student sample in this study involved one hundred sixty one students with mixed abilities from five hundred thirty middle schools. The researchers found four themes that influenced a student's preferences for a particular text. Among the themes that influenced student motivation to engage with a text include aesthetics, organization, coinciding technology, and personal interest in the content.

Differentiated text is a plausible means to access new knowledge only to the extent that it exists or that educators are able to adapt available resources to reflect readability levels for their students. While differentiated text that supports development of literacy skills is readily available in most classrooms, differentiated text for the purposes of deepening content knowledge and dispositions across disciplines is all but nonexistent (Friese, Alverman, Parkes, and Rezak, 2008). To that end, an important implication of the new Common Core Learning standards is to increase the use of the internet to locate high quality text that can be accessed by learners with varying reading abilities. When looking to attain text that is suitable for all different reading levels whether it be an in print or online, several factors should be considered. At the forefront of this instructional consideration is an awareness that text used in for the purpose of teaching social studies knowledge and skills need not be judged by the same criteria as text used to teach reading and comprehension skills. While integration of disciplines has its' place in the classroom, that is not to say that social studies is a vehicle for teaching reading. Although reading and social studies are intimately entwined, the educational goals and outcomes differ; implying different criteria for text selection may be employed.

Differentiation in terms of instructional repertoire and learning experiences can be utilized to increase accessibility of high-quality complex text for learners who otherwise lack the decoding or comprehension skills necessary to unpack such material. Tobin and McInnes (2008) discuss differentiation as an imperative tool for teaching diverse learners in today's classrooms. They remind teachers that differentiation equates to students developing the same understanding although the pathway to learning may vary. Literature circles are often used during the English Language Arts block and be an equally as lucrative instructional strategy when used in social studies learning experiences. McCall (2010), described literature circles as being a noteworthy

means to learning about the more sophisticated ideas and concepts that social studies entails. Additionally, the social studies content is most often available through the non-fiction genre. The very nature of Literature Circles lends itself to differentiation by student role or task. The actual text being utilized for a particular Literature Circle study may be advanced beyond the reading level of some of the group members yet can be accessible through the requirements of the specific role they take on. For example, a student taking on the Literature Circle role of questioner may be able to listen to the text on tape while interacting with the text in a print format. It is the job of the questioner to bring questions about the text to the group that will facilitate discussion and analysis (McCall, 2010). As such, it is not important that the reader/questioner cannot access the text independently so long as they are able to generate thoughtful questions through scaffold acquisition of the content. Through this type of learning experience students are engaged with high-quality text providing the opportunity to increase the balance of reading experiences between non-fiction and literary texts that is required by the new Common Core Learning Standards. Comparatively, other experiences during the Literacy block may need to account for the component of the Common Core Learning Standards that refers to independent acquisition of high-quality texts.

In accordance with new Common Core Learning Standards, social studies experiences should be rigorous and active for all learners while maintaining the integrity of the experience. In other words, social studies education must not become the forum for supplemental teaching of reading nor should it be used for the purposes of remediation. However, students must be fluid with certain literacy skills and understandings to be able to construct knowledge when undertaking tasks that involve complex texts above their independent reading level. Students should be adept with visual literacy skills, vocabulary strategies, text features that will enable

learners to make meaning of complex text that is not necessarily within their independent reading range.

O'Neil (2011) describes visual literacy as an interaction between pictures and text that occurs through four different schemes; reinforcing, description, reciprocal, and establishing. Visuals that are reinforcing provide additional detail that supports the text. Reinforcing visuals prompt readers to elicit new or less familiar vocabulary as well as to support decoding skills leading to comprehension of the text. Descriptive illustrations make use of artistic attributes such as line, shape, color to accentuate the tone or theme of the text. This helps to provide a frame of reference for students when they are reading about unfamiliar topics or time periods. Reciprocal visuals have equal importance with the text thus requiring students have a strong understanding of visual literacy in order to gain the true meaning of the text. Some pictures or illustrations are considered establishing which means that they portray a substantial element or elements that lend to comprehension with less emphasis on the actual text (O'Neil, 2011).

Students may rely upon their visual literacy skills to assist with determination of unknown words and will need to utilize additional strategies when there are no visuals that coincide with the text. Kessler (2010) explains how shared reading and context clues can be used to facilitate vocabulary development and aid in comprehension. Explicit instruction related to vocabulary during shared reading experiences raises students' level of word consciousness which in turn increases students' ability to solve the unknown meaning of word when they confront it during independent reading (Kessler, 2010). The importance of students' ability to be able to infer the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary is supported by research finding that indicate student's in the upper elementary grades may encounter up to 10, new or unfamiliar vocabulary during independent reading throughout one academic year alone (Winter's, 2009). With the

increase in expectations set forth by Common Core Learning standards that students will significantly increase their engagement with and understanding of high-quality non-fiction texts, one can surmise that the estimated number of unfamiliar words that students will encounter may increase dramatically. With a population diverse learners present across classrooms today, vocabulary instruction moves to the forefront when planning for the differentiation of instruction. Teachers must consider not only the appropriate strategies and scaffolds that will foster vocabulary acquisition for a variety of learners, but also how to ensure that students are transferring skills independently.

Implementation of new Common Core Learning standards in the social studies content area requires teachers to reconsider their current instructional repertoire. Materials and resources must be critiqued and analyzed in terms of their quality and complexity. Equal scrutiny should be employed regarding teaching methodologies and differentiation as it relates to as it relates to all teaching and learning processes including materials and resources, instructional strategies, and learning experiences.

This review of literature led to the development of a third grade social studies unit that has been revised to meet the requirements of the new Common Core Learning Standards and reflect best teaching practices that have been validated through research. Using the new Common Core Learning Standards as a foundation to plan for complexity and rigor through the lens of high-quality materials, research validated instructional strategies, and differentiated learning experiences will ensure today's' students are college and workforce ready when they leave the public education system.

Chapter 3: Third Grade Masai Unit Revised to Reflect Social Justice & Align with the Common Core Learning Standards Grade 3 Social Studies

The following third grade social studies unit plan has been revised to meet the rigorous expectations set forth by the new Common Core Learning Standards and serve as an exemplar model for the planning process. The unit represents a balanced approach to curriculum delivery with an equal emphasis on material selection, instructional strategies, and differentiation. Despite the current gaps between available complex texts rich learning experiences can carefully planned to meet the new standards.

Analysis of Existing Classroom Materials

In my third grade classroom, I am required to follow a schedule in which specific social studies units are taught sequentially and district learning outcomes are achieved throughout. The outcomes are rigorous and closely aligned to the New York State Common Core Learning Standards. In addition, unit overviews and individual lesson plans that teachers and curriculum supervisors have created for teachers are available to reference. The current unit of study investigates the Masai culture in Africa.

While the third grade social studies curriculum document reflects a strong structure for instruction, available materials to support implementation are somewhat limited. The classroom resource that is supplied by the district for teaching social studies is called *Social Studies Alive! Our Community and Beyond* (Teacher's Curriculum Institute, 2010). This resource provides a framework for teachers, instructional strategies, and reproducible templates and organizers. The program is research-based and covers many important social studies concepts. The lessons contained within the resource are student-centered with a hands on approach to learning. While the resource can be very useful for the introduction of important social studies topics and skills,

it lacks depth and richness needed to solicit opportunities for students to develop a deep understanding of the dispositions and values needed to critically evaluate, analyze, and problem solve when considering civic issues.

Complex non-fiction text found on the internet is an invaluable resource to offset the lack of available print sources. The students have access to laptop computers and a site called World Book. This is an excellent reference site for elementary students. The site is easy to navigate and is organized in a way that supports differentiation based on reading abilities as well as subject matter. This is an important component because it enables the students to take on an active role as an inquirer and access knowledge independently rather than passively. Another available material for students to utilize in developing their awareness of geographical features is topographical maps. These maps provide a more tangible frame of reference for students because of their three dimensional perspective that they provide. There are some text resources available through the library. The number of books related to each topic varies as well as genre options and leveled reading materials.

Access to World Book Online and topographical maps provides students with high quality materials; however, other resources are needed to create a comprehensive unit plan. The *Social Studies Alive! Our Community and Beyond* (Teacher's Curriculum Institute, 2010) resource serves as a supplemental resource for the teacher to reference but does not contain text or visual aids that are related to the subject matter for this particular unit. The NGA and CCSSO (2010) recognize the importance of specifying standards that focus on higher order skills, but do not discount the relevance of content matter. The following unit plan utilizes the existing resources in their capacity to enlist students in developing critical thinking skills and discovering some content knowledge. Additional text sources from a variety of genres have been carefully

selected to provide deeper understanding of essential social studies concepts through the content. Without implementation of additional high quality complex texts the unit would not encompass the necessary level of complexity needed to deem the unit effective in preparing students to be college and workforce ready.

Existing Evidence-based Approaches to Teaching the Social Studies Content

In this third grade social studies unit, I consulted current research related to best practices to design lessons and create a learning environment that promotes social justice. Kraft (2007) describes the basic forefront of a socially just approach to teaching as allowing students to grapple over social issues within the content. This is an imperative consideration due to elements such as time constraints that persuade teachers to apply a minimalist approach. In my own experiences, I have heard teachers state that there is not enough time for the teaching of social studies when the stakes are so high with standardized testing. In such cases, many teachers become the conveyors of information in an effort to "cover" the basics (primarily facts) related to the social studies content while students act as passive recipients making little meaning if any at all. Socially just classrooms seek to expose students to more than memorization experiences where they gain little more than factual knowledge that lacks context or meaning. Socially just classrooms present opportunities to investigate controversial issues through the content and apply problem-solving skills to make decisions and draw conclusions.

According to Bolinger and Warren (2007), active and authentic learning experiences known as the constructivist approach to teaching and learning, have been deemed best practices among educators and theorists alike for at least the past 150 years. However, when the researchers conducted a survey of 420 teachers across grade levels and found that while they reported that hands-on learning experiences were the most effective, they were also the least

employed (Bolinger, & Warren, 2007). Through observation, the researchers found that the most common instructional strategy being used was a lecture format. With productive citizenship being the end in mind, it is clear that simply gathering facts and information will not suffice if students are to achieve the learning outcomes that we expect to be attained. Bolinger and Warren (2007) suggest that students must develop critical thinking skills and values through alternate venues such as research, debate, role-playing, and analysis of multiple perspectives. This research led to the development of lessons within the following unit plan that ensure students will construct their own knowledge through learning experiences that embrace a variety of previously mentioned research based best practices.

Alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards

The material text/print resources used in this unit were determined to be complex in nature by way of the three part model introduced in the Common Core learning Standards. The CCLS (2010) explains that the text complexity model is a tool for educators to reference and implement in conjunction with their professional judgment. Important consideration should be given to the fact that qualitative dimensions including purpose, structure, language and knowledge demands can be assessed by the instructor while more advanced quantitative measurement tools are still needed. In the meantime, quantitative dimensions can be determined through lexile ranges and teacher discretion. Lexile grade band ranges for grades two and three are 450-790 (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). The third component to the text complexity model pertains to reader task demands and is embedded throughout the implications specific to materials and resources as well as instructional strategies and differentiation. In selecting texts for this social studies curriculum project all qualitative components were analyzed in terms of sophistication and applicability. Lexile ranges were referenced and fell within or above the grade band range.

Where gaps did occur, reader tasks demands were developed to ensure the complexity and rigor permeate the unit.

Alignment to the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

Prior to revision, the following social studies unit plan was aligned to the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (National Council for the Social Studies, 2010) as well as the New York State Learning Standards for Social Studies (New York State Education Department, 2011). The revised unit plan incorporates the national and state standards with the Common Core Learning Standards to establish a planning framework that is balanced in terms of skills and content considerations. The table seen in Appendix A depicts the unit overview prior to revision. The enduring understandings were derived from the ten thematic strands outlined in National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (National Council for the Social Studies, 2010). Focus questions, essential knowledge, and essential skills were adapted through the New York State Learning Standards for Social Studies (New York State Education Department, 2011) with the enduring understandings intact. The bank of assessments was obtained from the West Irondequoit Central School District Curriculum Document (2009). The individual lesson plans reflect the new Common Core Learning Standards as well as current research and best practices previously addressed through the material and resources, learning experiences and differentiation. The unit plan framework denotes a comprehensive approach to standards-based education that will prepare students for college and the workforce.

Unit: The Masai

** Lessons in this unit are divided into activities that may require several days to complete.*

**Students will keep the majority of their work in their anthropology notebook that they have been creating throughout the year.*

Lesson1: Introduction to the Masai

New York Sate Standard: Standard 2, Key Idea 4:

The skills of historical analysis include the ability to investigate differing and competing interpretations of the theories of history, hypothesize about why interpretations change over time, explain the importance of historical evidence, and understand the concepts of change and continuity over time.

Performance Indicator:

Explore the lifestyles, beliefs, traditions, rules and laws, and social/cultural needs and wants of people during different periods in history and in different parts of the world.

Common Core State Standard for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: Reading Standards for Informational Text Grade

3 Key Ideas and Details:

Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.

Essential Question: How are people around the world alike and different?

Materials:

- reproducible maps of Africa for each students
- colored pencils
- Venn Diagram
- Book: *The Masai and I*, by Virginia Kroll

This picture book is fictional narrative that compares and contrasts the life of a child living in America with that of a Masai child. Complexity can be noted through qualitative dimensions especially in terms of structure, language and visuals. The text itself compares typical moments and situations that a child from each culture would encounter simultaneously while the coinciding illustrations depict the innate nature of childhood regardless of the clash in cultures.

Learning Experiences:

Explain to students that they will begin a study of the Masai Tribe Culture. Show Africa on a large world map. Direct students attention to Kenya and Tanzania. Engage in a brief discussion related to the United States and Mexico (studied in a previous unit) to provide a frame of reference. Explain that students will take a more in depth look at the location and geographical features where the Masai live in subsequent lessons. Have students color in maps to depict the regions where the Masai people live.

Activity 1: Read the book, *The Masai and I*. Students record similarities and differences between our culture and the Masai culture on their Venn Diagram as they listen. After the reading, students work in heterogeneous partnerships to compare their diagrams and add any information they may have missed. Next, students work together to analyze the information and develop three questions that they would ask a Masai child about their culture based on the similarities and differences that they found.

Activity 2: Next, students work together to prioritize questions and determine which one would give them the greatest insight into the Masai culture. Students will share their final question with classmates and provide an argument as to its importance using culturally sound justification and vocabulary.

Instructional Strategies:

As students embark upon this unit, they begin by comparing and contrasting the Masai culture with their own culture. The importance of this initial activity is that students become more invested in their learning and more culturally responsive when they are encouraged to bring their own life experiences into the learning environment (Kraft, 2007). Comparing and contrasting cultures initially also provides a common ground upon which students can analyze differences in cultures or controversial issues with greater tolerance. Discourse groups also enables students to begin to consider multiple perspectives at the peer to peer level so that they can transfer an appreciation for different points of view and perceptions from a variety of individuals such as authors and those who provide firsthand accounts of historical events and time periods.

Differentiation:

Students with working memory difficulties or students have trouble categorizing information may benefit from scaffolded support through a revised Venn Diagram. Headings for the categories home, school, food, activities etc. should be placed in each section of the Venn Diagram to guide their thinking. Discourse groups should also be differentiated in such a way that members can optimize their learning from one another. Group members should have mixed reading abilities as well a variety of background knowledge and speaking skills. As students move through the elementary grades they begin to develop their awareness of their place in the

world through social studies instruction. This is a crucial time in students' development and awareness of others and their perspectives. As students discuss similarities and differences in the cultures that they are studying they simultaneously discover similarities and differences between themselves and their peers creating a deeper understanding of culture and mutual respect.

Assessment:

Students will write a letter to an imaginary Masai child. The letter should contain three similarities between cultures, three differences between cultures, and three questions. (At the end of the unit, letters will be distributed randomly and students will write a responding letter as if they were the Masai child receiving it).

Lesson 2: Where People Live Influences how People Live.

New York State Standard: Geography Standard 3, Key Idea 1:

Geography can be divided into six essential elements, which can be used to analyze important historic, geographic, economic, and environmental questions and issues. These six elements include the world in spatial terms, places and regions, physical settings (including natural resources), human systems, environment and society, and the use of geography (Adapted from The National Geography Standards, 1994: Geography for Life).

Performance Indicator:

- Locate places within the local community, State, and nation; locate the Earth's continents in relation to each other and to principal parallels and meridians (Adapted from National Geography Standards, 1994).

-Identify and compare the physical, human, and cultural characteristics of different regions and people (Adapted from National Geography Standards, 1994).

- Investigate how people depend on and modify the physical environment.

Common Core State Standard for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: Reading Standards for Informational Text Grade 3 Key Ideas and Details:

Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).

Essential Question: What impact does geography of a region have on the people who live there?

Materials:

- graphic organizers

- topographical maps

Topographical maps are an imperative component of this lesson providing a different lens through which students investigate the geography of a region. Lintner (2010) urges teachers to utilize resources and materials that foster critical thinking as a consistent part of their pedagogy. Students had experience with flat world maps and globes when introduced to the African continent and the topographical maps deepen their understanding of geography as well as their sense of location. Appendix C contains a graphic organizer that was designed to support students in through the inquiry process and facilitate discourse with their peers.

Learning Experiences:

Activity 1: Students investigate topographical maps, globe and paper world maps to explore and record their findings on the graphic organizer. Students will need to determine latitude, longitude, and the major landforms (desert, savannah, Great Rift Valley, plateau, plains, lakes, oceans, volcanoes, Mt. Kilimanjaro, Mt. Kenya, Lake Victoria).

Activity 2: Next, students will work in groups and make predictions as to how the geography of the region might affect various components of the Masai Culture (food, clothing, language, recreation, religion, economy arts/literature/music, education, government/law, values). Within their groups they will identify three components of culture that they predict to be affected the most by the geography of the region. Students will write a hypothesis based on this work (e.g., The Masai people have a strong economy because the mountains attract many tourists to the area).

Instructional Strategies:

The instructional strategies and learning experiences in this lesson are based on the Constructivist approach. In order to develop critical think and problem solving skills students

must engage in activities that allow them to apply and hone these skills in such a way that they learn by doing (Bolinger and Warren, 2007). The three dimensional element of the topographical maps provides a realistic and tangible means to explore the geography of a region independently and ponder the possible impact on those who inhabit the area. This experienced lessons in previous units where students learn about geography and location through a lecture format while the teacher shows a map to the students and described the different elements of the region. In this lesson students also take on the role of researcher as they develop a hypothesis about the information that they gathered.

Differentiation:

Students who need additional support are provided with an alternative organizer that had had all descriptive information inserted. This guided students so that they have additional information to refer to when determining what landform and geographical features exist. Students using the modified organizer are able to participate in active inquiry and be successful. Discourse groups were differentiated according to student generated hypotheses. Each member of the group develops a hypothesis regarding the impact of the geography on the region related to a different component of culture so that multiple perspectives and ideals were analyzed.

Assessment: 3-2-1

Students will down **3** different geographical features they learned about including the name of the feature and an accurate description, **2** ways that the geography of Africa impacts the Masai Culture, and **1** question they still have about what they have learned so far or something new they would like to investigate.

Lesson 3: The Components of the Masai Culture/Active Research

New York State Standard: World History

Standard 2, Key Idea 4

The skills of historical analysis include the ability to investigate differing and competing interpretations of the theories of history, hypothesize about why interpretations change over time, explain the importance of historical evidence, and understand the concepts of change and continuity over time.

Performance Indicator:

Explore the lifestyles, beliefs, traditions, rules and laws, and social/cultural needs and wants of people during different periods in history and in different parts of the world.

Common Core State Standard for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: Reading Standards for Informational Text Grade

3 Key Ideas and Details:

Use text features and search tools (e.g., keywords, sidebars, hyperlinks) to locate information relevant to a given topic efficiently.

Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a *grade 3 topic or subject area*.

Essential Question: How do we think critically to draw accurate conclusions?

Materials:

- laptops
- graphic organizer for note taking
- hypothesis analysis worksheet
- hypothesis from previous lesson

Using the laptops to access the internet during independent research is an important activity when college and workforce readiness are the overarching goal of all learning experiences. Students need to be proficient with the intricacies involved in navigating the Web for a variety of purposes including conducting research or gathering information. Complex nonfiction text can also be accessed via the World Book site making it an invaluable resource as there is a significant gap in complex nonfiction print sources. The text is also accompanied by pictures, captions, and additional text features.

Learning Experiences:

** Prior to this lesson students will need to have a clear understanding of task related vocabulary (hypothesis, assumption, contradictory).*

Activity 1: Students will use the World Book site to gather information about the components of the Masai Culture (food, clothing, language, recreation, religion, economy arts/literature/music, education, government/law, values).

Activity 2: Next, students will gather in groups of four (groupings will be determined by the hypothesis that they wrote. Each group will have four hypotheses that reflect different components of culture to greatest extent possible). Next, students will analyze the collective information that they have gathered and draw conclusions regarding the validity of each hypothesis. If the hypothesis is determined to be false, students will rewrite it to be true (draw a conclusion/make a statement). In addition, they will discuss and record possible misconceptions/false assumptions that led them to write the initial hypothesis.

Instructional Strategies:

This lesson focuses on problem solving in a systematic way. Students are first required to use their knowledge to develop a hypothesis about the Masai. As students use research to refine

their hypotheses, they are guided to analyze misconceptions and assumptions. Using reflective thinking in conjunction with research students engaged in critical thinking and problem solving in a more sophisticated way than if they only have to prove or disprove the hypothesis.

Differentiation:

World book provides differentiated text through two different possible search tools.

World book Kids provides complex nonfiction content through a predictable structure and text that has can be easily decoded. World Book Student contains the same content with more complicated structures and vocabulary.

Assessment:

Students will create a poster that illustrates their conclusion/statement about the Masai culture.

Lesson 4: Exploring Different Types of Print Resources to Learn About Culture

New York State Standard: Standard 2, Key Idea 1:

The study of world history requires an understanding of world cultures and civilizations, including an analysis of important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs, and traditions. This study also examines the human condition and the connections and interactions of people across time and space and the ways different people view the same event or issue from a variety of perspectives.

Performance Indicator:

- Read historical narratives, myths, legends, biographies, and autobiographies to learn about how historical figures lived, their motivations, hopes, fears, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Explore narrative accounts of important events from world history to learn about different accounts of the past to begin to understand how interpretations and perspectives develop.

Common Core State Standard for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: Reading Standards for Informational Text Grade

3 Key Ideas and Details:

- Describe the logical connection between particular sentences and paragraphs in a text (e.g., comparison, cause/effect, first/second/third in a sequence).
- Compare and contrast the most important points and key details presented in two texts on the same topic.
- Compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event or topic; describe the differences in focus and the information provided.

Essential Question: Why do we read a variety of genres when we are studying other cultures?

Materials:

- **Fiction/Traditional Literature:** *Mama Panya's Pancakes, Masai and I* – Kroll, *The Lonely Lioness* – Aardema, *The Warrior and the Moon: Spirit of the Maasai*- Would and Safarewicz
- **Non-fiction:** *Countries of the World: A Primary Source Journey Kenya* Levey, J. (2003), *A- Z Kenya* Fonte, R. and J. ((2003), *Masai of Africa* – McQuail, *The Masai of East Africa* - Hetfield, *Countries of the World*; *Keny-Dahl*
- **Poetry:** *World Peace*, by Faith Carter, <http://www.maasaiwarrior.com/?m=8&idkey=558>
Three Masai Warriors, by Ozymandias <http://gotpoetry?.com>, *Maasai Girls*.by Sekenani School Girls <http://www.youtube.com>
- double entry journal
- computer/laptop

The text resources used in this lesson are evaluated using the three part text complexity model presented in the new Common Core Learning Standards. The non-fiction texts include a primary source guide a variety of complex text features.

Learning Experiences:

Activity 1: Read the book, *Mama Payna's Pancakes*. The story is an African tale told from the perspectives of a Masai child and his Mother. The story is realistic fiction that depicts many components of African life in a subtle way so that the focus is on a lesson about sharing and community while other aspects of the culture such as economics come to life although they are not explicitly stated. This is helpful in that it requires students to make inferences and draw conclusions while constructing new knowledge. While listening to the story, student's record

highlights from the text and their thoughts about it on a double entry journal. After reading the story, engage in a whole group discussion about the text and their thoughts.

Revisit the essential question: Why do we read different genres when we are studying other cultures? Record student responses on chart paper.

Activity 2: Students break into three groups. Each group explores a different genre relating to the Masai. After exploring the texts/passages, students will answer questions related their findings. Then, students will come back in a whole group and share their work with the rest of the class.

Instructional Strategies:

In this lesson, students are assigned a specific genre to explore and analyze with group members. Upon completing their inquiry into that genre, the students shared their findings with the whole class. This strategy promotes deepening understandings through an in depth analysis of a specific genre while the whole group activity led to greater breadth of understanding. This strategy is effective for balancing concentrated investigations that foster critical thinking with broader experiential learning.

Differentiation:

Each genre station for this lesson is equipped with a listening center. At least one of the texts at each station is recorded on a compact disc so that every student is able to access the complex non-fiction texts independently. This strategy allows students who would otherwise not be able to the read text to listen to the content while following along in the passage or book.

Assessment:

Reflection- Students will write a written response to the question- How does examination of different genres related to a culture help you to better understand the culture?

Lesson 5: *"There is no nation so powerful it cannot be wounded, nor a people so small they cannot offer mighty comfort."*

New York State standard: Standard 2, Key Idea 1:

The study of world history requires an understanding of world cultures and civilizations, including an analysis of important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs, and traditions. This study also examines the human condition and the connections and interactions of people across time and space and the ways different people view the same event or issue from a variety of perspectives.

Performance Indicator:

- Read historical narratives, myths, legends, biographies, and autobiographies to learn about how historical figures lived, their motivations, hopes, fears, strengths, and weaknesses.

- Explore narrative accounts of important events from world history to learn about different accounts of the past to begin to understand how interpretations and perspectives develop.

Common Core State Standard for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: Reading Standards for Informational Text Grade 3 Key Ideas and Details:

Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

Essential question: What can we learn from studying different cultures?

Materials:

- book 14 Cows for America, by Carmen Agra Deedy
- computer

- projector
- index cards with questions
- desks arranged to facilitate discussion
- reflection worksheet

14 Cows for America is a beautifully illustrated, extraordinarily powerful true story. It tells the story of a Masai Warrior who was attending school in America at the time of the 9/11 attacks on America. Upon his return to Africa, the village children ask for stories of his journey. He tells of the horror of the event that took place on 9/11 and the entire village joins in his sorrow. They decide to give the gift of 14 cows to America. To the Masai people the cow equates to life itself. This selfless gesture brought two unlikely cultures to common ground.

Learning Experience:

Activity 1- Students will listen to the story 14 Cows for America while watching it on a slide show projected on the big screen. While listening to the story students will take note notes to reference for the Socratic discussion in activity 2.

Activity 2- After the reading, engage in a whole group Socratic discussion. **Guiding discussion questions:** What does the giving of the cows symbolize? What can we learn about the Masai values and beliefs from their actions? How does hearing the story, 14 Cows for America change your perception of the Masai culture? What does it mean when the author says, *He has brought one story, it has burned a hole in his hear?* (Teacher will pose additional questions intermittently: Does anyone think differently? Who disagrees? What are the most important words/ phrases in the story? etc.)

Instructional Strategies:

The use of technology in this lesson helps to accentuate the powerful message and themes in the text. It also provides students with a different experience when listening to the text which is important in maintaining student interest and engagement with the text. The Socratic style discussion supports independence and participation for all learners. Through this forum students internalized socially just practices as they deepen their understanding of the content and the enduring social studies concepts.

Differentiation:

Students who need additional support and confidence related to the Socratic discussion are provided with a bank of questions to ponder and choose from.

Assessment:

Students will write a reflection in response to this quote from 14 Cows for America:

"There is no nation so powerful it cannot be wounded, nor a people so small they cannot offer mighty comfort". After studying the Masai culture and listening to the true story, 14 Cows for America, explain what this quote means to you and your understanding of culture.

Culminating Assessment:

Students will take on the role of a Masai child and write a letter from that perspective.

The letter will respond to a randomly distributed letter from lesson 1. In their response students will:

- Answer the question about Masai culture that was posed in the letter that they are responding to.
- Explain at least 2 controversial aspects of the Masai culture (the drinking of bulls blood, homes made from cow dung, family structure, etc.).

- Take a stance about the importance of learning about diverse cultures and provide specific examples to support their argument.

Throughout the unit students complete a variety of formal and informal assessments that provide the teacher with a wealth knowledge regarding the students' learning. These assessments illuminate the students understanding of the content and concepts that are at the core of the lessons. Information gathered from these assessments informs the planning process as the teacher analyzes student response. Noting understandings as well as misconceptions throughout the unit enables the teacher to refine future lessons so that instructional goals are met. The culminating assessment provides students with an authentic venue to demonstrate knowledge constructed over the entire course of the unit.

Chapter 4: Reflection

Teachers today often feel overwhelmed by the ever increasing challenges and demands that exist in the current educational system. When a new initiative is presented to teachers, questions related to plausibility and implementation often surface. Through this curriculum project I sought to implement the new Common Core Learning Standards through the current social studies curriculum with integrity and rigor. Despite the gaps that exist between the expectations set forth by the standards and the available resources to support implementation, this project demonstrates the actuality of developing curriculum compels achievement through a supplemental and complementary approach and mindset.

This year I found myself teaching a new grade level and developing a deeper understanding of the "high stakes" standardized tests and the implications for the classroom. Through this experience I was forced to look more deeply at my own instructional practices and became more cognizant of my role as a facilitator of critical thinking not good test taking.

Standards-based curricula impart a lucid foundation upon which teachers plan, implement and assess student progress in a concrete and tangible way. This unit plan design demonstrates an inclusive framework for implementing the new Common Core Learning Standards at the highest level across disciplines. Throughout the unit content specific standards are utilized in conjunction with the new Common Core Learning Standards as a solid foundation for planning comprehensive lessons that address skills and knowledge that students must acquire to become critical thinkers in the twenty first century. Despite gaps and challenges that exist between the new standards and current curriculum, the standards can be fully implemented through this process. Material and resource analysis, selection of instructional strategies, and differentiation in all contexts were developed through the lens of the standards and goals, but also through the

lens of the existing gaps. While materials, instructional strategies, and differentiation are often planned for, they must be considered through both lenses for adequate instruction to occur. This unit plan serves as a model for planning in all content areas across grade levels.

The reality is that students who develop strong critical thinking skills will apply those skills in all situations including test taking. I think that teachers often forget that students who struggle with reading and writing are capable of developing problem solving and critical thinking. Providing instructional experiences that require application of these skills builds student engagement and confidence that will transfer across disciplines. Social Studies offer rich content for students to unpack and develop skills and insights that benefit them throughout their lifetime.

Students need to be engaged and focused for construction of new knowledge to occur. There are several students in my classroom with special needs including, Autism, ADHD, behavioral and emotional issues. Academic tasks and activities can potentially be the source of frustration and breakdown for many of these kids. This unit was designed to foster engagement and focus for all students regardless of their academic or behavioral needs. When students are invested in the learning process, they often demonstrate greater self-control and respect for the curriculum, themselves, and others. Several factors may contribute to student engagement achievement and therefore must be taken into account in the planning process. In socially just classrooms, students begin to see themselves as important contributors to the learning of their peers, as well as their own learning. This is very powerful for all children and leads to investment in the tasks at hand and ownership over learning. The instructional strategies embedded throughout the unit foster autonomy by actively engaging students in the inquiry process as they take on the role of researcher. Beyond active research, the students generate their

own questions related to the topics and apply analytical thinking skills independently as well as within a group of their peers when constructing new knowledge. Additionally, the content was simply interesting. This was not because the Masai just so happen to be an interesting culture. The interest came from the intentionality to expose the children to the controversial issues that require students to develop and apply critical thinking skills involving questioning, comparing/contrasting, generating ideas/hypothesizing, analyzing, and synthesizing. Careful implementation of instructional strategies enables students to bring the content to life in ways that are meaningful for them and are built from their prior knowledge and experiences.

Material analysis is crucial component of planning for instructional experiences that lend to critical thinking and active engagement while maintaining applicability to both the skills and knowledge related goals within a unit. When analyzing text or print materials, the Common Core Learning Standards Three Part Complexity Model should be used as a guide for selection as depicted throughout this unit (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). When gathering other materials, current research should be referenced and materials should be selected or modified accordingly. Modifications may need to occur by way of teacher created resources and materials that fit the standards and goals of the lessons along with the needs of the students as seen in appendices B-F.

Through this experience I learned to approach the standards based planning process through lens of social justice as opposed to trying to insert aspects of socially just teaching after the fact. I experienced a change in my attitude towards social studies as well as my student's attitudes. In the future I plan to apply my learning not only in the classroom, but through collaboration with my colleagues. Social justice begins with awareness and a mindset and grows from there.

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Appendix A. Third Grade Masai Unit Revised to Reflect Social Justice &

Align with the Common Core Learning Standards

Grade 3 Social Studies

Unit: The Masai

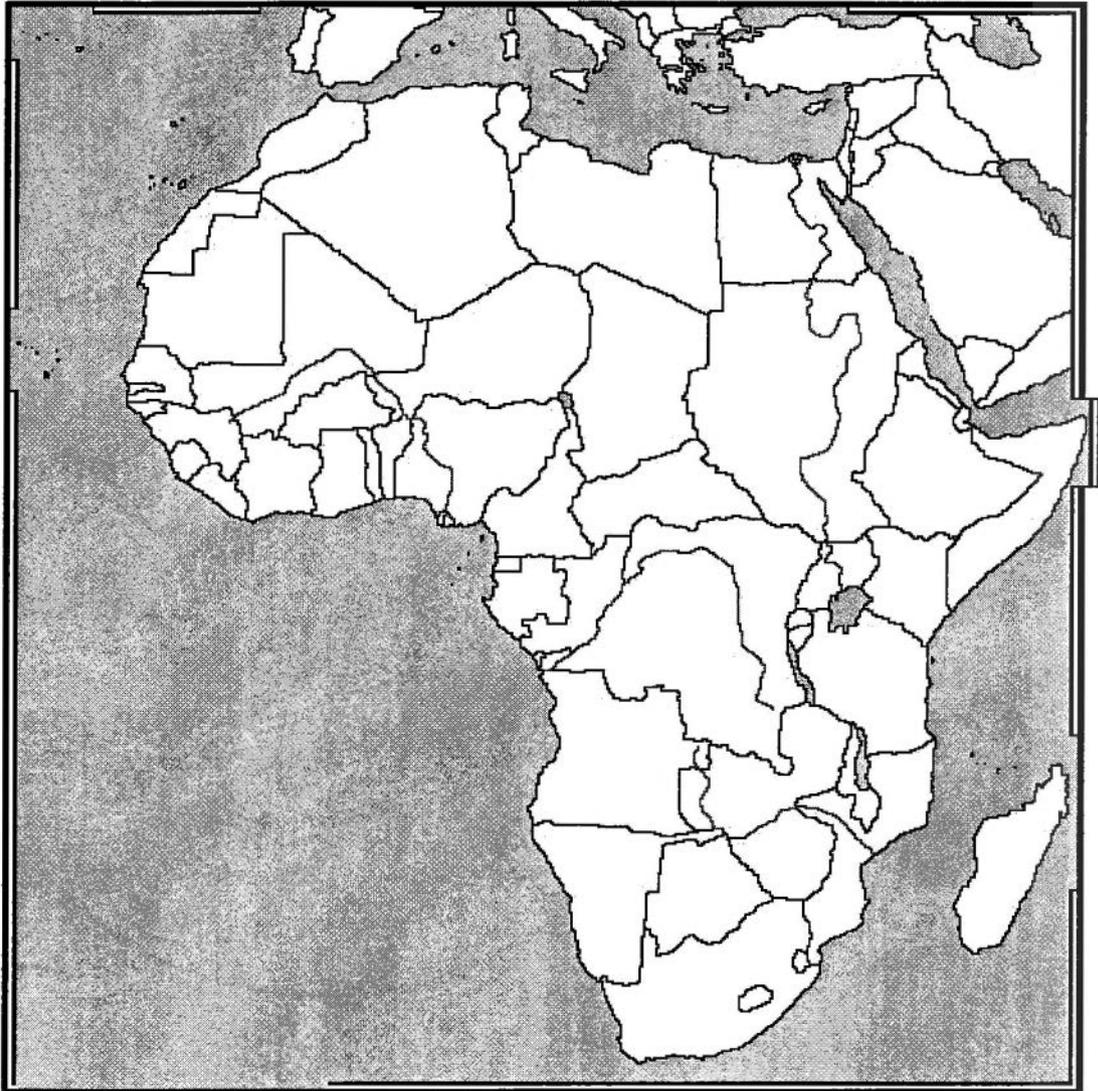
** Lessons in this unit are divided into activities that may require several days to complete.*

**Students will keep the majority of their work in their anthropology notebook that they have been creating throughout the year.*

Enduring understandings	Focus Questions	Essential Knowledge	Essential Skills	Assessments Formative/Summative
<p>NCSS curriculum strand 3: People, Places, and Environments</p> <p><i>Where people live influences how they live.</i></p> <p>NCSS curriculum strand 1: Culture</p> <p><i>Art, music, literature, and artifacts help define the values and beliefs of a culture.</i></p> <p><i>Belief systems help define and reflect the values and beliefs of a culture.</i></p> <p>NCSS curriculum strand 2: Time, Continuity and Change</p>	<p>What are the key components of the Masai culture?</p> <p>How does the geography of the region impact how they live?</p> <p>What are the values and beliefs of the Masai culture?</p> <p>How is our culture similar to and different from the Masai culture?</p>	<p>The components of culture: Language, food, clothing, religion, arts/literature/music, economy, education, government/law, family values, recreation</p> <p>Geographical features: desert, savannah, Great Rift Valley, plateau, oceans, volcano, and crater.</p> <p>Values and beliefs.</p>	<p>Questioning</p> <p>Analyzing information</p> <p>Make inferences</p> <p>Synthesizing information to draw conclusions.</p> <p>Substantiating claims with specific evidence.</p> <p>Compare and Contrast</p>	<p>KWL</p> <p>Double entry journal</p> <p>Discourse</p> <p>Role play</p> <p>Persuasive letter</p> <p>Feature article</p>

<i>Different people view the same event or issue from different perspectives.</i>				
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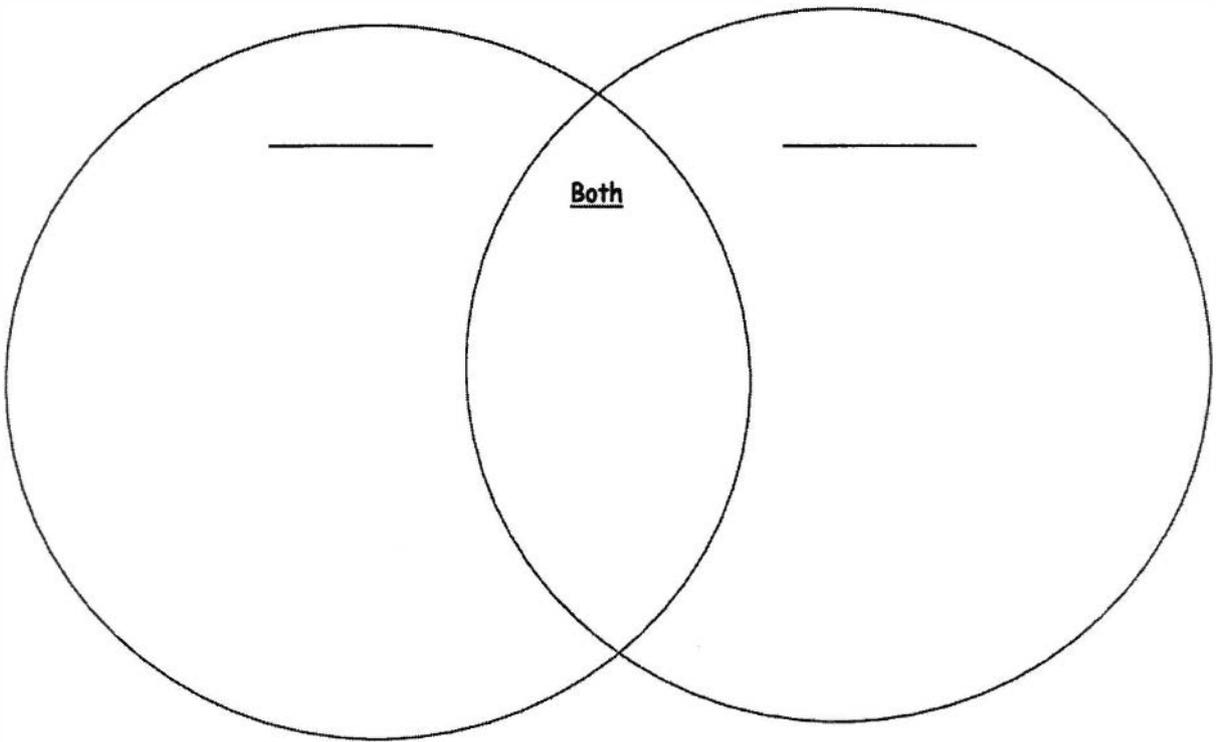
Appendix B-1. Lesson 1 Map of Africa



Appendix B-2. Lesson 1: Venn Diagram

Compare and Contrast

Topic: _____



Appendix C. Lesson 2 Geography Notes

Locate Kenya and Tanzania on the maps. Determine the latitudinal and longitudinal measurements for each.

Kenya: Latitude _____ Longitude _____

Tanzania: Latitude _____ Longitude _____

Find at least 5 geographical features or landforms that may affect the Masai culture. Record the name and description of each:

Name	Description

Hypothesis:

Appendix D-1. Lesson 3

Sign on to your laptop. Go the favorites menu and select *World Book Online*. Next, choose *World Book Student* and *Articles*. Type *Africa* in the search box. Read the articles and take notes on each component of culture. Be sure to pay attention to subtitles pictures and captions.

Component of Culture	Notes
food	
clothing	
religion	
economy	
arts/lit/music	
education	

government/law	
values	
language	
recreation	

Appendix D-2. Lesson 3

Hypothesis Analysis Worksheet:

Original Hypothesis:

Assumptions I made:

- ---
- ---

Contradictory evidence:

- ---
- ---
- ---

New Conclusion:

Appendix E-1. Lesson 4

Social Studies: Why do we read different genres when we are studying other cultures?

What the text said:	What it made me think:
<i>Mama Panya sang as she kicked sand with her bare feet, dousing the breakfast fire.</i>	Why does she cook breakfast on a fire? Why are her feet bare? I wonder if she lives on a beach.

Appendix E-2. Lesson 4

What genre did your group examine? _____

What new information did you learn about the Masai Culture?

Through whose perspective did the information come from? (Example: The author, a Masai child, a Masai Warrior, an animal?)

What was the author's purpose for writing this?

How did this investigation help you to better understand the Masai Culture?
