



Sioux Falls School District

Social Studies Curriculum Guide Fifth Grade

Updated: August 2025

Vision, Mission & Goals

Course Description:

The SFSD uses *Studies Weekly* as the core resource for teaching Social Studies in grades K–5. This curriculum is designed to engage students through an interactive, standards-based approach that blends print and digital materials. Each grade level receives weekly periodicals that introduce essential social studies concepts—such as history, geography, economics, and civics—through age-appropriate articles, activities, and discussions.

Studies Weekly supports critical thinking, reading comprehension, and inquiry-based learning. It aligns with our state standards and promotes deeper understanding by connecting content to students' lives and current events.

Parents can expect their child to bring home their completed periodicals at the end of each unit, allowing families to review and discuss what was learned in class. Our goal is to help students become lifelong learners who lead, contribute, and thrive in an interconnected global society.



COURSE AT A GLANCE - Fifth Grade Social Studies

Unit 1: Renaissance and Age of Exploration

Unit Summary: In this unit, your child will explore how Europe's geography, culture, and new ideas helped shape major events in world history. Students will begin by learning about the physical features of Europe, its mountains, rivers, and forests, and how these landforms influenced the development of civilizations and cultures.

The unit then moves into the 1300s, the Renaissance era, and the Age of Exploration. This period renewed interest in art, literature, and learning. The unit concludes with the impact of the Columbian Exchange, which introduced new goods, animals, and ideas between Europe and the Americas but also brought disease, colonization, and the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade.

Through this unit, students will discover how Europe's ideas, geography, and innovation shaped not only the continent but the future of many parts of the world.

Unit 2: Reformation

Unit Summary: In this unit, your child will explore the events that occurred in Europe after the Renaissance, with a focus on a significant religious movement known as the Reformation. This period, which began in the 1500s, sparked widespread changes in religion, politics, and society across Europe. Students will also learn about leaders who challenged the Church.

By the end of this unit, students will understand how the Reformation reshaped not only religious life in Europe but also had a powerful and lasting impact on government, education, and cultural traditions that are still felt today.

Unit 3: First Half of the 19th Century

Unit Summary: In this unit, your child will learn about the significant changes that occurred in the United States during the 1800s, a period of expansion, invention, and increasing conflict. As the country expanded westward, Americans encountered new opportunities and challenges that profoundly shaped society, the economy, and politics. Students will explore how different regions of the country developed in unique ways.

A key topic in this unit is slavery, a significant source of division between the North and South. Students will also study the idea of Manifest Destiny, the belief that the U.S. was meant to expand across the continent. This belief encouraged westward migration but also led to the forced removal of Native Americans and conflicts over land and culture.

The unit highlights how inventions and technology transformed life. Students will learn about the telegraph, the phonograph, and the Transcontinental Railroad, which helped Americans communicate, travel, and feel more connected than ever before.

Through this unit, students will understand how innovation, expansion, and conflict all played a role in shaping the United States during the 1800s.

Unit 4: Westward Expansion

Unit Summary: In this unit, your child will learn about a time of rapid growth and change in the United States during the early to mid-1800s. The focus will be on how westward expansion, new land acquisitions, and growing tensions over slavery and Native American rights shaped the country.

The unit begins with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, when the U.S. bought a vast area of land from France. This set the stage for settlers to move west across the Great Plains and beyond. As Americans pushed westward, conflict followed. Students will also explore how the U.S. acquired additional land following the war with Mexico, which helped the country expand to the Pacific Coast. But this growth came at a high cost. Native American communities were forced off their land through unfair treaties and laws.

Another critical topic in this unit is the growing conflict over slavery. Students will learn about the Underground Railroad, a secret network of people who helped enslaved individuals escape to freedom despite harsh laws that punished those who tried to help.

Through this unit, students will understand how America's expansion brought both opportunity and conflict and how debates over land, freedom, and human rights began to pull the country in different directions.

Unit 5: Civil War and Reconstruction

Unit Summary: In this unit, your child will study one of the most critical and difficult times in U.S. history: the growing divide over slavery, the Civil War, and the beginning of Reconstruction. Students will explore how disagreements between free and slave states made it hard to add new states to the Union and how this conflict eventually led to war.

Students will also learn about the rise of Abraham Lincoln, who spoke out against the spread of slavery and helped start the Republican Party. Students will learn about the Civil War and key leaders, such as Confederate General Robert E. Lee and Union General Ulysses S. Grant, and how the battles in both the East and West significantly shaped the war.

Through this unit, students will gain an understanding of the causes and consequences of the Civil War, the leadership of Abraham Lincoln, and the challenging process of healing and rebuilding the United States following such a significant conflict.

Unit 6: The Gilded Age

Unit Summary: In this unit, students explore a period in American history known as The Gilded Age (1870–1890). Following the Civil War, the United States experienced rapid industrial growth, major changes in technology, and shifts in how Americans lived and worked.

Students will learn how the second Industrial Revolution reshaped everyday life through inventions like the telephone, automobile, and sewing machine. They'll examine how new industries such as steel, oil, railroads, and banking created vast wealth for business leaders like John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie, leading to an era marked by both progress and deep inequality.

The unit also includes a special focus on South Dakota's unique history during this time. Students will study how settlers arrived in large numbers between 1870 and 1910, drawn by government incentives, new technologies, and the Black Hills Gold Rush. They'll learn how this growth came at a significant cost to Native American nations, particularly the Oceti Sakowin (Seven Council Fires), also known as the Great Sioux Nation, whose lands and treaty rights were repeatedly violated.

Through this unit, students gain a deeper understanding of the impact of industrialization and technological innovation, the rise of big business and extreme wealth, the expansion into the American West, and the history and resilience of Native American nations in the face of injustice. This unit engages students to think critically about the costs and benefits of progress and helps them connect past events to ongoing discussions about fairness, opportunity, and respect for all cultures.

Unit 7: 20th Century

Unit Summary: In this unit, students will explore a transformative period in American history, the turn of the 20th century, when the United States underwent rapid change and expansion. The country was transitioning from a predominantly rural society to an industrialized world power. Cities grew rapidly due to urbanization, which brought new businesses, transportation systems, schools, churches, and community centers. With increased economic and industrial strength, the U.S. began to play a greater role on the world stage, expanding its military, especially the navy, and gaining overseas territories following the Spanish-American War.

Students will also learn about social and political reform movements during this era. One primary focus is the women's suffrage movement and the efforts that led to the establishment of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, ultimately culminating in the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, which granted women the right to vote.

The unit highlights the rise of reform movements aimed at improving American society. Poor working conditions, unsafe food production, and child labor were significant concerns.

Finally, students will examine the leadership of Theodore Roosevelt, a key figure in early 20th-century America. As president, Roosevelt earned the nickname “The Trust Buster” for his efforts to regulate big business and promote fair competition. He was also a passionate conservationist who established national parks, forests, and monuments to protect natural resources for future generations.

Through this unit, students will gain an understanding of how the United States evolved into a modern nation, both domestically and globally, through industrial growth, reform movements, and civic leadership.

SD Social Studies Standards