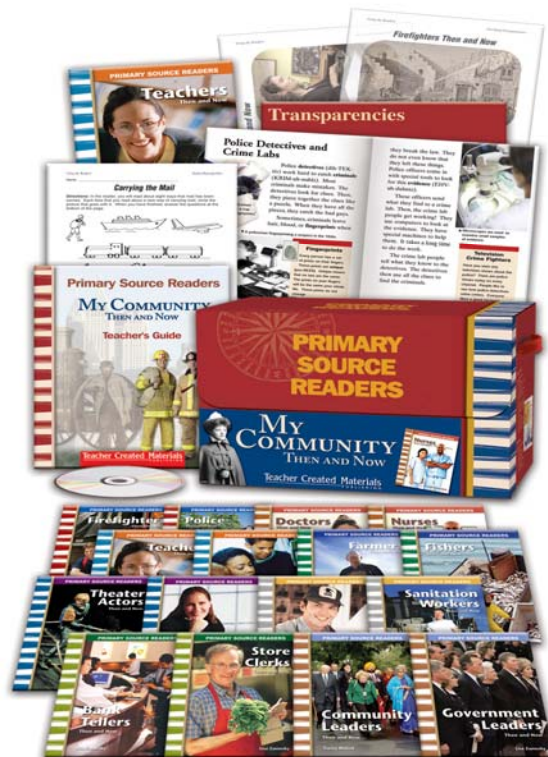


## Research-Based Curriculum Teacher Created Materials *Primary Source Readers*

*A Supplemental Program to Bridge the Achievement Gap*



## **Introduction**

**Primary Source Readers** is a research-based supplemental reading program. The program helps students develop nonfiction reading skills and strategies in social studies. Teaching social studies would be straightforward if all students learned with the same methods, practiced at the same rates, and read at the same levels. However, this description of the ideal classroom scenario does not usually represent a teacher's reality. Today's classrooms are filled with different students of varying backgrounds, reading abilities, levels of proficiency in English, and learning styles. Furthermore, teaching history is not about merely passing on a cluster of skills that can be memorized or simply replicated by students. "Learning to read is a complex process. Most children learn to read and continue to grow in their mastery of this process. However, there continues to be a group of children for whom learning to read is a struggle." (Quatroche, 1999)

Today's effective teacher needs to have a variety of teaching strategies, resources, and reading materials to use in order to help students become proficient and academically successful readers for life. Research shows that proficient readers have had access to a variety of reading materials, have been given the opportunity to explain their understanding of texts, and were asked comprehension questions by teachers. (Quatroche, 1999) Beyond just reading in literacy-based classrooms, content area teachers also find that competent reading is a necessary and vital skill for all of the other content areas. When students struggle with basic reading skills, this creates an even bigger gap of academic success as they progress from the lower grades into the secondary grades. Research has shown a difference in the reading strategies used by good readers and low level readers. (Collins, 1994)

Teacher Created Materials created this series of supplemental resources to support effective social studies instruction and close the achievement gap evidenced in schools around the country. **Primary Source Readers** are a valuable resource to help teachers extend good reading skills and strategies for students. With these readers, students continue the process to becoming independent and skillful readers through the content areas. Research continually shows that teachers can teach students to develop awareness of their own learning and strategies while engaging in reading. (Collins, 1994) The lesson plans include a variety of teaching strategies to reach the students who are not achieving to their potential. In addition to offering effective teaching strategies through the reading of primary source, content-based nonfiction texts, **Primary Source Readers** addresses the National Council for the Social Studies standards as well as language arts standards.

## **Content Area Reading**

Every teacher realizes how valuable each instructional minute is in the classroom. Elementary school teachers are responsible for covering multiple content areas. Middle school teachers have limited time in reaching the core curriculum in the time allotted, with textbooks written at the high end of grade level appropriateness. The available textbook levels do not always match the actual reading levels represented in the classroom. Moreover, proficient reading is an indispensable skill for most of the content areas. When students read in the content areas, they are constantly learning how to process and analyze information that they will later be assessed on. Thus, reading proficiency relates to the ability to achieve in the content areas.

The different content areas lend themselves to thematic modes of instruction. Through the themes provided naturally through content teaching, students are given a cognitive net of vocabulary, background, and concepts for which to connect the new learning and understanding that they will be participating in. This is especially important for English Language Learners who are learning language and content concepts simultaneously. The *Primary Source Readers* offer teachers additional resources for presenting the information necessary within a content unit. Crossing through interdisciplinary learning processes helps students to become “active learners equipped with the analytical, interpretive, and evaluative skills needed to solve real-life problems.” (NCSS, 1994) When students are exposed to multiple texts surrounding a single topic, they can build more background knowledge for which to process new information and retain learned information.

The *Primary Source Readers* program has combined effective reading instruction through the social studies content area. Research has shown that instruction that covers multiple subject areas and disciplines “is likely to be responsive to children’s curiosity and question about real life and to result in a productive learning and positive attitudes toward school and teachers.” (NCSS, 1994) Content area reading combines content learning with purposeful and meaningful reading activities.

The *Primary Source Readers* are not meant to be textbooks, but each book does provide the students with good historical information. The kits are designed for first through third grades and fourth through eighth grades. *Primary Source Readers* engage learners through methods for teaching nonfiction reading skills. While teaching the skills essential for reading nonfiction, teachers are directed in modeling practices and keeping the students actively engaged in their reading experiences. Teachers can use the books during reading instruction, as a support in social studies lessons, or as the basis of independent research. Young people often lack the conceptual base to connect new social world knowledge and the perspectives of others with their own personal and limited experiences. (NCSS, 1984) The before, during, and after reading strategies in the *Primary Source Readers* lessons encourage students to make these connections as they increase reading comprehension and learn the content information.

### **The Need for Leveled Readers**

With the diverse student needs represented in classrooms, teachers have to differentiate their instruction. The *Primary Source Readers* collections provide ways for teachers to differentiate without all the extra planning usually involved. The lesson plan book that comes with each set includes clear plans for the best teaching strategies. The teacher can choose from the suggestions, tips, and techniques and then determine the best way to use the program to meet the needs of the students in the classroom.

The *Primary Source Readers* kits contain sets of leveled readers for teachers to use in social studies instruction. Each set contains historical information written at two levels. For example, the *Early America* series has eight biographies written at a grade four reading level and eight topic-based books written at a grade five reading level. This allows for the teacher to provide differentiated instruction within various historical topics. Research shows that repeated reading of connected texts helps students develop more proficient reading skills. (Quatroche, 1999)

With this program, the teacher can integrate the textbook reading with the multiple connected texts that the leveled readers provide, as well as the primary source overhead transparencies. This program, which integrates reading skills and exploration of social studies themes, can fulfill the important need for exposing struggling readers to nonfiction text and concepts. Developing reading skills, along with other types of necessary skills, in the context of social studies can help children “enhance their abilities to learn, to make decisions, and to develop as competent, self-directed citizens.” (NCSS, 1984) In each kit, there are six copies of each of 16 titles - 96 books total – with each kit. The primary source overheads allow for teachers to further differentiate as they address whole class needs and then adapt them for small group instruction.

### **The Benefits of Using Primary Sources**

With the *Primary Source Readers*, students are taught by reading information in addition to overheads that show historical primary sources, such as relevant documents, maps, charts, photographs, quotations, and letters. The use of hands-on materials such as primary sources improves student learning. (Jacobs, 1989) While some materials or reading textbooks are beyond the struggling reader’s conceptual abilities, or simply too brief, these lessons encourage the use of scenarios and stories that give depth and breadth to the work being taught that is appropriate for the age level and the level of reading. Primary sources help students create connections linking themselves sitting in the classroom with the people involved in the actually creating document source. (Otten, 1998) The created connections allow students to more fully understand and retain information.

Examining primary sources encourages students to create a distance between their views and the views of the people they are studying. It also encourages students to compare information when looking at more than one document on a topic. (Drake, 2002) The primary sources found on the lesson overheads illustrate differing viewpoints and encourage students to interpret the social, political, and economic institutions of the time period they are studying. Using primary sources allows teachers to help verify the information that students are learning in textbooks, to help students discover historical information themselves, and to allow students to develop a richer contextual understanding of the time period they are studying. (Drake, 2002)

### **Nonfiction Reading is Necessary**

*Primary Source Readers* spotlight nonfiction texts and concepts. The detailed lesson plans encourage the teaching of specific nonfiction reading skills in addition to the necessary basic reading skills. These skills include understanding nonfiction text features, such as structural patterns, text organizers, and parts of a book. The importance of teaching these skills and the need for more nonfiction reading instruction in schools is also supported by *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading* (Anderson, Hiebert, & Wilkinson, 1985). In this pioneering document the commission states, "It is only common sense that children would be helped to make the transition to textbooks if early basal readers contained more high quality nonfiction. Though there is little hard evidence on the point, anyone experienced in working with young readers knows they can understand and do appreciate selections on such topics as animals, clouds, and how to make a kite, provided the material is presented in a coherent fashion."

There is a dramatic increase of reading comprehension skills essential for academic success in the higher grades. The courses in the upper grades are usually dominated by textbooks, which can be difficult for struggling readers and English Language Learners. For this reason, learning to read and understand nonfiction text is a critical skill that students must learn—and from a very young age. Duke (2000) in a *Reading Research Quarterly* article entitled “3.6 Minutes Per Day: The Scarcity of Information Texts in First Grade” states, “Scholars have pointed out that informational texts can play an important role in motivating children to read in the first place.” Reading informational texts is also particularly helpful to children who are learning English as a second language. The concrete nature of the real world makes it easier for these children to create bridges between their primary language and the English languages. In her article in *Instructor*, Sharon Taberski (2001) suggests, “Children love reading about real things. It gives them an understanding of our world and the way things work. And considering all the newspapers, brochures, guides, maps, Internet sites, and how-to manuals we navigate as adults, it’s safe to say that nonfiction is the genre children will read most often when they grow up.”

Furthermore, the structural patterns in nonfiction text tend to be very important for students to understand the meaning of the text. It is necessary for teachers to instruct their students in the strategies of using text structure to enhance learning. (Collins, 1994) Nonfiction texts often use sequence or cause and effect as a structural organizer. In order for a child to understand a book on the effects of a major event, the child would need to understand the basis of cause and effect relationships. This kind of understanding happens when students are explicitly taught the skills and given ample opportunities to practice them. Explicitly taught strategies are very important for understanding text and monitoring comprehension and this will help struggling readers transfer the learned strategies to other texts. (Quatroche, 1999)

One last convincing reason for using real-life text is the use of nonfiction text on the reading comprehension sections of state and national tests. (Parkes, 2003) Because students are most often tested on their ability to comprehend nonfiction text, it serves to reason that most of their classroom experiences should be with nonfiction text as well. Ivey and Broaddus (2000) state in *The Reading Teacher*: “Reading nonfiction materials would increase students’ depth of knowledge in the content areas, and probably help students score higher on the standardized tests that are of such concern to teachers and administrators.” *Primary Source Readers* offer teachers a further resource for helping students gain competence in the skills necessary for successfully responding to the standardized testing requirements.

### **Active, Engaged Learning**

The *Primary Source Readers* make use of various reading and writing activities, primary source transparencies, historical background transparencies, and reproducible pages with photographs, maps, charts, quotations, and letters. These materials invite students to experience an integrated approach to active learning where they are immersed in reading relevant, authentic nonfiction.

It is important for students to be actively engaged in the reading process. “Teaching students to think while reading is referred to in the professional literature as ‘critical reading.’” (Collins, 1993) This can happen when teachers assess and activate prior knowledge, using that information to then motivate the students to read and think about the text before, during, and after reading. Proficient readers are constantly interacting with texts, monitoring their comprehension, predicting, asking questions, and reflecting on what they have learned. Multiple research studies have proven that students who are actively engaged in learning retain information more effectively and perform higher on standardized tests (Gardner, 1983 & Baker, 1989). The lessons in *Primary Source Readers* offer easy to follow teaching activities where students engage in thinking, listening, speaking, reading and writing before they read, during their reading, and after their reading.

However, there are many students who do not understand the importance of the active process in reading. “For active, critical reading to occur, teachers must create an atmosphere which fosters inquiry. Students must be encouraged to question, to make predictions, and to organize ideas which support value judgments.” (Collins, 1993) Furthermore, content-area reading can be problematic for students who are not familiar with the subject matter or who have low levels of proficiency in English. The teacher aids in the process of making the input comprehensible by actively engaging the reader. The teacher models these skills, offers the students ample opportunities to practice the skills, and then encourages them to use these skills independently. The students are challenged and motivated to become more involved in their learning, as they process the multiple perspectives offered in the historical contexts. These are the types of activities that students engage in during the *Primary Source Readers* lessons.

The process of the active experience produces a link to a deeper understanding of content that requires ideas to be tested. (Emig, 1977) With active reading process, students realize that reading is not a passive process of inactively taking in information. This transformation of a reading approach occurs during three dimensions of reading comprehension. Educators who advocate the active process of critical reading skills suggest techniques that have students engage before, during and after reading. (Collins, 1993)

The first dimension is the before-reading phase, where the purpose for reading is established, prior knowledge is activated, and the language and concepts are developed. The before activities allow the students to make predictions and create “buy – in” for what they will read. The second dimension is the during-reading phase. At this point, there is active reasoning and the reader interacts with the material being read. Information that is encountered is tested against the reader’s own background, experiences, and expectations, and new knowledge is constructed. The during-reading activities allow students to monitor their comprehension of what they are reading as they continue in the texts. The third dimension is the after-reading phase. At this point, assimilation, assessment, application, accommodation, and appreciation can take place. The after activities allow reflection, interpretation, and reaction to what they have learned.

These phases of reading are essential for comprehension. The *Primary Source Readers* before, during, and after reading activities extend learning further than typical classroom experiences where students simply passively listen to lectures, copy notes from the board, and then answer comprehension questions at the end of the text. The lessons create students who are full participants and active learners as they explore historical events through active reading processes. Active learning utilizes an experience or participatory approach where content, process, and products are balanced. Teachers are more enthusiastic about teaching when they see that their students are immersed in understanding the content. (Wason-Ellam, 1987)

### **Cooperative Learning and Paired Learning**

When the teacher utilizes the role of facilitator and asks open-ended questions, he or she can choose various grouping structures. As much as cooperative learning has its values, it is just one form of grouping available. The ability to choose from many types of groupings empowers the teacher to select a classroom structure that best meets the needs of students and the goals of the class.

There are many opportunities for cooperative learning within the *Primary Source Readers* lessons. In cooperative group activities, students work together. It differs from simple “group work” in that, with cooperative learning activities, each student is given a role or task that the rest of the group is dependent upon. “Cooperative learning promotes student motivation, encourages group processes, fosters social and academic interaction among students, and rewards successful group participation.” (Lyman & Foyle, 1988) The students are simultaneously participating and being held accountable, and students are given the instructions needed to complete a task. Regardless of the roles that each play, the teacher should make sure that all individuals pull their weight for the entire group (Slavin, 1983).

There are also opportunities for paired learning within the *Primary Source Readers* lessons. Paired learning can be an excellent tool when a teacher asks students to reflect on a personal experience or respond with individual connections made to primary sources. The more students become active participants, the more likely they will have the opportunity to personally integrate the material (Stix, 1992). Similarly, as students are exposed to many modes, they will integrate the information with ease and in harmony with their own learning preferences (Baum, 1990).

When students are reading about the themes of social studies content, reflecting on personal experiences may help students intimately identify with the content of a lesson. Students are given the chance to share ideas, learn other’s viewpoints, and respond to issues that arise, while also practicing oral language skills. (Lyman & Foyle, 1988) During a *Primary Source Readers* lesson, the teacher may want to pair students and have them discuss the ways in which their pasts parallel some of the events. The teacher can then create meaningful ways through lessons with *Primary Source Readers* for the information to be shared with the whole class. The pairs can work together to use their personal experiences to relate to the content and create more meaning out of the reading. As students find out that many private or embarrassing issues they once thought were theirs alone are really common issues, they find relief (Gordon, 1974). For English Language Learners, paired activities allow them time to process content and practice using the academic language necessary for discussing their understanding of what they have read.

## Assessment

Researchers are using the term “authentic assessment” in different ways. The terms “authentic to the task” or “authentic assessment” are used when the assessment is a natural outgrowth of the strategy of instruction. “Assessment is authentic when we directly examine student performance on worthy intellectual tasks.” (Wiggins, 1990) In the integrated learning philosophy approach, “authentic” describes a circumstance in which information is totally integrated into the student’s scheme of understanding. For example, when students are asked to perform a task, they are aware that a specific performance is expected of them. Therefore, this task is classified as performance assessment. In contrast, assume that six months later, the students are in the nearby shopping mall and are presented with a problem. If they internalized and integrated the information from their class studies without prompting, and can apply it or perform it naturally, then it becomes “authentic” (Meyer, 1992). As long as teachers request a performance, it is difficult to consider the action “authentic” because it was prompted. It becomes authentic when the requested task is naturally and unconsciously integrated with whatever was learned previously and becomes a means to an end. The difference is quite simple. When a student naturally can take a skill to a higher, more abstract level, the authenticity is not in question. However, if a student is asked to use the skill in a classroom performance, the result may be staged and, therefore, may not be authentic.

The before, during, and after activities in *Primary Source Readers* engage learners in authentic tasks and reading strategies that they will use, not only to understand the present text, but that the learners can then be expected to integrate into future reading tasks. “Teachers can build in many opportunities to assess how students are learning and then use this information to make beneficial changes in instruction.” (Boston, 2002) In this way, the *Primary Source Readers* program is continually using authentic assessment opportunities. The teacher is monitoring the student progress and constantly making decisions about the next steps in the lesson.

There are many types of assessment. No matter what type is adopted or created, there are a few factors that should be considered. There should always be some aspect of assessment that is formative (Madaus & Kellaghan, 1993), so student achievements are recognized in a way that enables the teacher to plan the next lesson.

Within each *Primary Source Readers* lesson, the teacher has before, during, and after reading activities that allow the teacher to gauge student understanding, monitor the pacing of the lesson and content, and make the adjustments necessary to meet student needs in comprehending the material. “When teachers know how students are progressing and where they are having trouble, they can use this information to make necessary instructional approaches, or offering more opportunities for practice. These activities can lead to improved students success.” (Boston, 2002)

Assessment should also be diagnostic. Therefore, if weaknesses are found, the student can receive extra help. The assessments need to be systematic, so performance records can guide overall student growth and serve as a mechanism for comparative analysis among other students. Assessment should be evaluative, so principals or outside experts can assess the school.



In the *Primary Source Readers* lessons, there is a quiz provided for each reader. The quiz helps the teacher evaluate how well the students are learning the information and using the reading strategies. The quizzes can also be used by students as a way to prepare and study for end of unit assessments provided in the program. There are multiple choice questions and short answer responses. Additionally, there is a document based final exam in the teacher guide, as well as a culminating activity for the completion of the readers program. These assessments in the program allow for the student to be able to demonstrate what they recall. In terms of formative assessment described above and this more traditional route of assessment, it is not an “either-or” situation; rather there is good worth in an array of assessment tools in order to show the whole picture of what the student knows and is able to do. (Wiggins, 1990)

### **Conclusion**

Some of the goals of the *Primary Source Readers* supplementary program are to help students develop into proficient readers, develop skills and strategies to process information, and cultivate students who are able to use appropriate nonfiction material to access and understand information. The program is based on the concept that carefully selected authentic, nonfiction reading texts, which are already adapted into appropriate reading levels can help teachers to teach students multiple skills for understanding, remembering, and communicating with others about what has been read.

The theories and strategies on which *Primary Source Readers* are based demonstrate that the curriculum series is a sound supplement to a core social studies program. In conclusion, *Primary Source Readers* is a supplemental program with leveled nonfiction books that helps students develop independent strategies for reading and learning content simultaneously. Because the program and its strategies are research-based, instructors can feel confident that they are preparing their students not only for standardized testing, but for becoming ardent readers of the nonfiction text they will encounter for years to come.

## The following references were employed in the creation of this research-based program:

- Anderson, R.C., Hiebert, E.H., Scot, J. & Wilkinson, I.A.G. (1985). *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading*. Center for the Study of Reading.
- Baker, D. W. (1989). *Neuropsychology and Appropriate Modes of Instruction*. Columbia University, NY. AAD 90-02503, 50, section 08A.
- Baum, S. (1990). *Gifted but Learning Disabled: A Puzzling Paradox*. Reston, VA: The Council for Exceptional Children. ERIC, ED 479-490.
- Boston, Carol. (2002). *The Concept of Formative Assessment*. College Park MD: ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation. ERIC Digest ED470206.
- Collins, Norma Decker. (1993). *Teaching Critical Reading through Literature*. Bloomington IN: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading English and Communication. ERIC Digest ED 363-869.
- Collins, Norma Decker. (1994). *Metacognition and Reading to Learn*. Bloomington IN: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading English and Communication. ERIC Digest ED 376-427.
- Drake, Federick D. (2002). *Teaching Historical Thinking*. ERIC Digest ED 467-383.
- Duke, Nell. (2000, April - June). *3.6 Minutes per Day: The Scarcity of Informational Texts in First Grade*. Reading Research Quarterly, v. 35, p. 202-224.
- Emig, Janet. (1977). "Writing as a Mode of Learning." *College Composition and Communication*. 28 (2), 122-128.
- Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York, NY: Basic Books Publishers, Inc.
- Gordon, Thomas. (1977). *Teacher Effective Training*. New York, NY: David McKay Company, Inc.
- Ivey, Gay & Broaddus, Karen. (2000, September). *Tailoring the Fit: Reading Instruction and Middle School Readers*. The Reading Teacher, v. 54, p. 68-78.
- Jacobs, Heidi Hayes. (1989). "The Interdisciplinary Model: A Step-By-Step Approach for Developing Integrated Units of Study." In Heidi Hayes Jacobs (ed.) *Interdisciplinary Curriculum: Design and Implementation*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Lyman, Lawrence and Harvey C. Foyle. (1988). *Cooperative Learning Strategies and Children*. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. ERIC Digest ED306003.
- Madaus, G. F. & T. Kellaghan. (1993). "The British Experience with 'Authentic' Testing." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74:6, 458-469.

Meyer, Carol A. (1992). "What's the Difference Between Authentic and Performance Assessment?" *Educational Leadership*, 49:8, 39–40.

National Council for the Social Studies. (1984). *Social Studies for Young Children*. Prepared by Elementary/ Early Childhood Education Committee. Position statement approved by NCSS Board of Directors 1984. Retrieved April 16, 2007 from:  
<http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/children/>

National Council for the Social Studies. (1994). *Interdisciplinary Learning, PreK – Grade 4*. Prepared by Consortium for Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning. Position Statement endorsed by NCSS in 1994. Retrieved April 16, 2007 from:  
<http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/interdisciplinary/>

Otten, Evelyn Holt. (1998) *Using Primary Sources in the Primary Grades*. ERIC Digest ED 419-773.

Parkes, Brenda. (Accessed August 1, 2003). *Real-world Reading and Writing: Nonfiction Opens Doors to a Life of Learning*, Creative Classroom Online, Creative Classroom Publishing, LLC, [www.creativeclassroom.org](http://www.creativeclassroom.org).

Quatroche, Diana J. (1999). *Helping the Underachiever in Reading*. Bloomington, IN: ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE on Reading English and Communication. ERIC Digest ED 434-331.

Slavin, R. (1983). *Cooperative Learning*. New York: Longman.

Stix, Andi N. (1992). *The Development and Field Testing of a Multi-Modal Method for Teaching Mathematical Concepts to Preservice Teachers by Utilizing Pictorial Journal Writing*. Ph.D. dissertation. Columbia University Teachers College. Ann Arbor, Mich: U.M.I. Dissertation Information Service, Pub. #92-18719.

Taberski, Sharon. (2001, March). Fact and Fiction Read Aloud. *Instructor*, v. 110, p.24-26, 105.

Wason-Ellam, L. (1987). *Writing as a Tool for Learning: Math Journals in Grade One*. ERIC. ED 285 194.

Wiggins, Grant. (1990). *The Case for Authentic Assessment*. Washington D.C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation: American Institutes for Research. ERIC Digest ED328611.