Assessment in History/Social Studies

The Social Studies do not have a set of standards comparable to the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards. The National Council for the Social Studies does provide a set of standards, but they are not as ubiquitous in the instructional and assessment environment across the United States as the Common Core State Standards. The CCSS for English Language Arts do, however, contain separate sections on reading and writing in secondary history and social studies classrooms.

The traditional testing mode of multiple-choice questions that often test factual knowledge about topics, such as people, places, and cultures, are not adequate to measure the achievement of these standards. The CCSS demand assessment of the kinds of skills that professionals, such as historians, sociologists, and diplomats, use in their careers, and the kinds of skills that students will need as citizens to participate fully in public life. At the secondary level, students are expected to perform complex tasks with reading in the social studies environment, such as the following skills:

- Identify key steps in a text’s description of a process related to history/social studies (Grades 6-8).
- Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text (Grades 6-8).
- Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them (Grades 9-10).
- Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author’s claims (Grades 9-10).
- Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole (Grades 11-12).
- Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources (Grades 11-12).

The process focus of these standards prescribes a way of teaching and learning where students learn the skills they need to use primary and secondary sources to analyze events and documents themselves, rather than just memorizing the opinions of experts. This approach to instruction implies the extensive use of projects where students produce their own explanations of events. Rubrics, such as the project rubric in World War I: The War to End All Wars are ideal for assessing complex projects with multiple learning goals of content and process.

The specific nature of the Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6–12 makes them easily adaptable for process checklists that students can use repeatedly for self-assessment with Let’s Assess or some other method to monitor their progress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Process Checklist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole (Key Ideas and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ I cite specific evidence in primary sources to support my analysis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ I cite specific evidence in secondary sources to support my analysis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ I connect insights from specific details to understand the text as a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A group of history educators described useful tools for assessing students’ abilities to “analyze primary and secondary sources, cite textual evidence to support arguments, consider the influence of an author's perspective, corroborate different sources, and develop written historical arguments” (Breakstone, Smith, & Wineburg, 2013, p. 53). They suggest using the resources found in Congress's Teaching with Primary Sources Program to create short, focused tasks where students analyze one of the documents, speeches, videos, photographs, or other primary sources in the library.

The Teachers’ Guides and Analysis Tool includes several resources to support teaching and assessing the analysis skills that are described in the CCSS.

References
