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Abstract

Instructional time spent on elementary social studies is often marginalized due to the emphasis placed on other content areas. Therefore, social studies teachers must employ meaningful instructional strategies that will engage students while promoting content acquisition. This quasi-experimental study responds to this challenge by guiding a sample of 44 fifth grade students to use the historical thinking skills of sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating that encourage engagement with a variety of primary sources through the lens of Jerome Bruner's learning theories. The control group used traditional instructional methods including close-note taking, vocabulary review, and independent reading from social studies texts. Both the control and treatment groups were assessed prior to and after the study on content knowledge, attitude toward social studies, and critical thinking skills using the Cornell Critical Thinking Test. Students in the treatment group showed significant differences in their content knowledge over the control group.

Keywords

elementary social studies, historical thinking, primary sources, critical thinking, content acquisition, student attitudes

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Using Historical Thinking Strategies for Improving Elementary Students' Content Knowledge and Attitudes Towards Social Studies

According to a position statement by the National Council for the Social Studies (2016), social studies "teaching and learning in the elementary classroom should be meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active. These qualities of powerful social studies learning are foundational to the development of children's knowledge, skills, and dispositions as participating citizens in a global society." Social studies instruction should nurture the development of the whole child, socially, cognitively, and emotionally, ultimately contributing to the development of responsible citizens who possess the skills necessary to make informed decisions for the good of society (Jones et al., 2001). These are all reasonable, admirable goals. The challenge for teachers is in findings ways to help students achieve those lofty heights. Yet in recent years, educators have questioned whether teaching practices have sufficiently drawn upon existing research to implement the most effective classroom instruction (Cuevas, 2016a, 2019; Cuevas & Dawson, 2018).

Unfortunately, based on a study by Zhao and Hoge (2005), Georgia students revealed that their experience is a far cry from the aforementioned vision. More than 95 percent of the students saw no relevance in the instruction to their own lives, their social studies knowledge of basic topics was limited, and they almost universally had negative attitudes towards the subject. Social studies

instruction at the elementary level has been ridiculed for its reliance on rote memorization (Guidry et al., 2010), a practice shown to have limited benefits to long-term student learning (Cuevas, 2016b). This leads one to question, what has caused the de-emphasis on quality elementary social studies instruction? What instructional strategies can elementary teachers employ to enhance students' understanding, improve student attitudes toward social studies, and provide challenging and thoughtful engagement in their learning?

The Decline of Elementary Social Studies

Numerous researchers have argued that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001 is to blame for the marginalization of social studies (Anderson, 2014; Babini, 2013; Byrd & Varga, 2018; Hinde, 2005). With high-stakes standardized testing in place to measure proficiency in reading and math, instructional time has been devoted to these two subjects at the expense of social studies (Hinde, 2005). A study by Heafner and Fitchett (2012) showed that between 1993 and 2008, instructional time in elementary English Language Arts increased by an average of 52 minutes per week. Math instruction had risen by an average of 30 minutes per week. In contrast, social studies instructional time decreased by 56 minutes per week.

Lucey, at al. (2014) found that 97.56% of elementary teachers surveyed indicated that whole-group lecture was the predominant mode of social studies instruction, while instructional strategies that were more likely to foster higher-

level thinking and encourage active engagement among students were not prevalent. Similar studies showed that educators primarily relied on fact-recall, teacher-centered approaches (Winstead, 2011), as well as having students read from a textbook, answer questions, and define vocabulary words (Bailey et al., 2006). The most common rationale behind teaching for knowledge of basic facts is a lack of time due to pressures from accountability measures to cover math and reading curricula (Anderson, 2014). According to The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) this has resulted in only 19% of fourth graders demonstrating proficiency in social studies. Consequently, standardized testing has taken the leading role in influencing how and what teachers teach, and therefore, what students know and understand (Anderson, 2014; Byrd & Varga, 2018).

Additionally, some researchers suggest that the problem may partially lie in the minimal amount of social studies instructional training that pre-service teachers receive (Guidry et al., 2010). Elementary teachers lack the content knowledge that middle grades and secondary social studies educators develop because their schooling is more grounded in pedagogy than content (Logan & Butler, 2013). Furthermore, elementary school teachers are responsible for teaching every subject, every day, and the majority feel that teacher-centered methods are the most straightforward approach to cover all the material they are responsible for (Guidry et al., 2010). This has resulted in instruction on a large

scale that does not sufficiently emphasize social studies and also tends to employ ineffective methods to help students learn.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

In response to the dynamic outlined above, the current study addresses how to effectively teach social studies to students in ways that enhance content acquisition and critical thinking skills, as well as improve students' attitudes towards the social studies discipline. Jerome Bruner's (1966, 1977) theoretical framework for development guided both the background literature and the instructional approaches tested here. These theories served as the lens to guide the study.

As an educator, Bruner highly regarded the interconnectedness of learning (Babini, 2013). Bruner (1977) believed that the role of structure in learning paired with the content students learn should help construct their schema for future learning, a premise confirmed by future experimental studies (Cuevas, 2012). Students too often have limited exposure to the content they are expected to learn, and it must be meaningful "to count in their thinking for the rest of their lives" (Bruner, 1977, p. 11). In other words, if teachers want students to later draw from their learning and to make connections among concepts they are taught, the learning must have meaning. Bruner's (1966) theory of instruction urged educators to examine best practices to ensure that students are effectively learning. This is especially crucial for today's social studies instructors; students

must be learning skills that are essential for effective citizenship. If this can be accomplished, then students *can* learn about history to change their future (Soares & Wood, 2010).

Bruner (1977) also hypothesized about a readiness for learning in his spiral curriculum theory in which he asserted that any material can be taught at any age, as long as it is done in a developmentally appropriate way that uses instructional materials that meet the student's intellectual level. He felt that schools were often wasting precious time by choosing not to educate children on certain material on the grounds that it is too difficult to understand, a dynamic that has persisted in this century (Cuevas, 2015, 2016c). He further argued that when children could intuitively grasp understandings of basic ideas and internalize those understandings, the knowledge will support future learning (Babini, 2013).

As an example, one topic that might be presented in social studies is civil rights. In the primary grades, this theme could be introduced by sharing information about Dr. Martin Luther King. Later in upper elementary grades, students may learn about the life of Rosa Parks, how Jim Crow laws affected the lives of Black American citizens, and the era of desegregation. This curriculum would build, or spiral, on previously learned information. Unfortunately, some states recently have sought to limit inclusion of such topics in the curriculum (Cuevas, 2022), which would serve to break links in this spiral, thereby undermining learning.

Through his constructivist theory, Bruner proposed that learners construct their own learning through discovery (Bruner, 1966). Therefore, an effective teacher will not teach for rote memorization of basic facts but will serve as a facilitator of learning by designing lessons that give students the information they need, allowing them to discover the relationships between information, thereby constructing their own knowledge (Babini, 2013). This theory is especially true in social studies, as students actively take part in learning to analyze primary source documents from the past, learning to see history through multiple perspectives, and constructing their own meaning. It is important to consider not just the amount of time that is spent on social studies instruction but how that time is being used (Babini, 2013).

As a result, educators cannot rely on textbooks alone for powerful social studies teaching. When students read only the highlights and summaries that textbooks often provide, they are not introduced to the multiple perspectives of historical events; there is a focus almost solely on progress and accomplishments, while the atrocities and failures of the past are censored (Demoiny & Ferraras-Stone, 2018). Yet critical literacy skills go beyond reading and summarizing text by incorporating critical thinking skills and questioning to raise students' responsiveness regarding societal problems. They ultimately help students to understand power, inequity, and injustices, while at the same time teaching students that texts can have more than one interpretation (Demoiny & Ferraras-

Stone, 2018; Soares & Wood, 2010). While years of research suggest that critical thinking is not an isolated skill to be learned but rather based on the connections between thinking processes and content knowledge, students can develop specific types of critical thinking, such as thinking scientifically or thinking historically (Willingham, 2007). Essentially, content knowledge is a necessary prerequisite to higher order thinking skills, though is it the higher order thinking skills that stimulate the most durable learning (Cuevas, 2016b).

Using Primary Sources to Teach Students to Think Historically

Although more educators are beginning to realize the importance of using authentic primary sources in social studies, the power of this instructional practice is often overlooked. Throughout history, these trails of evidence have been left in the form of newspaper articles, speeches, letters, diaries and journals, interview transcripts, poetry, song lyrics, photographs, and more (Morgan & Rasinski, 2012). Using primary sources allows students to engage in inquiry by analyzing documents from a historical period in which events took place and takes them as close as possible to a moment in the past (Cowgill, 2015; Morgan & Rasinski, 2012).

Teachers can teach students to think critically as they compare and contrast details across multiple sources to construct their own meaning and arguments about historical events and people (Morgan & Rasinski, 2012; Popp & Hoard, 2018). Using primary sources further develops the “perspective

consciousness" previously discussed. For instance, in a study conducted by D'Adamo and Fallace (2011), 77% of participating fourth graders showed development in their historical perspective-taking skills when interacting with multiple sources.

Secondary sources such as textbooks, biographies, and newspaper editorials should not be overlooked; they can help students to understand specific references made and build their content knowledge while demonstrating that historians have engaged in the same thorough investigative processes (Ediger, 2014; Popp & Hoard, 2018). And this can have a substantial impact on learning. When using an intervention utilizing primary and secondary sources, Dalton and Cuevas (2019) found that students greatly improved their social studies content knowledge, performing more significantly better than students who received typical instruction on the same content.

It is important for teachers to closely read each source before using it with their students, as well as choose sources that have noticeable text features when first beginning to use primary sources with students (Popp & Hoard, 2018). It is also crucial to pose pre-reading and during-reading questions (Cuevas, 2012; Cuevas, et al., 2014), as well as engage in the close reading cycle, having students read and annotate small chunks of the text to help understand key terms and references. If introduced properly, students will find primary sources interesting

and will be intrinsically motivated to further investigate historical documents (Ediger, 2014).

Thinking historically is a term used by many people in the field of education, and some might even argue that it is nothing more than educational jargon (VanSledright, 2004). However, teaching students historical thinking skills is crucial in molding critical consumers of information and helping students see the uniqueness of the past and the multiple human perspectives that permeate all texts (Fillpot, 2012). Cowgill (2015) also asserts that teaching students to inquire and think as historians helps them to recognize author bias and exaggerations within texts, realize the effect of prejudices, and understand that multiple sources from the same time period can have conflicting narratives. Thinking historically goes beyond just written text and also includes learning how to think critically about sources to reason logically and make judgements based on evidence, even when the evidence may negate one's ideas (McCall, 2011; Willingham, 2007). Such thinking can be observed in self-directed learners, a key aspect for future learning (Willingham, 2007). When using inquiry-based learning in science to construct arguments, fifth grade students significantly improved their critical thinking skills (Hand et al., 2017).

Similarly, in a study conducted by Tally and Goldenberg (2005), students who were actively engaged in learning and employed historical thinking skills improved their attitudes towards social studies. This research involved middle and

high school students using historical thinking skills to critically analyze primary source photographs. Survey results showed 72% of students reported that their enjoyment of studying history increased as a result of their engagement during the intervention. While promising, such research leads to the question of whether elementary students would respond similarly to comparable interventions.

The Components of Historical Thinking

More specifically, three subskills compose historical thinking: sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating, and thus, learning activities should be scaffolded to effectively teach students how to use them (Fillpot, 2012; Gleeson & D'Souza, 2016; Hotchkiss & Hougen, 2012; VanSledright, 2004). Sourcing is teaching students to inventory a text's features such as author, date, and place of origination to help interpret the text (Fillpot, 2012). Students should be taught to identify what type of source they are investigating-a journal or diary entry, an image, a newspaper article, a map, a letter, etc., as well as pay attention to elements such as handwriting, grammar, and spelling to help interpret it (VanSledright, 2004). One well-known acronym that teachers can use to teach students which key aspects to look for is SOAPSTone, which reminds students to consider the speaker, occasion, audience, purpose, subject, and tone of the source (Popp & Hoard, 2018). Educators should purposefully and carefully select sources that are related to the content and at a reading level that challenges students, yet does not overwhelm them (Thacker et al., 2018). With primary-age students

especially, the material can be adapted to help students understand vocabulary and structure of the sources (Gleeson & D'Souza, 2016).

Contextualizing is using the historical context of a piece of evidence to interpret the source (Fillpot, 2012). To contextualize a source, the evidence must be rooted in its own time and place (Samuelsson & Wendell, 2016). Teachers can help students develop contextualizing skills by studying historical events and people and relating them to broader eras in the past. They must also help students to understand the circumstances and various views from individuals, groups, and institutions that help to shape a particular moment from the past (Reisman & Wineburg, 2008).

Just as historians gather reliable information from multiple sources to accurately reconstruct events and make sense of why they happened, contextualizing promotes critical thinking skills by having students deeply reflect on the evidence they collect to construct their own interpretation of the source (Cho et al., 2018; Hotchkiss & Hougen, 2012). Research conducted by Samuelsson and Wendell (2016) suggests that students demonstrate some evidence of sourcing. They found that 69% of students used sourcing skills to help them understand the time from which evidence originated.

Corroborating means to compare various pieces of evidence to help accurately interpret the sources (Fillpot, 2012). Corroborating also means to compare new evidence with the knowledge one already has, either from other

sources, experience, or prior engagement with a particular unit of study (Tally & Goldenberg, 2005). Again, sources should be carefully selected so that each contributes to a piece of the inquiry puzzle (Popp & Hoard, 2018). Different perspectives about the causes and consequences of events are compared when corroborating (Cho et al., 2018). Students can corroborate information from multiple texts to write historical accounts (Sell & Griffin, 2017). VanSledright (2002) saw a development in students' ability to examine intertextual evidence when giving specific instruction in historical thinking.

Research Questions

Teaching and learning must have purpose, and learning means in-depth understanding (Levstik & Barton, 2011). If educators do not take steps to make meaningful social studies instruction a priority, then we risk creating a generation of citizens who lack the social, historical, and civic literacy conducive for a respectful exchange of varying ideas and opinions (Burroughs et al., 2005; Byrd & Varga, 2018). The future of our democracy may well depend on what occurs in today's elementary classrooms.

The literature reviewed in this analysis revealed three skills that are crucial in effectively teaching students to think historically when analyzing primary sources. *Sourcing* is noting specific attributes of the document, such as the date of origin or author. *Contextualization* is when students draw from their prior knowledge about historic events, individuals, and/or concepts to make new

connections in their learning. *Corroboration* is used when students use more than one source to aid them in their interpretation of historical evidence. As students begin to develop these skills, they may become critically conscious of the past in ways that not only foster citizenship skills, but help to develop critical thinking skills. Critical thinking skills prompt students to question issues, respond to problems, and evaluate and interpret information.

This study sought to answer the following guiding research questions. Does implementing a combination of the historical thinking skills of sourcing, contextualizing, and corroboration impact fifth grade students' content knowledge? Does implementing a combination of the historical thinking skills of sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating enhance fifth grade students' development of critical thinking skills? Does implementing a combination of the historical thinking skills of sourcing, contextualizing, and corroboration impact fifth grade students' attitudes towards social studies?

Method

Contextual Factors

This study was conducted in a rural school district in northeast Georgia. The school district consisted of seven schools, including four elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The largest ethnic groups in the district were 85.7% White, followed by 9.4% Hispanic and 1.7% Multiracial. The median

household income in 2018 was $65,805. However, 8.7% of the population lives in poverty.

The elementary school where the study was conducted was comprised of 546 students, grades ranging from pre-k to fifth grade, 37 full time teachers, and 10 paraprofessionals. Ninety-one percent of the student population was identified as White. Fifty percent of the students received free or reduced lunch.

The sample consisted of 44 fifth grade students divided among two classrooms. The study was conducted in the two fifth grade classrooms during social studies. The student-teacher ratio in the treatment group was 21:1. The treatment group was comprised of 21 white students, with a breakdown of 11 boys and 10 girls. One of the students qualified for gifted services, and four students were identified as EIP. The student-teacher ratio in the control group was 23:1. The control group was comprised of 23 students, 22 white and 1 Hispanic, with a breakdown of 11 boys and 12 girls. Two of the students qualified for gifted services, and 3 students were identified as EIP.

Materials and Measures

Materials

A set of primary and secondary source documents was used for each of the two units. Examples for unit one include photographs of shantytowns, a map titled "1932 Election Results", and a manuscript of FDR's Fireside chat outlining the New Deal (Appendix A). Examples for unit two include maps of Europe and

Asia, propaganda posters for Rosie the Riveter and war rationing, and newspaper clippings for VE and VJ Days (Appendix B). The sources were displayed on the SMART board, and students were also given a hard copy for independent/partner/small group reading. Several anchor charts were used as references for students, "Sources Historians Use" (Appendix C), "SOAPStone" (Appendix D), and "Pre-Reading Questions" (Appendix E). These anchor charts were referred to throughout the intervention to help students identify the types of sources that historians use and to aid students in paying attention to features of sources. Technology resources were also used throughout the unit. Several resource templates were created prior to the unit. These included a Padlet collaborative board, a Google slides pamphlet template, and a Flipgrid response board.

Assessment of Content Knowledge

The pretest and posttest for this study covered the Georgia Standards of Excellence in Social Studies for the two units taught (The Great Depression and the New Deal and Another World War). The test was untimed and consisted of two sections. The first section consisted of 20, four-option multiple-choice questions. This researcher-created test represented the standards in each unit using the USA Test Prep assessment builder (Appendix F). USA Test Prep is a website that the school system had a subscription for that is designed to help students

increase achievement on state-mandated standards-based assessments. Teachers can also create tests by viewing question prompts individually.

Test items equally represented the two units, with ten questions per unit. The questions consisted of two Depth of Knowledge (DOK) level 1 questions, thirteen DOK level 2 questions, and five DOK level 3 questions. The second section consisted of two short-answer questions with one question per unit. The short answer questions were graded by two teachers from the fifth grade to establish interrater reliability. Written responses were assessed using the Trait 1 Rubric for Informational/Explanatory Genre from the Georgia Milestones Assessment System Seven-Point, Two-Trait Rubric (Appendix G). Therefore, each written response was worth a total of four points since only the idea development portion of the written responses were assessed. This trait examined the students' ability to effectively establish an idea, support the idea with evidence, and elaborate on the idea with examples, facts, and details. The pretest was given two weeks prior to beginning the first unit. The posttest was administered after the final unit. The question order was randomized to create two separate forms of the same test. Approximately one-half of the participants used each form during testing, and none of the students used the same form twice.

Assessment of Critical Thinking

The pretest and posttest for this portion of the study was the Cornell Creative Thinking Test, Level X (CCTT-X). The CCTT Level X has been used in

numerous studies of critical thinking skills since its development in 1985. The original instrument consisted of 76 questions, with five of the questions being sample questions, for a total of 71 multiple-choice questions measuring four different areas of critical thinking: deduction, induction, assumption, and observation. Each of the multiple-choice questions had three answer choices. The reliability Cronbach alpha of this instrument ranges from .67 to .90 (Ennis, et al., 2005). The test questions were read aloud to the students and the administration was divided among two days due to the length of the instrument.

Assessment of Students' Attitudes Towards Social Studies

Students were asked to rate their attitudes towards social studies using a 20-item inventory that was modified from The Attitudes Toward Mathematics Inventory (Tapia & Marsh, 2004). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale with students indicating their range of agreement with each statement. Tapia and Marsh's original ATMI consisted of 40 questions and measured students' mathematical enjoyment, motivation, self-confidence, and value (Lim & Chapman, 2013). The Cronbach alpha reliability of this instrument was .97 for the entire 40-question inventory. For this study, a research question was developed to measure the students' attitudes towards social studies. To measure this, the enjoyment and value constructs were used, with the phrase "social studies" substituted for "mathematics" for a total of 20 questions (Appendix H). The

Cronbach alpha reliability for the enjoyment construct was .87, and the Cronbach alpha for the value construct was .89 (Tapia & Marsh, 2004).

Procedures

Two of the fifth-grade classrooms in the school participated in the study. The control group consisted of one class containing EIP, high-achieving, and gifted students. The teacher in the control group continued to use their typical teaching practices. The treatment group consisted of one class containing EIP, high-achieving, and gifted students. All consented students in each class were administered a battery of assessments prior to the unit instruction within five days prior to the first day of instruction in unit one. Teachers administered two units, "The Great Depression and the New Deal" and "Another World War" to both the treatment and comparison groups during their regularly scheduled social studies period. In the comparison class, the teacher taught the two units using their typical practices, which included lecture, note-taking, and educational video segments. In the treatment class, the teacher implemented instruction for the historical thinking skills of sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating during each of the two units. Teachers taught the same content and topics to both the treatment and comparison groups. Each of the two units consisted of 10 days of instruction. During the intervention period, the treatment was administered each day of the week for 40 minutes. The duration of the study was five weeks between pretesting and final

posttest. The affective measure in the form of a survey for student interest toward social studies was taken during the pretest and after the completion of both units.

Comparison Group

Students in this group completed the pretest and posttest measures, but the teacher used the form of instruction she was accustomed to using. From interviews with the teacher, the current instructional strategies for social studies mainly consisted of teacher lecture with students taking close notes, educational videos, vocabulary review, and independent/paired reading from social studies texts. The most common content instructional method was close note-taking from a power point or Google Slides, which represented approximately 50% of instructional time, as indicated by lesson plans.

Treatment Group

The teacher in the treatment group administered the two, ten-day units implementing instruction for the historical thinking skills of sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating. The teacher began the intervention by teaching students how to source documents. This skill was continually used by students throughout the intervention, serving as the foundation upon which they were taught how to build on their schema and contextualize new knowledge they acquired, and as they corroborated multiple sources to understand the past.

Sourcing. *Sourcing* is noting specific attributes of the document, such as the date of origin or author. Students engaged in a discussion about primary

sources. Question prompts included: How do historians know about the past? What is a primary source? What is a secondary source? Is every printed text true? The anchor chart titled "Sources Historians Use" (Appendix C) was used to establish a routine of adding every source type that students encountered. As new source types were introduced and added to the list, the class discussed the document's characteristics and how helpful each source was in answering the essential questions for each unit.

For unit one, the primary source, "Letter to Mrs. Roosevelt", was used to discuss noticeable features of sources, as well as two pre-made anchor charts titled "Pre-reading Questions" (Appendix E) and "SOAPStone" (Appendix D). Each historical aspect of the SOAPStone anchor chart was defined and discussed to ensure that students understood each concept before partners read the text together. Students answered the questions about source features and discussed each historical aspect. As students pointed out salient features about the text, the teacher annotated the source on the smart board. The group discussed the numerous features of texts that are important to pay attention to when sourcing.

To begin unit two, students were asked to recall the consequences of World War I for Germany to engage students in discussion. Two propaganda posters were shared. The students investigated the origin of these posters, what groups they were targeting, and what historical period they are situated in by focusing on source features such as language and the images used. Each group

was provided with a set of sources, including maps of Europe and Asia, charts of German-occupied countries, and a text manuscript of a speech. Students worked collaboratively to determine the aggressors during WWII and what their goals were based on their source work. Students individually shared their new knowledge on a FlipGrid created prior to the lesson.

Contextualizing. *Contextualization* is when students draw from their prior knowledge about historic events, individuals, and/or concepts to make new connections in their learning. In unit one, sources such as "Letter to Mrs. Roosevelt", were used to teach students how historians analyze a text in order to place in it in the context of a historical event or period in time. Discussion was facilitated about students' understanding of the historical time period during which this text was written. Question prompts included: What type of person wrote this text? What view of the world does the author present? Whose voice is missing from this document? Students were encouraged to draw on their background knowledge of historical events such as World War I and the Roaring 20s to aid in contextualizing their new knowledge.

During unit two, students analyzed noticeable features of multiple photos to contextualize the events in history and worked in groups to create a timeline of the photos based on their inquiry of the photographs. Each group was given another set of documents that included newspaper articles, diary entries, and short stories. The students closely read and made notes of each source, matching each

source with its corresponding photograph. At the end of the activity, groups shared their constructed timelines with the class. Adequate time was devoted to ensure students had an accurate understanding of the major events of the war and the historical period in which they occurred.

Corroborating. *Corroboration* is used when students use more than one source to aid them in their interpretation of historical evidence. During unit one, multiple documents were shared with the students. Examples include the "Letter to Mrs. Roosevelt" source used previously, newspaper clippings, pictures of Hooverville shantytowns, and a 1932 election results map. Students were asked to examine each of the documents and corroborated the evidence in order to understand how citizens felt about President Hoover, possible reasons for the landslide election of 1932, and how citizens felt about President Roosevelt. Students shared their understandings of this historical time period as questions were posed that encouraged students to critically consider the evidence when forming their answers.

Students were placed in groups and given multiple historical documents to read and analyze together for a culminating assignment. Each student was provided with a copy of each document in order to take notes as they closely read. The students were tasked with analyzing the sources they were given to answer the following question: How did individuals, groups, or institutions change

America during this time in history? Each student in the group contributed to a Padlet board that the researcher created prior to the lesson.

During unit two, students were shown a draft registration card from World War II. Students were asked to critically consider the implications a draft would have on American society. A document set was shared with groups of students that included propaganda posters, diary entries, newspaper clippings, and video segments. Groups were tasked with corroborating the evidence from the document set to discover how various groups of Americans contributed to the war effort. Groups demonstrated their understanding of this era by creating a collaborative Google Slides pamphlet to inform citizens of ways they could get involved in the war effort of 1942.

Results

Content Knowledge

To determine if there was a difference between the comparison and treatment groups in the content acquisition during the two units of instruction, the student test scores on the teacher-created assessment of content knowledge were analyzed. An ANCOVA was conducted on the scores for both groups, using the posttest scores as the dependent variable and the pretest scores as the covariate. Students in the treatment group outperformed students in the control group by a statistically significant margin, $F(1, 40) = 4.68$, $p = .037$. There was a medium-large effect size, partial $\eta^2 = .105$, showing that the students whose instruction

was focused on historical thinking skills showed more growth in their content knowledge than the students receiving traditional instruction. The means and standard deviations can be seen below in Table 1, and Table 2 shows the between-subjects effects.

Table 1. Content Acquisition Means and Standard Deviations

Dependent Variable: Posttest

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Treatment	86.2000	10.72430	20
Control	77.3043	13.03643	23
Total	81.4419	12.69665	43

Table 2. Content Acquisition Results ANCOVA

Dependent Variable: Posttest

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1022.423[a]	2	511.212	3.557	.038	.151
Intercept	25314.087	1	25314.087	176.154	.000	.815
Pretest	175.888	1	175.888	1.224	.275	.030
Group	672.544	1	672.544	4.680	.037	.105
Error	5748.181	40	143.705			
Total	291980.000	43				

Corrected Total	6770.605	42

a. R Squared = .151 (Adjusted R Squared = .109)

Critical Thinking Skills

To determine if there was a difference between the comparison and treatment groups in critical thinking skills during the two units of instruction, the student test scores on the CCTT were analyzed. An ANCOVA was conducted on the scores for both groups, using the posttest scores as the dependent variable and the pretest scores as the covariate. The main effect was not statistically significant, $F(1, 40) = .117$, $p = .734$. This suggests that using this particular intervention did not have a beneficial effect on the treatment group's critical thinking skills. The means and standard deviations can be seen below in Table 3, and Table 4 shows the between-subjects effects.

Table 3. Critical Thinking Skills Means and Standard Deviations

Dependent Variable: PostCritical

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Treatment	75.5500	4.358600	20
Control	75.9565	5.40604	23
Total	75.7674	4.89332	43

Table 4. Critical Thinking Skills Results ANCOVA

Dependent Variable: PostCritical

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	190.300[a]	2	95.150	4.668	.015	.189
Intercept	397.943	1	397.943	19.522	.000	.328
Pretest	188.532	1	188.532	9.249	.004	.188
Group	2.389	1	2.389	.117	.734	.003
Error	815.375	40	20.384			
Total	247856.000	43				
Corrected Total	1005.674	42				

a. R Squared = .189 (Adjusted R Squared = .149)

Affective Traits

The final research question was designed to determine whether instruction geared towards historical thinking skills would influence students' attitudes towards social studies. Constructs (value and enjoyment) were measured by survey data. An ANCOVA was run to assess changes in each construct. The dependent variable for the analysis for each construct was the post-survey scores. The covariate was the pre-survey scores.

Construct 1: An ANCOVA was run to compare change in how valuable the students perceived social studies to be. The dependent variable was post-

survey scores for value, while the covariate was their pre-survey scores for value. There was not a significant difference between the groups, $F(1, 40) = 1.111$, $p = .298$.

Construct 2: An ANCOVA was run to compare change in how enjoyable social studies was for students. The dependent variable was post-survey scores for enjoyment, while the covariate was their pre-survey scores for enjoyment. There was not a significant difference between the groups, $F(1, 40) = .091$, $p = .764$.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of an intervention designed to implement historical thinking skills of sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating in a fifth-grade classroom. Overall, following two instructional units in the social studies classes, students in the intervention significantly improved their content knowledge. Although both the treatment and control groups showed improved scores, the effects on the students in the intervention group resulted in substantially higher performance than students receiving typical social studies instruction. These findings support the hypothesis that using an intervention utilizing historical thinking skills is a valuable method to substantially improve students' content knowledge acquisition in a fifth grade social studies classroom. Findings are consistent with a similar study conducted by Ferretti et. al. (2001), in which fifth grade students from three classrooms participated in analysis of primary and secondary sources over an eight-week

period, thereby significantly improving their content knowledge. Comparatively, Dalton and Cuevas (2019) found that fourth-grade students from four classrooms participating in an intervention in which they analyzed sources improved their social studies content knowledge and significantly outperformed the control group over a five-week period.

The second research question investigated the effects of implementing a combination of the historical thinking skills of sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating on the enhancement of fifth grade students' development of critical thinking skills. Results did not indicate a statistically significant improvement in the treatment group over students receiving typical social studies instruction. In similar studies, researchers found results inconsistent with this study. Yilmaz-Oscan and Tabak (2019) found that there was a significant improvement in the critical thinking tendencies of fourth grade students in the treatment group over control group in their six-week study. Additionally, Hand et. al. (2017) found in a year-long study that third, fourth, and fifth grade students in similar experimental groups showed greater improvement in their critical thinking abilities than those students who were not receiving treatment.

Interestingly, however, students in both the treatment and control groups in this study improved their score on the Cornell Critical Thinking Test by an average of over 20 points. Several factors could have potentially impacted this, including teacher influence due to the types of questions used throughout the unit,

as well as test familiarity. Both teachers may have included questions that could impact critical thinking. Additionally, pretest scores may not have been an adequate indication of the students' critical thinking tendencies prior to the instructional units. The test format is unique from any tests that most students would have had prior experience with. Therefore, the large increase in posttest scores may be an effect of students being more familiar with the test format since pretest. However, the increase in scores was not a result of the intervention, since both the treatment and control groups showed improvements.

It was hypothesized that student attitudes, both in the way they value and enjoy social studies, would be positively impacted as a result of the intervention. Findings do not support this hypothesis, as there was not a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups. Although there were several outliers in both the treatment and control groups of this study, the vast majority of students in both groups maintained a consistent attitude from pre- to post-survey scores. These results contrast with those found by Yilmaz-Oscan and Tabak (2019) where the attitudes of the students in the intervention group were positively impacted and showed greater improvement over the students in the control group. Tally and Goldenberg (2005) also saw considerable improvements in the attitudes of two-thirds of middle and high school students engaged in a similar study.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. The short six-week duration of the treatment could have had an effect on the results of this study. More time could possibly be needed to affect the dispositional traits and critical thinking skills of the students even though Yilmaz-Oscan and Tabak (2019) found that there was a significant improvement in the critical thinking tendencies in their six-week study. The small, homogenous sample could also be a limiting factor to this study and impact the generalizability of the study to other heterogeneous samples. The teacher effect could potentially have been a factor, as well, and since only one teacher implemented the treatment, results could be due to teacher effect rather than solely the intervention.

Implications/Conclusion

There is no shortage of recent studies that have investigated strategies to improve reading comprehension and expand students' vocabulary (Cuevas, et al. 2012), particularly in elementary level students (Moore & Cuevas, 2022; Tankersley & Cuevas, 2019; Zavala & Cuevas, 2019). Others have tried novel approaches to teaching social studies at a variety of levels (Gault & Cuevas 2022; Jennings & Cuevas, 2021; Liming & Cuevas, 2017). Yet fewer have used historical thinking strategies to focus on reading primary sources as a way to enhance students' content knowledge in social studies.

This study sought to uncover meaningful modes of instruction that would engage students and promote content acquisition, while enhancing the critical thinking tendencies and attitudes of students. The results of the study suggest that teaching historical thinking skills as an instructional method in social studies may be appropriate for upper elementary students. Even with the short duration of the study, students in the treatment group showed significant improvement in their content knowledge over students in the control group. Because the students engaged in critical analysis of primary sources, as well as scholarly discussion with their peers, they were able to discover history for themselves, which appeared to have a significant impact on their understanding of these two time periods. Based on this research, it is recommended that students be taught to think as historians and work to develop the historical thinking skills of sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating in upper elementary students, as there were substantial effects on students' content knowledge. It would also be recommended to introduce these skills from the very beginning of a school year and continue to develop these skills throughout the school year, which would allow more necessary time for students' critical thinking tendencies and dispositions towards social studies curriculum to improve. Perhaps such instruction could be used with earlier ages. However, further research is needed to support or discredit the use of this intervention with younger students.

Studies that are longer in duration are also needed to assess the long-term effects of such instruction. Retention of content was also not assessed due to the time constraints of the study, so longer studies would be beneficial in this area. Studies with larger and more diverse samples would also benefit the body of research on this topic. Although significant differences in critical thinking skills and student attitudes were not noted, lengthier studies could provide valuable findings in these areas.

The results of this study show that students can learn content without instructional strategies that target rote memorization. Teaching students to use historical thinking skills allows teachers to be facilitators of active learning, not distributors of routine information. Perhaps if this instructional method becomes more common practice in elementary classrooms, we will begin to see the benefits of its effectiveness in our citizenry, which should be a primary goal of social studies.

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Appendix A- Source Documents Unit 1 – The Great Depression and the New Deal

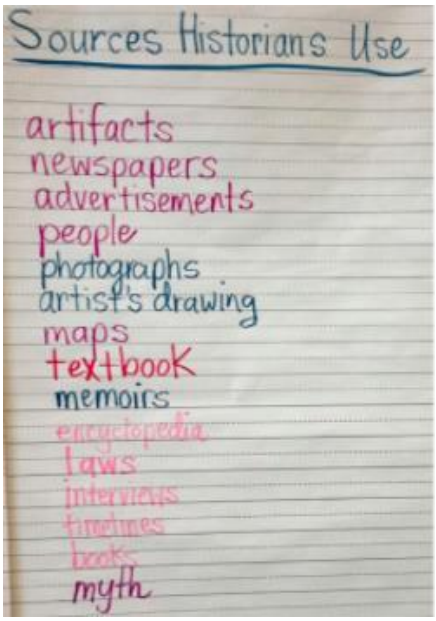
Source Type	Title of Source
Manuscript	"A Nine Year Old Girl's Letter to Mrs. Roosevelt"
Newspaper	"Stock Market Crash"
Photograph	"Hooverville"
Photograph	"Shantytowns"
Map	"1932 Election Results"
Photograph	"Soup Kitchen"
Graph	"United States Unemployment Rate 1890-2011"
Photograph	"Schoolchildren Line Up For Soup Kitchen"
Letter	"Letter in Response to Fireside Chat"
Manuscript	"President Roosevelt's Remarks at CCC Camp in 1935"
Manuscript	"Fireside Chat Outlining New Deal 1933"
Map	"Tennessee Valley Area: Pictorial Map"
Song Lyrics	"I'd Rather Not Be On Relief"
Video	"Jesse Owens' Historic Wins at the Berlin 1936 Olympics"
Video	"Duke Ellington – 'It Don't Mean A Thing' 1943"

Appendix B – Source Documents Unit 2 – Another World War

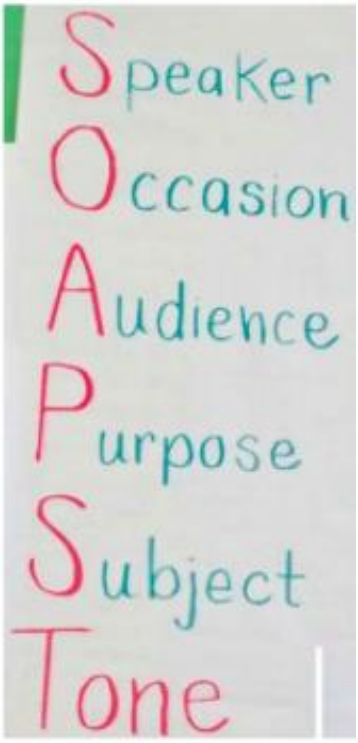
Source Type	Title of Source
Poster	"The NSDAP Secures the National Community"
Poster	"Yes, Leader, We Follow You"
Table	"Promises"
Map	"Second World War Russian Front, 1941-1942"
Map	"Japanese Expansion"
Chart	"Countries Germany Occupied in World War II"
Manuscript	"FDR's Pearl Harbor Speech"
Map	"Normandy Landings, June 6, 1944"
Newspaper	"Marines on Iwo Jima, Reach Airstrip; Resistance Furious"
Photograph	"Flag Raising on Iwo Jima"
Transcript	"General Eishenhower's Order of the Day"
Photograph	"American Military Personnel Gather in Paris to Celebrate the Japanese Surrender"
Photograph	"Churchill Waves on VE Day"
Photograph	"Draft Registration Card"
Photographs	"Ration Books"
Photograph	"View of Battleship Row"
Letter	"London Celebrates VE Day"
Transcripts	"VE Day Firsthand Accounts"

Book Exceprts	*Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*
Photograph	"A group of Jewish girls wearing the yellow star"
Oral History	"Oral History: Alexander Jefferson"
Photograph	"Tuskegee Airmen During World War II"
Photograph	"6th Grade Teacher Instructs Her Alert Pupils on War Ration Books"
Poster	"Do with less, so they'll have enough!"
Poster	"Women in War Industry"
Newspaper Article	"Real Life 'Rosie the Riveter' Women Share Their Stories and Philosophy"

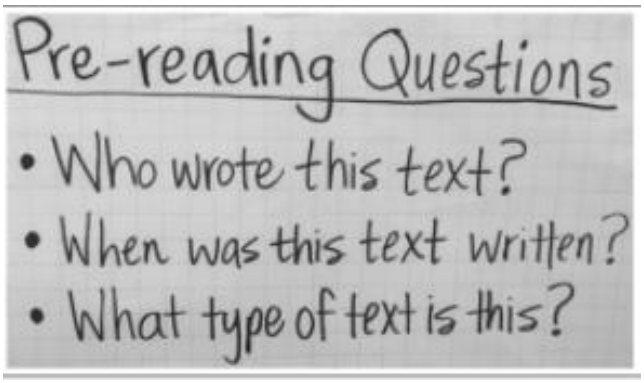
Appendix C - Anchor chart - Sources Historians Use



Appendix D - Anchor chart –"SOAPStone" sourcing heuristic



Appendix E - Anchor chart – "Pre-reading Questions"



Appendix F – Content Knowledge Assessment

1. Which of these was the basic idea of the New Deal?

a. The Supreme Court is responsible to the executive branch.

b. Energy production should be solely the concern of private enterprise.

c. States' rights have priority over rights of the federal government.

d. The federal government has a major responsibility for ensuring economic prosperity.

2. 

The rationing of tires shown in the photograph is MOST likely to be caused by

a. the lack of imported rubber.

b. shortages caused by World War II.

c. too many consumers and not enough tires.

d. a rubber shortage due to the Rubber Strike of 1932.

3. Which of these occurred LAST?

a. Germany invades Poland.

b. Japan attacks Pearl Harbor.

c. United States drops the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

d. Soviet army defeats the German army at the Battle of Stalingrad.

4. Which event in history is seen by many people as the beginning of the Great Depression?

a. the Stock Market Crash of 1929

b. the beginning of the Dust Bowl

c. the end of fighting in World War I

d. the creation of the Federal Reserve

5. The leader of Great Britain corresponded with President Roosevelt and persuaded him to give Great Britain the supplies it needed to fight in World War II, an agreement that resulted in the Lend-Lease Act. Who is this leader?

a. Tony Blair

b. Anthony Eden

c. Harold Wilson

d. Winston Churchill

6. 

This photograph of a slum was taken in 1935. These slums were nicknamed after the U.S. President who was often blamed for the economic plight of the country during that period. Who was that President?

a. Harry Truman

b. Herbert Hoover

c. Calvin Coolidge

d. Warren G. Harding

7. "Our many Jewish friends and acquaintances are being taken away in droves. The Gestapo is treating them very roughly and transporting them in cattle cars to Westerbork, the big camp in Drenthe to which they're sending all the Jews....If it's that bad in Holland, what must it be like in those faraway and uncivilized places where the Germans are sending them? We assume that most of them are being murdered. The English radio says they're being gassed."

- *Diary of a Young Girl* (1947), entry dated April 11, 1944

This quote is referring to what period in history?

a. World War I

b. the Holocaust

c. The Great Depression

d. The Russian Revolution

8. From the mid-1930s to 1940 over 2.5 million people had moved out of the Great Plains states in the center of the United States. What BEST accounts for this movement?

a. Jim Crow laws

b. the Dust Bowl

c. the Great Migration

d. US entry into World War II

9. In the Presidential Election of 1932, Franklin Roosevelt defeated President Herbert Hoover Election. There were a number of reasons for his victory, but the MOST important factor was

a. Hoover was sick from a stroke he suffered at the end of World War II.

b. Hoover had already served two terms and could not run for a third term.

c. Most Americans blamed Hoover and the Republicans for the Great Depression.

d. Franklin D. Roosevelt was a war hero and people trusted his military experience.

10. *Civilian Conservation Corps
*Works Progress Administration
*Social Security Administration

All of these programs are associated with the presidency of

a. John Kennedy

b. Ronald Reagan

c. Lyndon Johnson

d. Franklin Roosevelt

11. What was the purpose of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) during the Great Depression?

a. to insure bank deposits in the United States

b. to create job opportunities in national parks

c. to reduce farm surpluses and raise agricultural profits

d. provide electrical power to poor and rural regions of the U.S.

12. Who was the dictator of Germany during World War II?

a. Franz Josef

b. Adolf Hitler

c. Benito Mussolini

d. Otto von Bismarck

13. Which of these events of World War II happened first?

a. Japan invades China.

b. Germany bombs England.

c. Germany invades Poland.

d. Japan bombs Pearl Harbor.

14. What was most significant about VE Day in World War II?

a. Allied forces invaded France.

b. It marked the end of fighting in Europe.

c. FDR died of a stroke in Warm Springs, GA.

d. Japan finally surrendered after being hit by two atomic bombs.

15. Why are the “Tuskegee Airmen” important in U.S. history?

a. They dropped the atomic bombs that ended World War II.

b. They were created as a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

c. They successfully defended American airspace from the Nazi air forces.

d. They showed that African Americans could fight as well as white troops.

16. Which of these would have been used MOST by Americans in the 1930s?

a. movies

b. radio

c. telegraph

d. television

17. Which person is incorrectly matched with their field of work?

a. Margaret Mitchell: author

b. Duke Ellington: politician

c. Jesse Owens: track athlete

d. Babe Ruth: baseball player

18.

Original Targets Considered for Atomic Attacks

Target	Qualifying Characteristics
Hiroshima	Major embarkation port and site of military headquarters
Kokura	Site of a large munitions plant
Niigata	Industrial port with metal plants and oil refinery
Kyoto	Major Japanese industrial city

Based on the table, what can you infer about Truman's goal for the nuclear attack on Japan?

a. Truman wanted to disrupt Japan's ability to wage war.

b. Truman wanted to restrict the attacks to military targets.

c. Truman wanted to isolate Japan by cutting off its major ports.

d. Truman wanted to strike at the cities with the largest populations.

19. *Unstable economy

*Overproduction of agricultural products

*Instability of the Stock Market

*Tight monetary policy of the Federal Reserve

All of these items led directly to what event?

a. World War I

b. World War II

c. Great Depression

d. Baby Boom Generation

20. What political and military transformations in Japan led to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941?

a. Japanese imperialism had successfully spread the nation's military control throughout other parts of the Pacific.

b. Japan's political control of Korea ended after it lost a war against China, so Japan retaliated against China's allies

c. Japan's Emperor Meiji rose to power, putting an end to their constitutional government and leading to a military state.

d. Japanese political leaders closed the country off to trade and cultural exchange with other nations, leading to isolation and tension.

21. Short Answer - In the 1930s, most Americans were dealing with harsh effects of the Great Depression. Because laws during the 1930s were different than today's law, some Americans also faced civil inequality during that time. Even in the face of these hardships, some notable people left great legacies during this time. Literature, art, medicine, sports, and music are some examples of areas impacted during this time.

For each of the famous Americans listed below, write at least one complete sentence describing his or her contributions to American culture during the 1930s.

1. Duke Ellington

2. Margaret Mitchell

3. Jesse Owens

You MUST use complete sentences in your answer.

22. Short Answer - Pearl Harbor played a very important role in World War II in 1941. A. Describe what happened at Pearl Harbor on that date.B. Explain why this is such an important moment in World War II.

You MUST use complete sentences in your answer.

Appendix G – Rubric - Short Answer Responses on Content Knowledge Assessment

Writing Trait	Points	Criteria
Idea Development, Organization, and Coherence *This trait examines the writer's ability to effectively establish a controlling idea, support the idea with evidence from the text(s) read, and elaborate on the idea with examples, illustrations, facts, and other details. The writer must integrate the information from the text(s) into his/her own words and arrange the ideas and supporting evidence (from the text[s] read) in order to create cohesion for an informative/explanatory essay.*	4	*The student's response is a well-developed informative/explanatory text that examines a topic in depth and conveys ideas and information clearly based on text as a stimulus.* • Effectively introduces a topic • Effectively develops the topic with multiple facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic • Groups related ideas together logically to give some organization to the writing • Effectively uses linking words and phrases to connect ideas within and across categories of information • Uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to explain the topic • Provides a strong concluding statement or section related to the information or explanation presented
	3	*The student's response is a complete informative/explanatory text that examines a topic and presents information based on text as a stimulus.* • Introduces a topic • Develops the topic with some facts, definitions, and details • Groups some related ideas together to give partial organization to the writing • Uses some linking words to connect ideas within and across categories of information, but relationships may not always be clear • Uses some precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to explain the topic • Provides a concluding statement or section
	2	*The student's response is an incomplete or oversimplified informative/explanatory text that cursorily examines a topic based on text as a stimulus.* • Attempts to introduce a topic • Attempts to develop a topic with too few details • Attempts to group some related ideas together but organization is not clear • Uses few linking words to connect ideas, but not all ideas are well connected to the topic • Uses limited language and vocabulary that do not clearly explain the topic • Provides a weak concluding statement or section

Idea Development, Organization, and Coherence *This trait examines the writer's ability to effectively establish a controlling idea, support the idea with evidence from the text(s) read, and elaborate on the idea with examples, illustrations, facts, and other details. The writer must integrate the information from the text(s) into his/her own words and arrange the ideas and supporting evidence (from the text[s] read) in order to create cohesion for an informative/explanatory essay.*	1	*The student's response is a weak attempt to write an informative/explanatory text that examines a topic based on text as a stimulus.* • May not introduce a topic or topic is unclear • May not develop a topic • May be too brief to group any related ideas together • May not use any linking words to connect ideas • Uses vague, ambiguous, or repetitive language • Provides a minimal or no concluding statement or section
	0	*The student will receive a condition code for various reasons:* • Blank • Copied • Too Limited to Score/Illegible/Incomprehensible • Non-English/Foreign Language • Off Topic/Off Task/Offensive

Appendix H – Attitudes Towards Social Studies Inventory

Directions: This inventory consists of statements about your attitude toward mathematics. There are no correct or incorrect responses. Read each item carefully. Please think about how you feel about each item. Please answer every question.

Write the number in the box next to the question to show how much you agree or disagree with the sentence.

Likert scale

1- No WAY! Strongly Disagree

2- Hmm, I don't think so. Disagree

3- I don't agree or disagree

4- Yes, I agree

5- Absolutely! I strongly agree

1	Social Studies is a very worthwhile and necessary subject.	
2	I want to develop my Social Studies skills.	
3	Social Studies helps develop the mind and teaches a person to think.	

4	Social Studies is important in everyday life.	
5	Social Studies is one of the most important subjects for people to study.	
6	High school Social Studies courses would be very helpful no matter what I decide to study.	
7	I can think of many ways that I use Social Studies outside of school.	
8	I think studying Social Studies is useful.	
9	I believe studying Social Studies helps me with problem solving in other areas.	
10	A strong Social Studies background could help me in my professional life.	
11	I get a great deal of satisfaction out of solving a Social Studies problem.	
12	I have usually enjoyed studying Social Studies in school.	
13	Social Studies is dull and boring.	

14	I would prefer to do an assignment in Social Studies than write an essay.	
15	I really like Social Studies.	
16	I am happier in a Social Studies class than any other class.	
17	Social Studies is a very interesting subject.	
18	I am comfortable expressing my own ideas on how to look for solutions to a difficult problem in Social Studies.	
19	I am comfortable answering questions in Social Studies class.	
20	I like to solve new problems in Social Studies.	