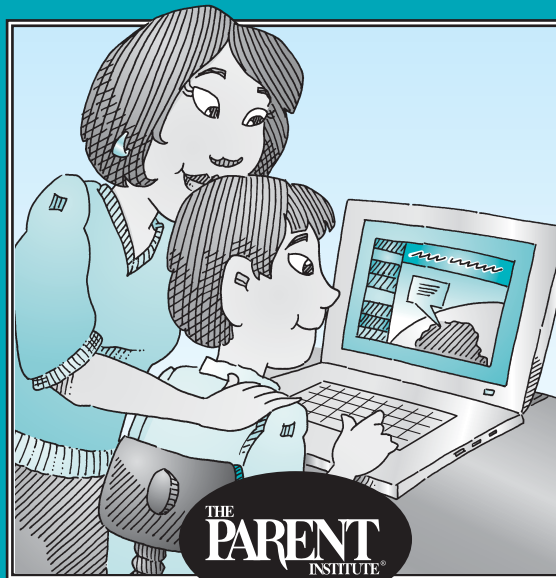


# What Parents Can Do at Home *to* Help Students With Social Studies

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One of a Series of Booklets for Parents



**T**he world seems to get smaller every day. And students need social studies to make sense of it. Understanding how people live and the things that shape their lives are part of social studies. History, geography and economics are all social studies. That's what creates today's news!

Children need social studies to understand about war in a far-off country. They need social studies to make sense of political campaign ads. They need social studies to understand as their parents discuss local issues. They need social studies to learn about how governments work. Social studies help students see how the past affects our lives today. And most importantly, social studies teach children how to be good citizens.

You can help make social studies come alive for your child. This booklet includes games, activities and ideas you can use at home. The ideas will help your child do better in other subjects, too.

You'll also find suggestions for talking about current events, ideas for trips to the library and ways to explore family history. You'll even find ideas for making maps to learn local geography. This booklet can help you boost your child's understanding of social studies in *and out* of school.



*Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. We'll alternate using "he/him" and "she/her" throughout this booklet.*

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## Use Family History to Illustrate Social Studies

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**H**istory is the story of people from the past. Help your child learn about the history of your family by becoming an "investigative reporter." Here's how you can do this with your child:

- **Make a list of topics** to discuss with older relatives—memories of their school days, things they remember about their childhood.
- **Set aside time at a family reunion** for your child to talk with one or more family members.
- **Record the interviews** for future reference.

Your child can also become an amateur historian by researching more about his ancestors. Find your family's countries of origin and chart the birth-places of relatives on a map. Together, plot the route(s) they followed before they arrived at their present homes. Why did they leave their home countries?

Later, your child can publish what he's learned as a book of family history. If possible, add old photographs. The books and the audio recordings may become treasured family heirlooms.



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# History Affects Today's News

Most events reported on the front page of the newspaper today began some time in the past. Talk with your child to see how history affects the present. Look through the newspaper or a news magazine with your child. Look for stories that refer to past events. Choose at least one of the historical events mentioned in a current news story.

Together do some research. Find out the history of these past events. Then talk about the connections between past and present. That's social studies.



## Discuss Current Events

Many middle and high school students don't know much about current events. They're busy with their *own* current events—who's dating, who's breaking up, who said what to whom. But if they don't get into the habit of paying attention to current events now, they may never be informed citizens.

One of the best ways to get older students more informed is by asking their opinions on events. For example, you might casually say, "What do you think about the governor's ideas about education?" Be prepared for your child to say she doesn't have any idea what the governor is suggesting. You might say, "Well, here's an article that describes it. I thought that since it affects you, you might have some thoughts."

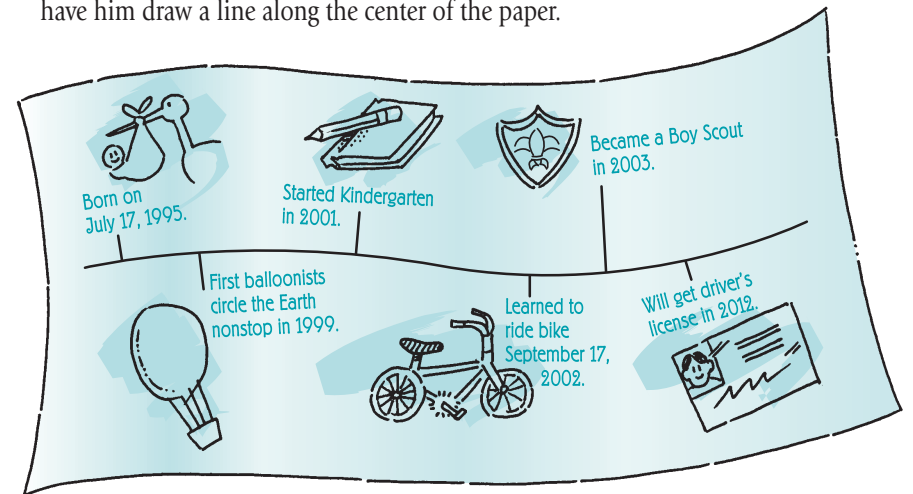
You can help your child see that social studies include—and involve—her!

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# Make History Come Alive With a Personal Time Line

Most children need some help to make sense of history. Here is an activity that will help your child see the connections between his own personal history and the history of the country or the world.

Stretch a roll of shelf paper along the floor. Cut a piece of paper about three feet long for your child. Using a ruler, have him draw a line along the center of the paper.



Now have him do some research to fill in important dates in his own life: the day he was born, the day he started school and so on. Have him write these dates above the line. Add photos or drawings to make the time line more meaningful. Below the line, fill in important family and world events that have occurred since the birth of your child. Entries might include: "Started kindergarten." "Learned to ride a bicycle." "Became a Boy Scout." "NASA mission explores the surface of Mars." "Got driver's license." "First balloonists circle the earth nonstop." Display these time lines in a special place for all to see.

## Put Time in a Bottle

**M**ost students are fascinated to learn how children lived 100 years ago. This family activity can help preserve your history for future generations. And it can also make learning about the past fun. You'll need a large container with a tight-fitting lid (a large jar or a sealable plastic container will work). Then:

- **Look through magazines** and newspapers to collect pictures of important things from their lives.
- **Think about other items** that represent their lives and times. They might want to add a few toys, games, a card or letter from a loved one or a CD of some of their favorite music.
- **Have children write a letter** to the children who will open their time capsule. In it, they can describe their lives today.
- **Have everyone in the family meet** for "show and tell." Allow for some negotiating about what goes in the time capsule and what doesn't.
- **Help them label the items by name.** Add any other information that will help those who open the container understand why they represent our time.



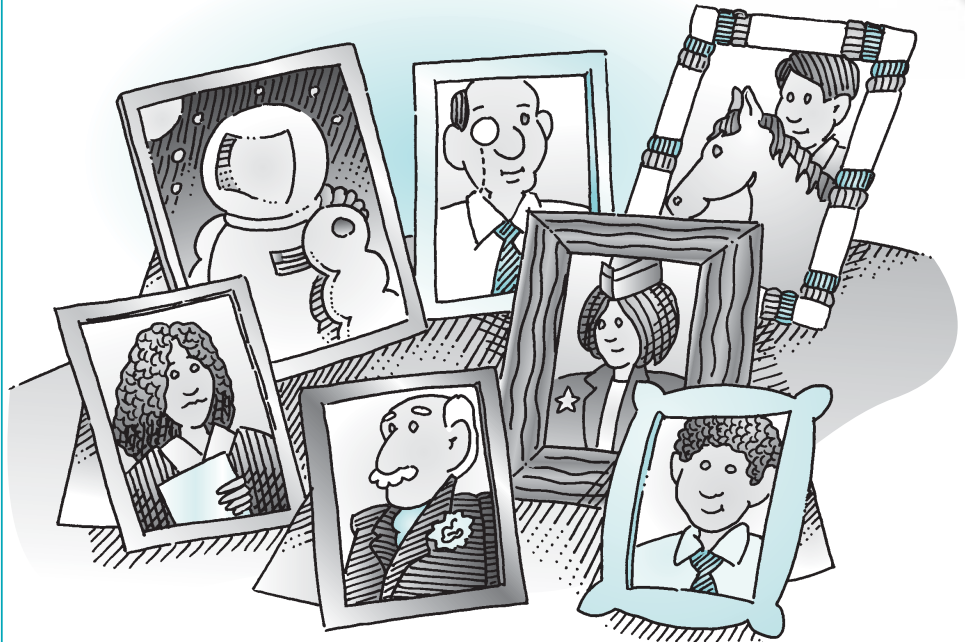
- **Place the items in the container,** seal it and find a place to store it. Now your children haven't just studied history—they've left a record for students in the future.

Finally, think about the things your family decided to include in your time capsule and use the list as a guide to asking about the past. What were the favorite toys of children 100 years ago? What was the popular music, and how did people listen to it? What did they read? What was school like? How did they communicate without cell phones, TV or the Internet? Did they have movies? All these topics are social studies. And understanding the past helps students understand the world today.

## Create a Gallery of Heroes

**W**hen kids face a tough challenge, it's good to have role models as examples. Use pictures and stories of heroes to help your child learn about historical characters who have overcome great odds.

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Start with your own family. Are there relatives who have done something worth remembering? Show your child their pictures while you tell their stories. Perhaps your grandparents had the courage to come to this country in search of a better life. Perhaps your parents gave up a lot so you could get a good education. Tell the story and talk about what happened because of a family member's heroic behavior.

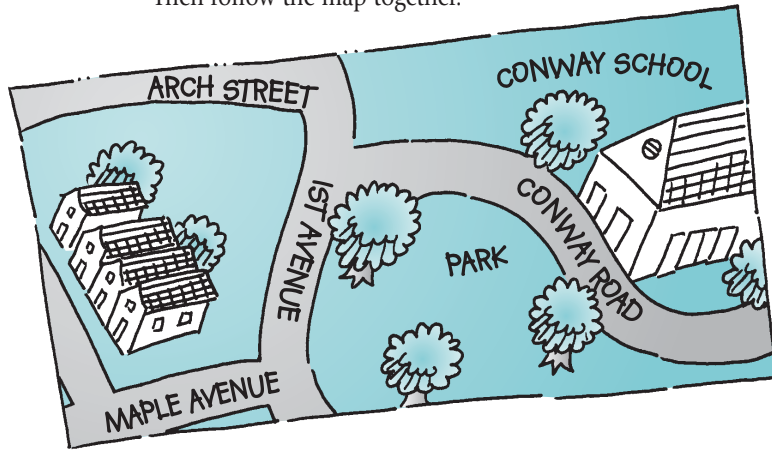
Then look for pictures of other people who deserve your child's respect. A picture of Anne Frank, a young girl who wrote a diary while she and her family lived in hiding from the Nazis, can lead to a talk about courage and compassion for others. A picture of Abraham Lincoln might lead to a talk about honesty and integrity. A picture of Martin Luther King can lead to a discussion of justice and equality.

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## Make Geography Come Alive

**G**eography is also part of social studies. And it's much more than learning about rivers, capitals and principal products. Helping your child learn about geography can be a way to bring the entire world to life. Here are some fun activities to try together:

- **Have your child draw** a map of how to get from your house to school, church or a friend's home. Then follow the map together.



- **Find a pattern to the streets** in your town. In some towns, streets run north and south, while avenues run east and west. Or street names may be alphabetical. Help your child see the patterns. Then when you're riding on a street, say, "We've just passed Elm Street. What street do you think comes next?"
- **Look for maps and pictures of other cities,** regions and countries in newspapers and magazines. Talk about what you see.
- **Read maps and atlases.** They can be a source of imagination and thought for young explorers.
- **Start a collection of objects** from countries around the world. Stamps, post cards or coins are all easy to collect and store.

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## Use a Compass To Learn Directions

**B**y third or fourth grade, children are expected to know how to read a map. But for many kids, words like *north*, *south*, *east* and *west* don't have any real meaning. Buy an inexpensive compass. Use it when you and your child are walking or riding around town. Ask questions like, "Which way are we headed? Would we need to turn right or left in order to head *north*?" Use words to describe where things in your town are located. ("My school is *northeast* of my house." "City Hall is *south* of the zoo.")

If you can, get a map of your town. Then help your child compare what she sees on the map with what she sees in real life. Map reading is an important part of social studies.



## Travel Abroad Right at Home

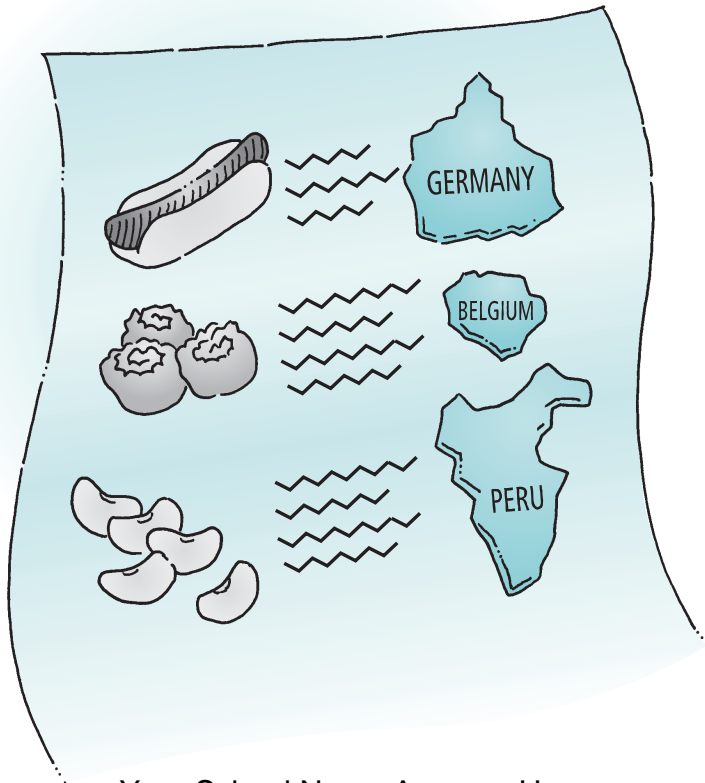
You don't need a passport to experience another culture. Look in your local newspaper and phone book for ethnic restaurants, shops and food stores. Visit those places with your child. Before your visit, have your child locate the country you will "visit" on a world map. Read about the country's customs at the library or on the Internet. Review travel brochures and look up a few words in the country's main language. These are good ways to get your child interested in social studies.

## Link Words to Places

There are dozens of words your child uses every day that come from the name of a particular city, country, river or other geographical place. Make a list of these words. Then have your child locate the places on a map. Here are some words to get you started:

- **Hamburger** started out as “Hamburg steak.” It was brought to America by immigrants from Hamburg, Germany.
- **Frankfurters** originated in Frankfurt, Germany.
- **Brussels sprouts** came from Brussels, Belgium.
- **Lima beans** are from Lima, Peru.
- **Tangerines** come from Tangier, Morocco.
- **Cologne** comes from Cologne, Germany.

But don't try to look up “French fries.” They *didn't* originate in France!



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## Learn Civics by Getting Involved

Whether it's global warming or a proposed change in the time school will start next year, students usually have opinions on many subjects. You can turn a conversation about one of those issues into an opportunity to help your child take action on something that matters.

Start by helping your child clarify his thoughts on the issue. You might ask:

- Why is it important to you?
- What would you like to see happen?
- If you could do something to change the situation, would you do it?

Once your child has clarified his thoughts, encourage him to write a letter expressing his concerns. For example, he might write a letter to the school board about school hours. He could also do some research to see what Congress is doing about global warming. Then he could write a letter to your senator or representative.

Often, public officials will write back. Your child may even find that he has helped influence the outcome of a particular issue. This is social studies.

# Social Studies Requires Learning 'In Breadth' and 'In Depth'

**B**y the time teens reach high school, they're expected to learn in two different ways—in breadth and in depth. Students often have problems in their history, government or civics classes because they don't know how and when to focus on learning in breadth, in depth or both.

*Breadth* means getting a broad understanding of the overall subject. In U.S. history, for example, it might involve remembering the battles and the dates of the Civil War. It's the type of learning most students are used to—memorizing facts and basic concepts, then remembering them for a test.



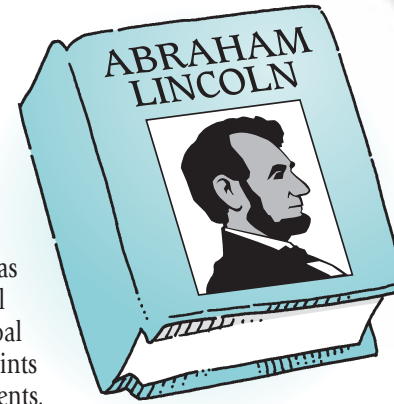
High school students, however, also need to understand the details of a subject. They need to understand specific details and how they relate to the overall subject. This is learning in *depth*. For example, they need to *know* the date of the Battle of Gettysburg as well as *understand why* it was a turning point in the Civil War.

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Here are some of the differences between learning things in breadth or in depth:

## Learning in Breadth

- A single source, such as a textbook, may be all that is needed. The goal is to know the key points or most important events.
- Memory is the key. Students need to understand how things fit together, knowing, for example, that the Pike's Peak gold rush and the election of Abraham Lincoln occurred at the same time.
- Students usually focus on a broad range of topics.



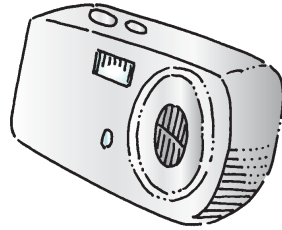
## Learning in Depth

- Many different sources must be used. Students should understand different points of view on a subject and then draw conclusions about it.
- Analysis is the key. Students should ask questions when learning in depth: *Why* did that occur? How might things have gone differently?
- Students usually focus on a single topic, with the goal being to learn as much about the topic as possible.



Until high school, most students have had lots of experience in learning things in breadth. But high school subjects also require students to master some topics in depth. If your teen is having trouble with an in-depth project or paper, remind her that she needs to use different skills and approaches.

# Get the 'Big Picture' and The 'Fine Print' From a Social Studies Assignment

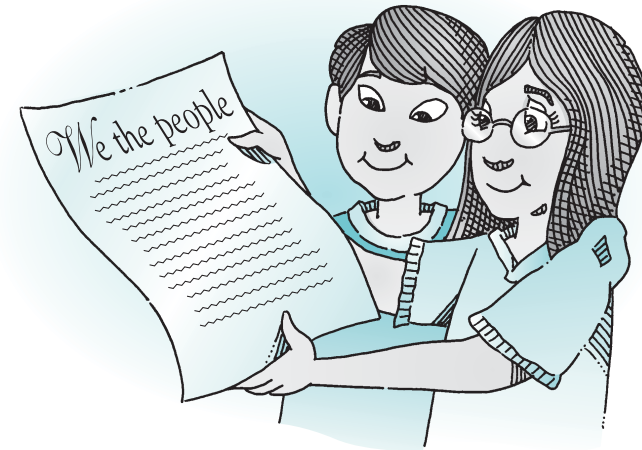


**R**eading is important in social studies. Many students just try to look for the “big picture.” But your child needs to be able to read—and remember—the “fine print,” too. SQ3R is a process that can make it easier to remember both the main ideas and the details in social studies—or any other reading assignment:

- **Survey.** Have your child quickly skim over the material to see what it’s about. Check the headings. Look at photos. Read the **bold type**.
- **Question.** Once your child knows the main ideas, ask him to think of questions the assignment might answer. He can prepare a list of questions to help him identify the most important things he needs to learn from the reading. (These may be the subheads of various sections. He may also want to look at the end of the chapter for review questions. These will help him focus on the main ideas as he’s reading.)
- **Read.** Have your child read the assignment. As your child reads, have him look for answers to the questions he developed.
- **Restate.** Ask your child to tell you in his own words about the material he has read. What are the most important ideas covered?
- **Review.** What were the main ideas? Did your child find answers to all his questions? What else did he learn? What surprised him? This step can be done right away as well as days later. Another good way to review is to have him make up a test based on what he has read and then see if he can answer all the questions.

Children need to know about current events. They need to know how government works. They need to know history and the reasons behind why people do what they do. And you can help your child learn the critical lessons social studies can teach us all.

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