



# Critical Thinking in the Draft K-6 Social Studies Curriculum

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## Social studies

Social studies is an interdisciplinary subject area that includes content about history, geography, economics, government, and civics. Social studies education can build active, informed, and responsible citizens who contribute to their communities and are knowledgeable about rights, responsibilities, and decision making.

Developing critical-thinking skills is an important part of social studies education. Social studies can provide students with transferable skills needed to question assumptions and make informed decisions as active participants in society.

## What is critical thinking?

Critical thinking is a competency that involves reasoning logically to analyze and synthesize new knowledge with existing knowledge in a coherent way. To explore critical thinking and competencies further, see [Alberta Education – Competencies](#).

## Critical thinking in curriculum design

The [Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Curriculum](#) is a policy document that guides curriculum development in Alberta. It explains the architecture and design of the new Alberta curriculum and sets clear direction for developmentally appropriate curriculum. The curriculum defines “what” is taught, while the teacher determines “how” it is taught. Teachers decide how they want to bring meaning to each knowledge, understanding, and skills and procedures component of curriculum, and they decide the best approach for students to achieve the learning outcome. Skills and procedures are not intended to be specific learning or assessment tasks; instead, they offer direction for teachers on how students should engage with curriculum. The expertise of the teacher guides students to develop critical thinking through meaningful, developmentally appropriate learning opportunities.

Once the skills and procedures (the “what” of the curriculum) are augmented by classroom pedagogy (the “how”), the skills and procedures become rich with critical-thinking opportunities. Teachers decide the direction of the learning tasks. They may ask students to argue, brainstorm, construct, convince, create, design, editorialize, express, facilitate, imagine, improve, integrate, justify, negotiate, order, plan, portray, rank, rate, recommend, respond, role-play, simulate, speculate, verify, or write.

## Critical thinking in the social studies curriculum

Curriculum provides learning outcomes that integrate competencies with subject- and grade-specific knowledge, understanding, and skills. Competency progressions identify skills that students may demonstrate by the end of each divisional age range. When new curriculum is finalized, competency progressions associated with each learning outcome are identified on [new LearnAlberta](#) to support teachers in providing students with opportunities to develop competencies, including critical thinking.

The examples below, aligned with specific learning outcomes from the draft curriculum, highlight different ways that a teacher might develop students’ critical-thinking skills in a meaningful way in the classroom.

**Critical Thinking, Division 1 (ages 6-8):**  
I reflect on contexts or experiences that influence my thinking.

**Grade 1 Social Studies Learning Outcome:**  
Students explore some of the major physical features of our world.

**Grade 1 Social Studies Skills and Procedures:**  
Share reasons why a local place holds personal meaning or significance.

Possible classroom experiences teachers may use in support of the learning outcome and the development of the critical thinking competency

Show photos of community places and have students rank in order of personal significance.

Have students talk about their favourite place when they do a show-and-tell presentation.

Write a class story featuring local places as recommended by students.

Read a book about places and have students create a representation of a place that is meaningful to them.

**Critical Thinking, Division 2 (ages 9-11):**  
I pose questions to analyze information or evidence.

**Grade 5 Social Studies Learning Outcome:**  
Students investigate ways to learn about the world and take action for change.

**Grade 5 Social Studies Skills and Procedures:**  
Connect current events to prior knowledge and personal experiences.

Possible classroom experiences teachers may use in support of the learning outcome and the development of the critical thinking competency

Read an informative article and highlight what was new and what was already known. Generate inquiry questions for follow-up research.

Discuss what you already know about a particular topic of concern. Watch a news clip and generate questions for reflection and investigation.

In response to a current event, describe similar situations read about, viewed, or experienced. Generate questions in response to the event.

Invite a guest speaker. Discuss what the class already knows about an event or issue. Create a list of interview questions to ask the guest.