

## 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, students 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*, *United States Constitution*, and *Bill of Rights* as the foundation and promise of the American Dream. The importance of active citizenship in a free society is a theme we will carry throughout the year. 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 Change

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 immigration presents. We will study the experiences of immigrants of the later

Twentieth Century through the present, when we focus on Asian and Latino immigrants and explore current perspectives on immigration. Our identity as a nation built by immigrants, and the rich diversity discovered in our classroom, is celebrated.

While immigrants are the focus of this unit, we weave in other groups' experiences as well -- women, Native Americans, African Americans and others.



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Critical thinking, writing, study, organization and map skills are systematically introduced and integrated into each of the units and reinforced repeatedly throughout the curriculum. Time will be devoted to current events in order to promote active citizenship, develop an awareness of multiple points of view, and 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.



### **Ways for Adults at Home to Help**

1. Engage your children in conversation about what we are examining in class. Share your perspective and ask them about theirs.
2. Ask your children "Why?" questions. When they tell you about a specific movie they want to see, ask them why. If the request that you order pizza from a particular restaurant, ask them why they think that pizza is best. They should be able to back up their opinions with specific supporting evidence (ex. their pizza has the most cheese, I enjoy the sesame seeds in the crust, etc.). One of my most important goals is to help your children learn how to defend their points of view, and you can help with this in everyday conversation.
3. If organization is a challenge for your children, I encourage you to periodically review their binders with them. It is a great way for you to see what we are doing in class and will be very helpful to your children in developing these critical skills.