

Social Studies – “Voices of America”

Thank you for being here this evening. I trust that you have read the “Welcome” sheets that came home at the beginning of the year and reviewed information with your child on classroom policies, homework, extra help, and assessment. Now, you are likely interested in what we’ll be studying this year in social studies.



Unit I: Understanding Ourselves

In Unit I students begin to understand the numerous factors that shape their identities. Through this discovery, students come to recognize similarities and shared interests with their classmates, providing opportunities for establishing connections and friendships. At the same time, students will conclude that each individual is unique. This understanding allows for a classroom environment that encourages various perspectives and points of view. In this introductory unit, students begin to examine how identity impacts individuals and groups within our society. Through the use of primary and secondary sources, students will recognize various groups of people for whom identity has been a factor in shaping their American Experience. In the most recently added component of Unit I, students study the important role geography plays in our identity as a nation. Through a geographic study of the different regions of the United States, they come to understand that geography is an important factor in the identity of a state, region and nation, and that the U.S. is a geographically diverse country. Finally, students study the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights as the foundation and promise of the American Dream and the importance of active citizenship in a free society. As Unit I comes to a close, students have examined the many factors that shape their own identities and have begun to explore who we are as a nation.

Unit II: A Nation of Immigrants

Unit II explores the immigrant experience over 175 years of American history -- both the rewards and struggles in gaining access to the American Dream. Identity continues to be a core theme, as students learn about the conflicts immigrants faced assimilating into American society. Many of these conflicts resulted from stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Immigration is studied in the context of industrialization and the rise of labor. Students learn about the increased rights and economic opportunities that came from these struggles as well as the complex societal challenges that immigration presents. Our identity as a nation built by immigrants, and the rich diversity discovered in our classroom, is celebrated.

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Unit III: "Liberty and Justice for All"?

Unit III begins with a review of the experience of Africans' forced immigration and slavery, studied by our students in 5th grade, and then moves to a study of Reconstruction and Jim Crow. Building upon the students' previous study of prejudice and discrimination, this unit explores the effects of powerfully institutionalized versions of these forces upon Black and White Americans. In the second half of Unit III, our study shifts to the Great Migration and Harlem Renaissance. Students see how Black Americans' self-perceptions and post-slavery identity began to evolve. In the last part of Unit III students study the Civil Rights Movement. They examine how organization, leadership, allied support, media exposure, music, and an increasingly empowered identity, fueled dramatic social and political change. Students see how the lessons of the Civil Rights Movement connect to their own lives and socially relevant issues today.



Critical thinking, writing, study, organization and map skills are systematically introduced and integrated into each of the units and reinforced repeatedly throughout the curriculum. Throughout the year, time will be devoted to current events to promote active citizenship, develop an awareness of multiple points of view, and to draw connections between history and the events of today. A more detailed account of each of the units is available on line at

<http://ab.mec.edu/rjweb/voicesofamerica.pdf>.

I will provide numerous opportunities throughout the year for you to stay connected to what we're studying in class. I encourage you to engage your student in conversations about his or her work, and please be in touch with any questions or suggestions you may have.

