Exploring Social Studies through Children’s Books

Children’s books offer an excellent way for teachers and children to explore the many themes of social studies. Through books children can learn about their own culture and family, cultures around the world, geography, history, community, and more. The following titles represent just a small selection of books touching on these themes.


This version of the Cinderella story is set in Mexico. (Folktales)


In this shortened version of Taylor’s poem “The Baby Dance,” the text is accompanied by pictures of a father dancing lovingly with his baby girl while Mom rests on the couch. (Families)


An adaptation of a Zambian tale, this is a good starting point for discussions about difference, individuality, and community. (Folktales, Community)


The retelling of a Comanche legend has beautiful illustrations that bring the story to life. (Folktales)


The simple story of how a house is built might encourage some interesting block building. (Shelter, How the world works)


The many homes and habitats of creatures big and small are featured in this beautifully illustrated book. (Shelter, Community)

Ling Sung discovers that others at his new school admire his prowess with chopsticks. (Understanding self and others)


This modern immigrant story is illustrated with photos of an Egyptian family now living in Queens, New York. (Immigration)


Through photos and text, children are introduced to water gathering and use around the world. (Ecology, How the world works)


Readers listen to the sounds of the country through the ears of Muffin the dog. (Also recommended, *The Noisy Book* and *The City Noisy Book*) (The world around us)


This story is a warm celebration of family life with two working parents. (Family)


Readers join Carrie on her visits to her diverse neighbors, sampling breads from around the world (recipes included). (Cultures, Community)


Children can experience a close-up look at different kinds of work, including professions that fascinate children, like firefighter, and some behind-the-scenes jobs. (Community, Jobs)


The Wright brother’s flight at Kitty Hawk in 1903 is seen through the eyes of a child. (History, Aviation)


History comes alive through a focus on the first president’s teeth, presented in rhyming verse. (History)


This account introduces young readers to the difficulties and wonders that were part of the Lewis and Clark expedition. (History, Geography)
Beyond the Journal • Young Children on the Web • September 2005


This simple picture book depicts the many different kinds of boats found in a busy working harbor. (How the world works)


Here is a retelling of the African folktale made familiar to children around the world by the classic children’s book *Caps for Sale*. (Folktale, Cultures)


A young girl plays hide-and-seek on the Arctic tundra with a mythic creature called an ijirac in this wonderful introduction to the landscape and folktales of the Arctic cultures. (Folktales, Cultures)


Hoban introduces familiar signs found in all communities. (How the world works, Community)


Jackson presents the first day of school from a child's point of view in 11 countries and includes a world map and fact pages. (Geography, Cultures)


In this charming story Peter wants to invite Amy to his birthday party, but he wants it to be a surprise. (Understanding self and others)


Burton's classic story about a little house in a country setting that changes from rural to urban continues to be a favorite. (The world around us)


Illustrated with photographs, this simple book looks at many different kinds of grandparents. (Family, Community)


A young boy looking for a father finds a special companion in his neighborhood. (Understanding self and others)


Young builders and diggers will like seeing the many trucks and workers in a construction crew at a building site. (Machines/tools)


Two best friends have a fight and then make up in this familiar story. (Understanding self and others)

In this Liberian folktale a crocodile captures Mrs. Chicken, who concocts a clever plan so that the crocodile won’t eat her. (Folktales)


Two best friends with quite different skill levels discover how their strengths complement one another. (Understanding self and others)


After caring for an abandoned horse, a young Pawnee boy is rewarded through the horse’s mystic powers. (Folktales, Cultures)


This picture atlas, designed especially for preschoolers to first-graders, introduces maps and more. (Geography)


Martin’s simple rhyming book (one of a series) has colorful illustrations that tell the story of endangered animals. (Environment)


The topic of divorce is explored as a young boy visits his father at his new home after his parents’ separation and they spend a rainy day together. (Family, Community)


Gibbons explains the recycling process from start to finish and hopefully inspires children to recycle too. (Recycling, Environment)


A bunny and her family recycle many household items throughout the week. (Recycling, Community)


With simple text and colorful pictures, readers follow a package through the postal system from sender to recipient. (Community, How the world works)


Kirk tells the story of the Mohawk steelworkers who built the frames of the new skyscrapers in the early 1930s. (History, Cities, Cultures)


This simple counting book begins when lightening strikes a tree, and then it follows the smokejumpers on their forest firefighting routine. (Community helpers, How the world works)

Children will learn the history of the American flag, from the revolutionary period to current times. (History)


An African American boy spends a busy summer day helping his family on their Texas farm in the 1950s. (Culture, History, Social relationships)


The grocery store is the topic of this book—what goes on behind the scenes, interesting facts, how supermarkets work. (How the world works)


A historic 1958 photograph of jazz musicians inspired this story of a boy’s search through his neighborhood for the missing hat of his uncle, a well-known jazz musician. (History, Cultures)


Mama’s told her daughter about her childhood so often that at bedtime the child can relate the stories herself. (Understanding self and others)


Tools from all over the world and the people who use them are presented through photos and text. (How the world works, Cultures)


A shoebox helps Louie to remember the old times before he moves away and then helps him to make friends in his new neighborhood. (Understanding self and others)


This wordless book follows a red truck on its cross-country journey. (Transportation, How the world works)


A sparrow, a lamb, and a deer outsmart Sigma the lion in this India folktale, with illustrations reflecting the Warli tradition of painting. (Folktale)


Grandma tells about her mama’s journey to America by boat. (Immigration)


A young boy wants very much to learn to whistle. (Understanding self and others)