

# The New York State K–12 Social Studies Toolkit and Professional Development Project

The approval of the New York State K–12 Social Studies Framework in April 2014 by the Board of Regents set in motion a series of efforts designed to define and support the best in social studies teaching and learning. The New York State K–12 Social Studies Toolkit and Professional Development Project (the Toolkit), which focuses on curriculum writing resources and the professional development of teachers, is an important step in building on the foundation of the framework.

The New York State K–12 Social Studies Framework defines the content and skills that support a rich and rigorous social studies curriculum. Drawing on the National Council for the Social Studies themes and the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for State Social Studies Standards* (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013), the framework is organized around the five learning standards; grade-specific lists of social studies content expressed as Key Ideas, Conceptual Understandings, and Content Specifications; and six categories of Social Studies Practices.

## Toolkit Approach

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The Toolkit project provides a bridge between the New York State Social Studies Framework and teachers' classroom practices. Three elements define the Toolkit approach:

- 1. Use of the Inquiry Design Model™:** Fundamental to the Toolkit curriculum work is the Inquiry Design Model (IDM™), which offers pedagogical suggestions to teachers but relies on their expertise and experience for implementation. Unique to IDM is the Blueprint™, a one-page presentation of the questions, tasks, and sources that define a curricular inquiry. Within the Toolkit are 84 inquiries: Five at each grade from kindergarten to grade 11 and ten at grade 12 (five each for Economics and Participation in Government). Each of the inquiries features a blueprint and a short description of how the inquiry might be taught. Fourteen of the inquiries (one at each grade from kindergarten to grade 11 and two at grade 12) are fully annotated with detailed explanations highlighting the IDM components.
- 2. Refinement of the Toolkit inquiries through field-testing and review:** Curriculum work is challenging because it is typically done in the abstract with the writers imagining generic classroom situations and students. In contrast, an iterative development process was used to develop the Toolkit. Writers of the Toolkit inquiries engaged educators and stakeholders in the development process, using feedback from multiple groups of external reviewers and teachers piloting the work in New York classrooms to revise the inquiries throughout the process.
- 3. Commitment to professional learning alongside resource development:** The third distinguishing element of the Toolkit project is the addition of a set of professional development resources to aid teachers.

Throughout the Toolkit development process, New York teachers have worked in collaboration with college and university faculty and New York State Education Department personnel to create resources that support teachers as they implement the New York State K–12 Social Studies Framework.

## The Toolkit Project

The Toolkit project comprises three parts (see Figure 1). The first part, the *Conceptual Foundations*, describes the principles that inform the IDM. The second part of the Toolkit, *Grade-Level Inquiries*, is a set of 84 curriculum inquiries that are built around the IDM and reflect the New York State K–12 Social Studies Framework and the New York State P–12 Common Core Standards for English-Language Arts and Literacy. As the inquiries were developed, they were field-tested in classrooms across New York State. This section also includes the IDM templates for creating additional inquiries. The third part of the Toolkit, *Professional Learning Resources*, houses a set of professional development materials (e.g., PowerPoint slides, handouts, and videos) for use in workshops and turnkey programs.

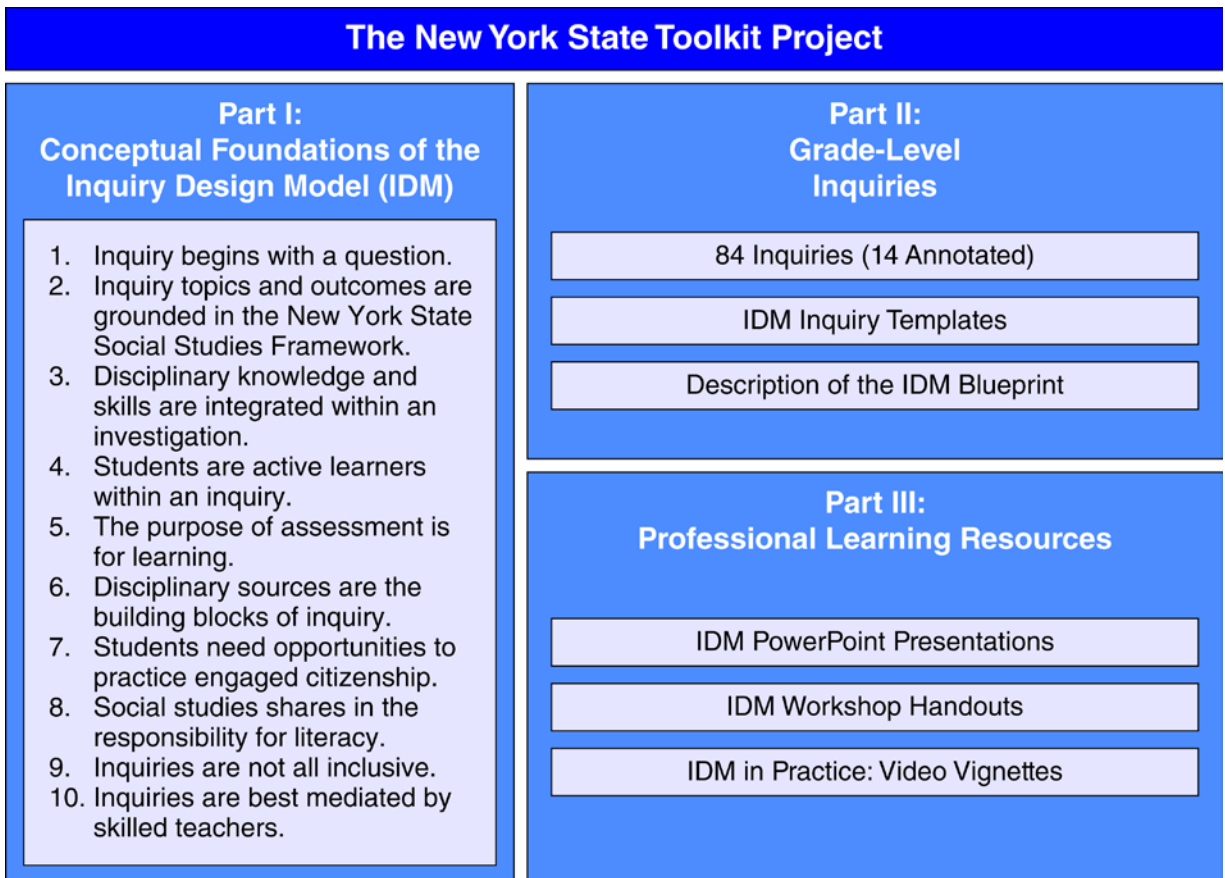


Figure 1: Components of the New York State Toolkit Project

## Development of the Toolkit

After the New York State K-12 Social Studies Framework was published, funding for a set of curriculum resources was made available based on federal Race to the Top monies. The Project Management Team consists of Dr. S. G. Grant, professor of social studies education at Binghamton University; Dr. Kathy Swan, professor of social studies education at the University of Kentucky; Dr. John Lee, professor of social studies education at North Carolina State University; and Ms. Jean Dorak, assistant dean of the Graduate School of Education at Binghamton University.

Work began on the Toolkit project in June 2014 when the Project Management Team met with 14 New York State teachers (one teacher representing each grade from kindergarten to grade 11; two teachers—one for Economics

and one for Participation in Government—representing grade 12) who were selected to be curriculum writers. The writers, along with a 42-member Teacher Collaborative Council (three teachers representing each grade from kindergarten to grade 11; six teachers—three for Economics and three for Participation in Government—representing grade 12) were chosen from nearly 400 applicants. The Teacher Collaborative Council, whose primary responsibilities included reviewing and piloting the inquiries and leading professional development opportunities, met with the Project Management Team in August 2014. Later that month, 18 academic reviewers were selected from colleges and universities in New York State and across the United States. These reviewers provided insights into the content and pedagogy included in the inquiries. Content experts in United States and world history, geography, economics, and political science, along with pedagogical experts in social studies methods, English language arts, English for language learners, and students receiving special education services, reviewed the annotated and abridged inquiries.

Evaluation of the inquiries by the Teacher Collaborative Council and college and university content and pedagogical experts was just part of the review process. The Social Studies Content Advisory Panel, a group of New York State K–12 and college faculty, provided one level of review; the staff of the New York State Education Department provided a second. State-level social studies consultants from across the United States were also invited to participate in a review of the inquiries through their involvement in the Social Studies Assessment Curriculum and Instruction group (sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers).

In each case, the writers used the feedback offered by these groups to revise the inquiries and prepare them for publication.

## Part I: Conceptual Foundations of the IDM

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The Toolkit project is designed around the IDM. In this section, the 10 assumptions that support this model are described. These assumptions, based in research and practice, are integral to the conceptual and pedagogical coherence of the IDM in general and the 84 inquiries in particular.

- 1. Inquiry begins with a question.** At the heart of social studies is the drive to understand how the social world operates; in short, why do people do the things they do? That seemingly simple question and others that emanate from it offer an opportunity for students and their teachers to explore and examine the many ways people have lived their lives both past and present.

No social issue, however, can be addressed through a single disciplinary lens because no social problem is *only* economic, political, historical, or geographic. The challenges we face are multifaceted and demand that we use the skills and content knowledge of history and the social science disciplines to address them. The questions students and their teachers examine do not lend themselves to simplistic conclusions. The conclusions they reach will be better informed when based on thoughtful and multidisciplinary approaches. As John Dewey (1916/1997) noted, “only by wrestling with the conditions of the problem at first hand, seeking and finding his own way out” (p. 188) do we learn how to think and reason our way through social problems.

The approach taken in the Toolkit is to frame grade-level inquiries around the New York State K–12 Social Studies Framework. The compelling question within each inquiry addresses key issues and topics found in and across social science disciplines and history. Compelling questions should also represent concerns or interests that are relevant to students’ lives and worthy of research. For example, “Who won the Cold War?” could be considered a compelling question because it reflects a genuine intellectual dispute, but it does so in a way likely to spark student interest in that it plays off the idea that winners and losers in wars should be easy to define (Grant, 2013).

The IDM represented in the Toolkit features a compelling question and the elements necessary to support students as they address that question in a thoughtful fashion:

Toolkit Element	Purpose
Compelling question	Frames the unit of study
Staging the compelling question	Builds student interest
Supporting questions	Develop the key content
Formative performance tasks	Demonstrate emergent understandings
Featured sources	Provide opportunities to generate curiosity, build knowledge, and construct arguments
Summative performance task	Demonstrates evidence-based arguments
Extension activities	Provide options to the summative task
Taking informed action exercise	Offers opportunities for civic engagement

Each of these elements is represented on the first page, or blueprint, of the inquiry and is briefly described on the following pages. In the 14 annotated inquiries, however, the writers describe the elements and offer an expanded range of pedagogical advice.

Crafting compelling questions and the elements needed to scaffold the rest of an inquiry can be more challenging than it appears. Doing so, however, puts students in the middle of legitimate and authentic inquiries rather than marching them through a series of “just the facts” curriculum units. There is substantial evidence that the latter approach does not work well (Goodlad, 1984; Grant, 2003; McNeil, 1988; Yeager & Davis, 1996). IDM is a curricular and instructional approach designed to support students’ intellectual curiosity and improve their skills and content knowledge.

- Inquiry topics and outcomes are grounded in the New York State Social Studies Framework.** At the core of the Toolkit project are two frameworks—the inquiry-focused standards represented in the C3 Framework and the content-focused standards in the New York State Social Studies Framework. The 84 inquiries represented in the Toolkit reflect the curriculum design evident in the C3 Framework; they take their specific content cues from the New York State Social Studies Framework. All of the inquiries are explicitly linked to Key Ideas as well as to the related Conceptual Understandings, Content Specifications, and Social Studies Practices.

Standards-based instruction requires a comprehensive approach that aligns all aspects of teaching and learning to the high-level goals of the New York State Social Studies Framework. While the inquiries align with the New York State Social Studies Framework, they are *not* intended to be comprehensive, *nor* are they intended to be a series of prescribed lesson plans. They are intended to serve as pedagogically rich examples of ways in which content and skills can be addressed with students. These inquiries are typically designed to fit within 5–7 days of instruction.

Writing curriculum based on a state framework requires paying close attention to the scope of content included in the framework as well as to the level of knowledge and skills expected of students. The Toolkit writers make explicit connections between the ideas and practices represented in the framework.

- 3. Disciplinary knowledge and skills are integrated within an investigation.** Long debated in social studies circles, the question of whether to focus on content and conceptual knowledge or skills has been firmly answered in both the C3 Framework and the New York State Social Studies Framework: Good teaching focuses on both.

Dimension 2—Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools—of the C3 Framework outlines the kind of disciplinary knowledge and skills students need to develop and answer compelling questions. Skills and knowledge in isolation have little value. It is the application of skills in the pursuit of knowing and understanding the past and the present that makes up the substance of social studies (Willingham, 2003). In the New York State Social Studies Framework, this substance—the disciplinary knowledge and skills—is clearly delineated. Social studies content and concepts are presented in the Key Ideas, Conceptual Understandings, and Content Specifications. Social studies skills are represented as the Social Studies Practices. In the IDM, each of these categories is explicitly listed and developed across the inquiries.

- 4. Students are active learners within an inquiry.** Central to the IDM approach is psychologist Jerome Bruner’s (1960) observation about the relationship between students and ideas: “We begin with the hypothesis that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development” (p. 33). The accumulating research evidence demonstrates the idea that students actively construct knowledge rather than passively receive it (Bruner, 1990; Grant, 2003; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1996; Piaget, 1962; Saye & SSIRC, 2013; Wineburg & Wilson, 1991).

Taking Bruner’s quote seriously means teachers need to find ways to engage all students in the topics under study. One assumption of IDM is that students of all abilities can participate in the questions and tasks in the inquiries. To support students across a range of abilities, the Toolkit inquiries include suggestions on how to create language-focused scaffolds, vocabulary guides, and other instructional tools to support all students so that they can be successful. The inquiries also offer a range of ways to interact with the sources that students encounter as their curiosity is engaged and as they build their disciplinary knowledge and their arguments.

Central to a rich social studies experience is the capacity for developing questions that can frame and advance an inquiry. Those questions come in two forms: compelling and supporting questions. The authors of the C3 Framework argue that students can and should play a role in constructing the questions that guide the inquiries in which they engage. Constructing questions is a challenging intellectual pursuit, and students, particularly before grade 6, may need teacher guidance in doing so.

Creating compelling and supporting questions is only one way, however, for students’ questions to play a role in inquiries. Student questions can surface in several ways. For example, students might suggest modifying a teacher’s compelling question, they might propose additional and/or alternative supporting questions, or they might inspire their teachers to develop compelling questions for new inquiries.

- 5. The purpose of assessment is for learning.** One of the biggest challenges teachers face is understanding what students know. Assessments come in a variety of forms, but none is perfect and each has constraints as a vehicle for judging students’ knowledge and skills.

The IDM features both formative and summative performance tasks, and these provide assessments for instructional purposes and evaluation. The formative performance tasks reflect an inquiry’s supporting questions and offer students opportunities to build their content knowledge and their social studies skills. Formative performance tasks also offer teachers snapshots of their students’ progress so that they can modify their instructional plans if necessary. The summative performance task is tied to an inquiry’s compelling question and asks students to construct an evidence-based argument in response.

The formative and summative performance tasks threaded throughout the inquiries provide teachers with multiple opportunities to evaluate what students know and are able to do. These tasks can be informal or

formal, but each is constructed to provide students with an opportunity to learn by doing and for teachers to have a steady loop of data to inform their instructional decision making.

As a result, the IDM encourages the use of a variety of assessment approaches for formative performance tasks—writing, debates, T-charts, and structured discussions. The summative performance task may also take a number of forms—a five-paragraph essay, a chart, or a poster. The form in which an argument is expressed is less important than the opportunity it provides for teachers to see how their students marshal evidence to express and support their conclusions.

The summative performance tasks act as a kind of convergent assessment. A convergent assessment is one where the preceding, formative performance tasks have been scaffolded in such a way that students' knowledge and skills converge in the construction of evidence-based arguments that respond to compelling questions.

Convergent assessments are useful as direct measures of students' capacity to engage with an inquiry. Also useful, however, are divergent assessments as they provide opportunities for teachers to stretch their students' understandings. Each summative performance task features an extension task. These tasks can take many forms—a structured discussion, a perspective-taking exercise, or a documentary. The idea is to present students with additional and alternative ways to engage with the ideas that are central to an inquiry.

Extensions, along with the Taking Informed Action activities described later, offer variety to the inquiry assessments. Although inquiries may end formally when students' construct their arguments, teachers may want to vary the ways in which students present those arguments by substituting the options represented in the extensions or the Taking Informed Action activities.

- 6. Disciplinary sources are the building blocks of inquiry.** The Internet is a useful resource for social studies teachers to find primary and secondary sources. Access to original writings, maps, political cartoons, artwork, and the like present terrific opportunities for students to deeply explore the content behind a compelling question. Sources can take a variety of forms—including text, data, spatial representations, images, artifacts—and can even be embodied in people's stories.

Not all sources are equally valuable or reliable, however. Students will need the guidance of their teachers as they learn to navigate the sources represented in the inquiries. First, teachers need to help their students realize that every source reflects a perspective; implicitly and/or explicitly, all sources reflect the bias of their producers. Historian E. H. Carr (1961) recognized this condition when he cautioned, “study the historian before you study the facts” (p. 26). Given Carr's caution, the second way in which teachers can assist their students is to use a range of sources as they develop their instructional plans. Finally, teachers need to think about the forms in which they present sources to their students. Although there is considerable value in reading sources in their original length and language, teachers should consider the possible advantages of annotating, excerpting, and/or modifying sources, especially long and conceptually dense texts.

The IDM embraces the use of multiple sources. Because there are far more sources on every topic than could be listed in the inquiries and because no one source can address every aspect and perspective on a given topic, the inquiries contain a limited number of featured sources. These featured selections illustrate the kinds of sources students might use to build their knowledge, skills, and arguments. Sources can be used for three distinct, but mutually reinforcing, purposes: to generate students' curiosity and interest in the topic, to build students' content knowledge, and to help students construct and support their arguments related to a compelling question. Recognizing the rich array of sources available, the writers have included additional source suggestions for teachers to consider as they build out the inquiries.

- 7. Students need opportunities to practice engaged citizenship.** Social studies has long been criticized for its limited attention to civic engagement (Campbell, Levinson, & Hess, 2012; Levine, 2007; Levinson, 2014).

Learning how a bill becomes a law and how individual and group rights have been addressed by examining Supreme Court cases are useful activities. But, if students' ideas and actions are confined to the classroom, then they miss important opportunities to see how those ideas and actions play out in other public venues. One of the key dimensions of the C3 Framework and the New York State Social Studies Framework, then, is the idea of taking informed action.

Informed action can take numerous forms (e.g., discussions, debates, and presentations) and can occur in a variety of contexts both inside and outside the classroom. Key to any action, however, is the idea that it is *informed*. The IDM, therefore, stages the Taking Informed Action tasks such that students build their knowledge and understanding of an issue before engaging in any social action. In the *understand* stage, students demonstrate that they can think about the issues behind the inquiry in a new setting or context. The *assess* stage asks students to consider alternative perspectives, scenarios, or options as they begin to define a possible set of actions. And the *act* stage is where students decide if and how they will put into effect the results of their planning.

In most of the Toolkit inquiries, Taking Informed Action tasks are offered as additional instructional opportunities to be implemented after students have completed the Summative Performance Task. In some inquiries, however, the Taking Informed Action sequence has been embedded throughout the supporting questions and the attendant formative performance tasks and sources. Doing so allows teachers the option of using the argument construction task or the action task as the final assessment.

- 8. Social studies shares in the responsibility for literacy.** The New York State P–12 Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy encourage social studies teachers to integrate literacy goals and practices into their instruction. We intuitively know that inquiry in social studies involves sophisticated literacy skills; after all, when we ask and answer questions, we typically read and write and speak and listen. But inquiry also requires unique disciplinary skills that enable students to work with sources (Lee & Swan, 2013). The Common Core provides a focus on the skills supporting inquiry, such as reading rich informational texts, writing evidence-based arguments, and speaking and listening in public venues, which complement the pedagogical directions advocated in the C3 Framework and the New York State Social Studies Framework (Lee & Swan, 2013).

Common Core literacy skills surface in three ways through the inquiries. First, the writers embedded specific reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills throughout the inquiries. For example, different approaches to reading the featured sources and scaffolds for constructing and supporting arguments are illustrated and explained, particularly in the annotated versions of the inquiries. The second way in which literacy skills are referenced is through the chart at the end of each annotated inquiry that lists specific skills along with examples. Finally, research opportunities, while implicit in all inquiries, are noted explicitly in several inquiries to demonstrate how they might be incorporated.

- 9. Inquiries are not all inclusive.** The use of the term “inquiry” in place of “unit” to describe the curriculum work represented in the Toolkit is purposeful in both general and specific ways.

Inquiry, that is, the crafting of questions and the deliberate and thoughtful construction of responses to those questions, can inspire deeper and richer teaching and learning. Using “inquiry” as the descriptor for the curriculum topics portrayed, however, reflects a conscious decision not to produce fully-developed and comprehensive curriculum units or modules. Teachers should find considerable guidance within each inquiry around the key components of instructional design—guiding and supporting questions, formative and summative performance tasks, sources, and activities designed to engage students in taking informed action. What they will *not* find is a complete set of individual lesson plans. Experience suggests that teachers teach best the material that they mold around their particular students' needs and the contexts in which they teach. Rather than scripts reflecting generic teaching and learning situations, the IDM encourages teachers to draw

on their own wealth of teaching experience as they add activities, lessons, sources, and tasks that transform the inquiries into their own individual pedagogical plans. Inquiries offer teachers a curricular direction rather than an instructional script. All inquiries are published as Word documents (as well as in PDF) so that teachers can modify them to meet their particular instructional goals and needs.

One other note on the nature of inquiries: Inquiries should be planned with a clear and coherent intellectual and student-relevant purpose in mind. As a result, multiple inquiries may be useful and necessary to convey the full scope of a Key Idea. On the other hand, a single inquiry may be more coherent if it draws from multiple Conceptual Understandings. The point is that an inquiry works best when it has a cogent and well-reasoned focus.

- 10. Inquiries are best mediated by skilled teachers.** Key to the implementation of the Toolkit in general and the IDM in particular is the belief that teacher expertise and experience are central to rich classroom instruction. Students can and do learn important lessons on their own. However, with the guidance of expert teachers, learning can become deeper, richer, and more engaging.

Finding the balance between too much direction and too little in curriculum materials is no easy task. IDM attempts to strike a balance by providing key components that instructional plans require, while leaving important decisions in the hands of teachers with the understanding that they will tailor these inquiries to fit their classroom situations. Research consistently supports the idea that teachers have a powerful impact on their students' achievement (Smith & Niemi, 2001). The best pedagogical resources, then, support and enable rather than undercut teachers' best instructional ambitions (Grant, 2003; Lee, Doolittle, & Hicks, 2006; Shulman, 1987; Swan & Hofer, 2013; Yeager & Davis, 1996).



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