

Social Studies Structure

Content

The main sources of content are class notes and reading materials. Reading materials are usually from worksheets or the Internet, but on some occasions from textbooks kept in the classroom. Class notes and worksheets prepared by the teacher normally contain the primary material to be tested with the any other readings being used as reinforcement. If this varies, the students will be forewarned.

Typical Routine

Class almost always starts with one to three “catch-up questions” for students to answer in their notebooks while attendance is taken. We discuss the answers after attendance. The questions are about key points from the previous class and allow the students to settle in and re-orient themselves to what we are studying. They scroll from day to day, so absent students can copy the questions and answers they missed with the help of the students in the seats next to them (and they are responsible for doing so).

If there was homework assigned the previous night, we will usually (but not always) review the material to make sure all the students have the correct information and add it to their worksheets.

Usually there will be note-taking after that, but sometimes there is a different activity. Note-taking should be done using the Cornell method with headings on the left side of the page and detailed notes on the right. Notes are always posted on the Social Studies web site for absentees or those who lose theirs, but students should take their own notes in class when present unless they have a special accommodation. Students will **not be allowed** to take notes on I-pads or other electronic devices. This policy is based on classroom experience and information found through the links under “Information on Note-taking” on the main Social Studies web page.

If there is any homework, it is posted in class every day, and I call attention to it. I also post it before leaving for the day on the Middle School homework web calendar. In case of IT problems, the posting in the classroom still applies.

Grades

Homework is usually an effort grade (not graded for accuracy) as explained more fully on the Social Studies web site “Homework Guidelines” on the main Social Studies web page.

“Notebook quizzes” are open note and unannounced. They allow me to check notebooks without having to collect and review all of them.

Tests are closed note and closed book. We always do a detailed review (normally the day before). It is usually a chain of questions on flash cards that are distributed among all the students. They answer the questions in a random sequence around the room moving from student to student. The questions are re-shuffled, and they repeat the process, usually three times. They know that I prepare the review questions from the test, so the review questions give them a great idea of where to focus their studying. In cases where essay questions are involved, I often give them a word bank of concepts they must include in their answers, post the actual questions on the Social Studies web site several days before the test, and develop a model answer outline in class for practice.

I have frequently advised the students of the following test preparation tips:

- Catch-up questions are key points they should know. I like to ask them about key points. Therefore, they are good to study.
- Since notes are usually the primary source of content, they should use their Cornell-style notes to write questions on the left side of each page, the answers being the detailed notes they have already taken on the right side, and use each page as an extended Question & Answer flash card.

The points for the overall marking period's percentage grade usually work out to be approximately 60% from tests and quizzes and 40% from other assignments. Since homework is usually a completion or effort grade, a student who struggles on tests can normally still earn a passing grade by fully completing homework on time. On the other hand, no matter how well a student does on tests, high quarterly marks cannot be achieved without timely and full completion of homework.

Extra Credit

From time to time, students request extra credit assignments because they are unhappy with their grades. I do not assign extra credit. This is for several reasons:

- In most cases, the request is made because the student has had trouble performing required work. It makes no sense to me to pile more work than normal on a student who is having such a difficulty.
- There usually seems to be a presumption that extra work can only raise a student's grade and will always raise it to the target desired. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that the quality of the student's work would result in a score higher than the student's current average or high enough to reach the student's goal. In other words, a student requesting the added work to boost a grade might have a different result.
- Sometimes students request extra work because they barely missed honor roll. Since Middle School honor roll was instituted to encourage and reward *consistency* in high academic performance with requirements clearly posted in advance, its requirements will be followed precisely. The idea is to change performance to meet certain standards, not vice-versa. To do otherwise would be unfair to those who have met the requirements

without special consideration and to the many students who barely missed honor roll in the past.

- Students who want to do extra work for the sake of interest in the subject and without concern about grades should pursue the procedures for Challenge Work on each grade's Social Studies web page.