

INCLUSIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM: A TOOLKIT FOR SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATORS



College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



INCORPORATING INCLUSIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM: A TOOLKIT FOR SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATORS

Essential Question:

What does it mean to practice inclusivity with your students, their families, their communities, and the world to center justice?

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to INCLUSIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM: A TOOLKIT FOR SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATORS. In this interactive toolkit, you will complete activities that aim to make you a more inclusive educator. The Office of Online Programs at University of Illinois' College of Education defines Inclusion in the Classroom as “fostering an environment where every child—regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender identity, or abilities—is valued, respected, and safe. Educators foster belonging by challenging biases, helping students embrace individuality and succeed.” During the activities that follow you will reflect on your own, and your students' complex identities, learn about the The Illinois Mandated Units of Study for Social Science and how to infuse them within an inquiry-based classroom setting, and develop plans for making your curriculum more inclusive. As you move through this interactive toolkit, we encourage you to reflect deeply and honestly, making note of areas for growth along the way. Finally, we hope that you will consider using the activities and resources shared here with your students, supporting their concepts and actions related the construction of a more inclusive world.

“The way a student is treated, especially by a teacher, shapes their expectations for themselves. So making a student feel incapable or like they don't belong will reflect in their success and how they view themselves.”

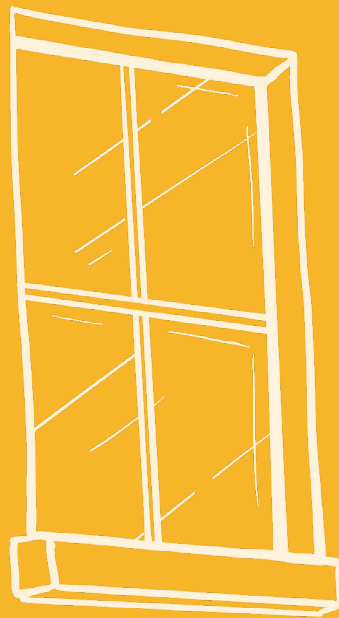
~ Ava Eames, student

LET'S START THINKING...

Before diving into this toolkit, record questions you have about inclusivity in the classroom.

SECTION 1: WHO ARE YOU? WHO ARE YOUR STUDENTS?

- Understand your intersecting identities as an educator
- Reflect on your identities and how they impact your experiences in the world
- Activities to help you identify and reflect on you students' identities, how they impact their experiences in the world, and their inclusion in the curriculum



WHO ARE YOU?

To do the pedagogical work of inclusive teaching, it is important that you reflect on who you are, your cultural identities, and how they shape the lenses in which you view the world. Now, some of you may be thinking, “Wait, but I don’t have a culture. What will I reflect on?” Contrary to popular belief, everyone has a culture. From where we grew up to the beliefs we learned from our families, we all have a culture which we interpret the world through.

According to Patricia Hill Collins, cultural identities can be broken down into categories. Her work sorts cultural identities into 3 types that are defined by the degree of which the identity carries value or privilege in society. The 3 categories are broken down below...

3 MAIN CATEGORIES OF IDENTITIES (Adapted from the [Matrix of Oppression](#))

Privileged: These identities belong to social groups that have advantages and benefits in society that are frequently denied to other groups. These advantages are often “invisible” to those whose identities fall in this category.

Ni Aquí Ni Allá (neither here nor there): These identities belong to social groups that can be privileged or targeted depending on the social, political, and economic context. For example, someone who identifies as middle class may be able to consistently meet their basic needs, but they also may be severely impacted in moments of economic downturn.

Targeted: These identities belong to social groups that are often denied the same advantages and benefits in society as those in the privileged category. Identities in this category are frequently marginalized in society.

Let’s put this newfound knowledge into practice!

ACTIVITY 1

For your first activity, you are going to build your own identity table! The goal of this activity is for you to better understand the facets of your identity and how they impact your life. Start by skimming the information contained in the links attached to each identity category title on the following page. Then, decide how you believe you fit into that identity group and write it in the corresponding box under “Identity Type”. Then, in the second column, consider the three subsets of identity we discussed earlier and write the one you believe your identity fits into. Finally, take a moment to think deeply about how that certain identity has an impact on your daily life, relationships, experiences, and opportunities; list those reflections in the third column. Repeat this process for each identity. For the last row of the table, as an EXTRA challenge, consider another identity group you believe is an important part of who you are, and follow these same steps for that identity. By the end, you should have an AMAZING chart that displays every aspect of who you are!

UNCOVER YOUR IDENTITIES

Identity Type	Privileged, Targeted, or Ni Aquí Ni Allá	How does this identity affect your life? (Privileges, Disadvantages, Discrimination, etc.)
<u>Racial:</u>		
<u>Ability:</u>		
<u>Gender:</u>		
<u>Age:</u>		
<u>Sexual Orientation:</u>		
<u>Religion:</u>		
_____:		

Reflection

Now that you have identified who you are and how your identities carry power and privilege, let's take a moment to reflect on ACTIVITY 1 with the following questions.

1. How do your listed identities interact with one another?

2. Now, take a second and imagine your life without the advantages/disadvantages that you wrote down in the chart. How would that change your human experience?

This activity is not only important in your role as an educator, and in your daily life! It's important to be conscious of your identities and the privileges you encounter on a daily basis. The first step to being an inclusive educator is to remain conscious of how you enforce and represent your privilege in the classroom.

So, next time you get in front of your class or talk with a student, take a second to think:

How might this moment be impacted by societal power structures and my own identities or privileges?

WHO ARE YOUR STUDENTS?

As important as it is to have a good understanding of your own identities and privileges when working with students, it is arguably more important to have a high understanding of the identities and privileges of your students.

When considering how your identities impact your classroom interaction, you must also consider the identities of your students. For example, how could an activity feel insensitive to a student with different identities? How could your perspective misalign with those of your students? Is your content or instruction biased by an identity of power that could offend or misrepresent your students?

Being conscious of these questions and thoughts will help ensure that your students feel well-represented, valued, and engaged in the classroom.

LET'S APPLY THIS TO YOUR STUDENTS AND YOUR CLASSROOM!

ACTIVITY 2

For this activity, let's take a deeper look into the identities of your students since it's so important to building an inclusive classroom. To do this, you are going to repeat the process of Activity 1; however this time, it won't be YOU completing the chart, it will be YOUR students! Use the Printable Student Copy of the chart from ACTIVITY 1 (found on the next page) and ask each of your students to complete their very own chart. This will allow your students to have a space where they can openly communicate their identities and better understand how they shape their life. Afterwards, collect their charts and examine what your students have to say about themselves. The goal of this activity is to help your students better understand their own identities, help you understand and consider their perspectives, and start a positive conversation in your classroom focused on understanding one another and the different life experiences we may have.

UNCOVER YOUR IDENTITIES

For this activity, you are going to build your own identity table! In the chart below, start by reading some information in the links attached to each identity category title. Then, decide how you believe YOU fit into that identity group and write it in the corresponding box under "Identity Type". Then in the second column, write where you think your identity fits on a scale from privileged to targeted. Finally, take a moment to think deeply about how that certain identity has an impact on your daily life, relationships, experiences, and opportunities; list those reflections in the third column. Then, repeat this process for each identity listed in the first column. At the end, you should have an AMAZING chart that reflects the many intersections of your identity.

Identity Type	Privileged, Targeted, or Ni Aquí Ni Allá	How does this identity affect your life? (Privileges, Disadvantages, Discrimination, etc.)
Racial:		
Ability:		
Gender:		
Age:		
Sexual Orientation:		
Religion:		

i am...

Know self

my intersections 8

LET'S REFLECT ON THE ACTIVITY AND YOUR STUDENTS!

1. Write about the responses of your students! What were some of their responses? Did any of them surprise you? How did the responses of your students differ from your responses? ETC.

2. How could what your students wrote about have an impact on their experiences in your classroom?

3. How did the students react to this activity? Did they seem excited to be involved and tell you about themselves? Were all of the students able to feel included?

4. How can having a greater awareness of these identities help you build solidarity with your students and foster inclusivity within the classroom?

SECTION 2: THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF INCLUSIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

- Recognize the importance of making students feel positively represented in the classroom
- Understand the scale of inclusion integration in the classroom (shallow to deep)
- Identify potential mistakes in your educational past and investigate ways to fix them in the future



PRACTICING INCLUSIVITY

At this point in the workbook, you have reflected on your identities, learned about the identities of your students directly from the source, and hopefully better understand why considering these identities is so important.

You might be thinking... so, now what? **It is time to start using what you're learning to foster inclusivity in the classroom!** But what does that mean? We're glad you asked!

Inclusivity is the practice of actively including and valuing individuals/groups from diverse backgrounds in all aspects of society. It is done with the purpose of fostering a sense of belonging and participation. It's important to realize that there are a few things to consider when striving to be inclusive, especially as an educator. The goal of this part of the module is to walk you through some of these considerations.

Let's start by listening to some real students share how the inclusivity strategies in their classroom have changed their experiences! Watch this [**Social Studies Network Video: When Students Feel Seen and Affirmed in School**](#) that highlights the personal perspectives of Illinois students' on the extent to which they feel represented and valued by teachers in their classrooms.



You are probably wondering now, okay, **where do I begin?** Great question! The [**Illinois Inclusive Calendar**](#) is a great starting point for those seeking to learn more about the various people, places, and notable events that may be significant to their students and their respective cultures.

ACTIVITY 3

For this task, choose one upcoming event noted on the Illinois Inclusive Calendar and consider how you might go deeper with it in your classroom. In the following text box, consider 5-10 ways you could incorporate this holiday/culture into your classroom. This could be through a combination of pedagogical, curricular, and spatial (the classroom, energy, etc.) ideas. Be creative!

Let's now consider the possible negative ways that inclusivity can be incorporated in the classroom.

As important as it is to be culturally inclusive in your classroom, you must think critically about the ways in which you are doing so. Consider the video from earlier in this section. As the students explained, just because a culture is discussed in the classroom doesn't mean that it is a positive representation that allows students to feel seen. At times, a shallow depiction of a culture can make students feel more exiled or stereotyped. Read [Let's Move Beyond the Five "F's" of Culture](#) to get a better understanding of shallow versus deep inclusion of culture. It's extremely valuable to obtain a deep understanding of a group in order to represent a culture in an honest way that students can connect to.

As important as it is to include cultures into your classroom, simulations may also be inappropriate or harmful to students. Hasan Kwame Jeffries said it best in an episode of "The Cult of Pedagogy" podcast when he said that "*Simulations can be productive tools for teaching certain things... They're terrible for teaching trauma. You can't re-create the trauma. And if you could, why would you want to recreate the trauma to teach about it?*"

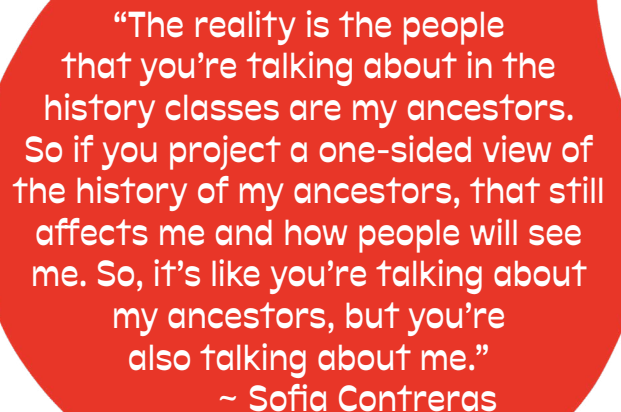
Now that you have learned more about shallow cultural inclusion and the Five F's, we recommend that you apply your newfound knowledge to your responses to the previous activity. After review, think about whether or not there are elements to the ideas that could be considered surface level or offensive. Regardless, write down any new deep classroom ideas or changes you may have in mind. Moving forward with the toolkit, take a second to be conscious of whether or not your ideas could actually be DON'TS in an inclusive classroom.

It is important to understand that there are many ways of teaching inclusively in a classroom that are positive! To honor the identities and cultures of your students, you must understand and teach with a deep understanding of the culture. One helpful strategy to use when trying to teach culture in a deeper context is to remember the acronym P.C.S. which stands for Pedagogy, Curriculum, and Space. These are explained more thoroughly below...

Pedagogy: As an instructor, you can incorporate inclusion in the pedagogy by making your classroom more student-led, valuing diversity in your content, promoting classroom equity, and giving your students individualized attention.

Curriculum: Consider how the content you are teaching to your students is both representative of diverse cultural backgrounds and relevant to their experience.

Space: Think about how your classroom environment can help foster positive relationships between students, create a safe place for them to express themselves, and be representative of all students.



"The reality is the people that you're talking about in the history classes are my ancestors. So if you project a one-sided view of the history of my ancestors, that still affects me and how people will see me. So, it's like you're talking about my ancestors, but you're also talking about me."
~ Sofia Contreras

ACTIVITY 4

Think back to a lesson that you have taught as an educator or were taught in the past as a student. With your new perspective on inclusive education, what are some things that you could change about the activity in the future to be more inclusive and conscious of your students' experiences and cultures while avoiding the five F's? Consider this by building the start of a lesson using the P.C.S. strategy in the chart below.

PEDAGOGY

CURRICULUM

SPACE

SECTION 3: INVESTIGATE THE ILLINOIS MANDATED UNITS OF STUDY FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE AND CURRICULUM

- Critically understand The Illinois Mandated Units of Study for Social Science
- Reflect on your current level of mandated inclusion in class instruction



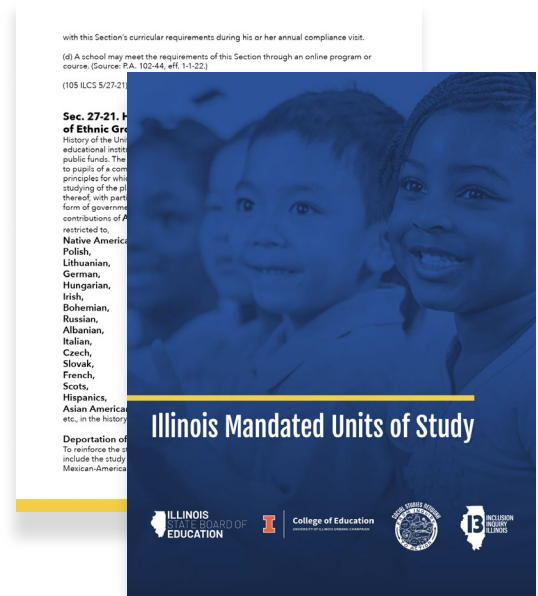
ENSURING INCLUSIVITY

At this point in the workbook, you have been able to reflect on your own identities, your students' identities, and some of the considerations that are important to consider in ensuring your classroom is truly inclusive.

Now, let's look into how these strategies can be implemented in accordance with the Illinois Mandated Units of Study for Social Science! We invite you to read through and acquaint yourself with these mandates while considering their significance in the creation of more inclusive learning spaces.

[The Illinois Mandated Units of Study for Social Science](#)

As explained by the Illinois State Board of Education, these mandates “are designed to ensure that students across Illinois focus on a common set of standards that promote the development of the knowledge and skills necessary for success in college, career, and civic life in the 21st century. The vision supporting this design is to produce Illinois graduates who are civically engaged, socially responsible, culturally aware, and financially literate.” The inclusion of these curricular expectations is not only a required piece of every Illinois classroom, it is vital to the development of culturally responsible students.



ACTIVITY 5

For this activity, evaluate your current inclusion of these mandates and consider some ways to improve. Read about each of the mandates in the link above and indicate on the checklist on the following page whether or not you are adequately teaching this mandate in your classroom. In the third column, write about the extent to which you include the information at a deep level in your classroom and/or how your instruction could improve.

*Have the [The Illinois Mandated Units of Study for Social Science](#) open so you can read the specificities included in each individual mandate as you reflect.

MANDATED UNIT OF STUDY CHECKLIST

Mandate	Are you meeting this mandate?	If yes, how are you meeting this mandate well? If not, how can you improve your instruction to meet this mandate?
Sec. 27 20. American Indian Day	YES NO	
Sec. 27 20.05 Native American History Study	YES NO	
Sec. 27 20.3. Holocaust and Genocide Study	YES NO	
Sec. 27 20.4 Black History Study	YES NO	
Sec. 27.20.5 Study of the History of Women	YES NO	
Sec. 27-20.6 "Irish Famine" Study	YES NO	
Sec. 27-20.8. Asian American History Study	YES NO	
Sec. 27 21. History of United States Roles and Contributions of Ethnic Groups	YES NO	
Sec. 27 21. (cont.) Deportation of Mexican American Citizens	YES NO	
Sec. 27 21. (cont.) Roles and Contributions of LGBT People	YES NO	
Sec. 27 21. (cont.) Role of Labor Unions	YES NO	
Sec. 27 21. (cont.) Americans of Different Faith Practices	YES NO	
Sec. 27-23.8. Disability History and Awareness	YES NO	
Study of the Process of Naturalization	YES NO	
Sec. 27-19. Leif Erickson Day	YES NO	
Sec. 27 20.1. Illinois Law Week	YES NO	

Reflection

To think even deeper about the integration of the Illinois Mandated Units of Social Science in the classroom, answer the following reflective questions.

1. How do the mandates help teachers and students to interrogate societal power structures, investigate the world, and evaluate systems of inequity?

2. How can you use these mandates to better meet the needs and interests of your students and create a more inclusive classroom?

3. What types of support do you think are needed to incorporate these mandates?

SECTION 5: INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING

- Understand the concepts and importance of Inquiry-Based Learning strategies
- Consider how lessons used in the classroom can be adapted to better suit Inquiry-Based strategies
- Update instruction to adequately address Mandates



LINKING INCLUSION TO INQUIRY

Now that you understand the background of the Illinois Mandated Units of Study, let's begin to consider how you implement them in a more inquiry-based way. In this section, you will learn more about inquiry-based learning to examine how useful inquiry can be to foster inclusion and build solidarity with students.

- Watch this [SSN Video: What's an inclusive and inquiry-based social studies curriculum?](#) to create a baseline understanding of Inquiry-Based Learning.
- Read the article [Making Inquiry Critical: Examining Power and Inequity in the Classroom](#) by Ryan M. Crowley and LaGarrett J. King about being purposeful when developing critical inquiry and connecting it to social justice.
- Here's another resource that simplifies this concept into visual [Inquiry Skills Posters](#). These will be helpful to show your students or display in your classroom in order to help build their understanding about this style of learning.

The goal of Inquiry-Based Learning is to support students' inquiry in the classroom. This can be done by using the purposefully vague standards (e.g., historical events) to inspire compelling questions, research of new sources, critical analyses, and student action. Inquiry is broken up into the four core areas as defined on the right...

The Illinois Learning Standards for Social Science Inquiry Skills (which complement the Illinois Learning Standards for Social Science Disciplinary Skills) are composed of four core areas:

1. recognizing perspective and articulating identities,
2. developing questions and planning inquiries,
3. evaluating sources and using evidence, and

ACTIVITY 6

In the final activity in this toolkit, let's put together everything you've learned. First things first, take a look at your checklist from Activity 5 and have it at the ready! Next, put this reflection into action by considering how Inquiry can be better implemented in the classroom. For each mandate, write an example of an instructional activity that you have either used in the classroom or could use in the future in the center column. This could be a specific lesson, unit outline, in-class activity, etc. When choosing your activity, consider how Inquiry-Based strategies would be utilized throughout. In the last column (area of inquiry) identify the relevant area(s) of inquiry that this lesson engages in.

Remember, to consider everything you've learned during your planning process...

- How your own and your students' identities make each of (y)our perspectives unique
- The level at which you incorporate inclusion be it shallow (Five F's, Simulations) or deep (P.C.S.)
- The Illinois Mandated Units of Study
- The four core areas of and impacts of Inquiry-Based learning

INCLUSION THROUGH INQUIRY CHECKLIST

Mandate	Instructional Activity	Area of Inquiry
Sec. 27 20. American Indian Day		
Sec. 27 20.05 Native American History Study		
Sec. 27 20.3. Holocaust and Genocide Study		
Sec. 27 20.4 Black History Study		
Sec. 27.20.5 Study of the History of Women		
Sec. 27-20.6 "Irish Famine" Study		
Sec. 27 20.8. Asian American History Study		
Sec. 27 21. History of United States Roles and Contributions of Ethnic Groups		

INCLUSION THROUGH INQUIRY CHECKLIST (CONTINUED)

Mandate	Instructional Activity	Area of Inquiry
Sec. 27 21. (cont.) Deportation of Mexican American Citizens		
Sec. 27 21. (cont.) Roles and Contributions of LGBT People		
Sec. 27 21. (cont.) Role of Labor Unions		
Sec. 27 21. (cont.) Americans of Different Faith Practices		
Sec. 27 23.8. Disability History and Awareness		
Study of the Process of Naturalization		
Sec. 27-19. Leif Erickson Day		
Sec. 27 20.1. Illinois Law Week		

CONCLUSION

You are SO CLOSE to the completion of the workbook... BUT, before you're done, it's important that you consider how you can use the lessons you have learned in this toolkit to set future goals and principles for yourself when it comes to inclusionary instruction.



In the box below, reflect on the kind of instructor you want to be moving forward. This could mean...

- **The goals you now have as an inclusive educator**
- **The principles you will now be conscious of and hold yourself accountable for**
- **Your pedagogical intentions moving forward in the classroom and how they may or may not have changed.**

MY INCLUSIVE GOALS, PRINCIPLES, AND PEDAGOGICAL INTENTIONS:

CONGRATULATIONS!

You have completed...

INCORPORATING INCLUSIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM: A TOOLKIT FOR SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATORS

You have taken great moves toward becoming a more inclusive educator and prioritizing solidarity with your students.

Here are some other resources that are accessible to help you along your journey of becoming a more inclusive teacher and creating a classroom environment built on the concepts of solidarity...

[The Illinois Mandated Units of Study for Social Science](#)

[Illinois Learning Standards for Social Science](#)

[I3 Annual Planning Template](#)

[I3 Unit Planning Template](#)

[I3 Lesson Planning Template](#)

[SSN Resource Evaluation Toolkit](#)

[National Council for the Social Studies](#)

[Nine Powerful Ways to Promote Inclusion in the Classroom](#)

[IPA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resources](#)

[Education for Liberation Network](#)

Toolkit Resources:

[Think Twice Before Doing Another Historical Simulation, Cult of Pedagogy Podcast](#)

[Matrix of Oppression](#)

[SSN Video: When Students Feel Seen and Affirmed in School](#)

[Let's Move Beyond the Five "F's of Culture](#)

[Inquiry Skills Posters](#)

[Illinois Inclusive Calendar](#)

[SSN Video: What's an inclusive and inquiry-based social studies curriculum?](#)

[Making Inquiry Critical: Examining Power and Inequity in the Classroom](#)

Take a look at some of the **Social Studies Network's other Toolkits:**

[Action Plan Toolkit](#)

[Inquiry With and In Community](#)

[Towards Inquiry & Inclusion in Social Studies](#)

[Critical Civics Toolkit](#)



At SSN, we believe that all students deserve inquiry-based and justice-centered learning experiences and want to support teachers in creating those contexts of exploration and action. To meet these goals, we conduct research, offer professional learning experiences, and share resources including the one you are reading right now! Take a look at the links below to see some of the other amazing resources we offer!

SOCIAL STUDIES NETWORK

[WEBSITE](#)

[YOUTUBE](#)

[SPOTIFY](#)

[TIKTOK](#)

[APPLE PODCAST](#)

This guide was created by Emma Greenberg, Jennie Garcia, Chantelle Grace, and Asif Wilson, as part of **I3: Inclusive, Inquiry-based Social Science for Illinois** professional learning series.

Suggested citation:

Greenberg, E., Garcia, J., Grace, C., & Wilson, A. (2025). Incorporating Inclusivity in the Classroom: A Toolkit for Social Studies Educators. *Social Studies Network*. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. <https://socialstudies.education.illinois.edu/>