

# *ELLs and Social Studies*

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*For General Information about ELLs, please see Section entitled "Overview of English Language learners (ELLs)".*

## ELLs and Social Studies

*If you think of yourself as a social studies teacher, keep in mind that when you have one or more ELL students in a class, you also become an English language teacher.*

Meeting the needs of today's heterogeneous student bodies is challenging, particularly when it comes to social studies, which requires proficiency in English and knowledge of American culture to facilitate new learning. Since Social Studies is a national-focused subject, students everywhere learn about people, places, and events from a nation-centered viewpoint. This means that ELLs in particular are at a disadvantage because of several factors:

- ***Limited Background Knowledge of the U.S.*** ELLs are at a disadvantage because the traditional way students learn social studies may be blocked by cultural obstacles and prior educational models. Concepts that a U.S. born student knows through enculturation may be completely foreign to the ELL.
- ***Cultural differences*** preclude ELLs from asking questions of the teacher or even making eye contact in some societies. Also, in certain Asian cultures the primary method of learning is through rote memorization. Therefore, when these students are put into cooperative groups this is usually considered non-academic and a waste of time. In addition, in some immigrant cultures sharing work and helping classmates is thought of as an important part of learning; yet when students from these cultures share their work during a test this is viewed as cheating.
- ***Difficulty learning from textbooks.*** In social studies texts, facts and details are often condensed and authors often omit the type of concrete or anecdotal detail that can help ELLs relate to unfamiliar concepts from their own experiences. Textbooks often contain a high concentration of new vocabulary or sophisticated sentence structure.
- ***Difficulty learning from lectures.*** Some ELLs find it difficult to understand different teachers' accents and pronunciations. Others may have lived in the U.S. too short a time to have developed sufficient listening skills. Words, like people, play various roles depending on the context. Moving a word from the vernacular to the academic style is tricky.

Source:

Jodi Reiss. *Teaching Content to English Language Learners: Strategies for Secondary School Success*, Longman, 2005.

## Examples of Language Difficulties

Vocabulary terms that wear “two hats” (polysemous)

Vocabulary	Meaning in Everyday Life	Meaning in Social Studies
party	a social gathering	group of persons with common political interests
lobby	an entrance hall	political unit/pressure group
house	a building where people live	bicameral legislative body
front	foremost part of any surface	foremost line or part of an army or line of battle
sphere	global mass (Math); planet or star (Astronomy)	geographical area or field of influence.
period	full pause or stop usually at the end of a sentence (English)	a large section or division of time.

In the English language some words function as different parts of speech and can be confusing to ELLs.

**Examples:**

*The Democratic party held a party for the winners.*

*The western front saw more action than the eastern front during the onset of the war.*

*It was a period of change, of revolution, of political and social unrest.*

### Reading, Structure, and Concepts

For the ELL student there are the additional problems of reading and understanding the language of primary sources such as historical documents, letters, diaries, political cartoons, maps, and photographs. Social Studies texts contain complex sentences, use of the passive voice, and extensive use of pronouns. Many ELLs lack familiarity with historical terms, government processes, and vocabulary. Concepts not common to all cultures are difficult; this includes *privacy*, *democratic procedures*, *rights of citizens*, *free will*, and *movement within the structure* of a society. In U.S. schools we use a timeline teaching approach vs. learning history by “dynasty” or period. There are also issues of a nationalistic and cultural focus concerning the study of maps. Furthermore, some ELL students may not be used to expressing their personal

opinions in class or contributing an alternate view that reflects conditions in their or other countries. Finally, the amount of information covered in social studies classes challenges the ELLs' inability, at least initially, to discern what is important in the text and what is not.

<b>Sophisticated Sentence Structure/Vocabulary</b>
<i>The two chamber design (Congress) is based on the central principle of American government that government must be divided into units that share power to provide a system of checks and balances against potential abuses of power.</i>
<i>The difference between perfect competition and monopolistic competition arises because monopolistically competitive firms sell goods that are similar enough to be substitute for one another but are not identical.</i>
<b>Unfamiliar Concept</b>
<i>Colonists in favor of independence began using propoganda to gather support for their cause.</i>

## Text Analysis

The written language of content instruction in Social Studies is clearly very difficult for ELLs. The following website offers valuable and easy strategies on teacher preparation for:

- Building Background Knowledge
- Pre- teaching Vocabulary and concepts
- Pre-reading strategies to increase comprehension, introducing the text, reading the text
- Speaking: Production of Oral Academic English
- Writing: Production of Written Academic English.

[http://www.doe.in.gov/lmmp/pdf/content\\_area\\_texts.pdf](http://www.doe.in.gov/lmmp/pdf/content_area_texts.pdf)

## Strategies for Teaching Content and Language

English-Language Learners is enhanced by activating their prior knowledge, using graphic organizers, examining word roots, and through oral practice and vocabulary. Use this website for additional help.

<http://www.adlit.org/article/14342>

### STRATEGY: T-NOTES

#### Description

T-notes are a simplified form of an outline. Readers grasp concepts by mentally organizing them. ELLs, in particular, will find a text easier to read and learn if they have an overview of concepts before reading the chapter.

#### Procedure

1. In T-Notes, the left column represents a main idea. Have students write the main idea here.
2. The right column shows supporting details and/or examples. Have students write supporting information here.

Always model a new strategy. Offer extra credit to students who are willing to make an outline or T-note of the chapter. The T-Note format is flexible and adapts easily to all subjects. T-Notes are useful in other ways as well. They are a good way to develop note-taking skills. Give students an in-class or home assignment of completing the Details/Examples column. Students who have a low-level of note-taking skills will benefit from seeing one or two items included in the Details/Examples column as a model of what to do.

#### Application of Strategy

T-Notes are a simplified version of an outline and helps readers grasp concepts by mentally organizing them.



	of grass would grow.
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Source:

Jodi Reiss. *Teaching Content to English Language Learners: Strategies for Secondary School Success*, Longman, 2005.

## STRATEGY: ANALOGIES

### Description

This activity is used to foster critical thinking and reinforcement of key vocabulary through the comparison of relationships in two pairs of words.

### Procedure

1. Choose a chapter of a social studies text that you are using with your class.
2. Examine the chapter to determine which terms need emphasis in support of learning outcomes. (Some of the words can be introduced *before* reading, as others are emphasized *during* reading.)
3. List the main ideas and new vocabulary.
4. Create pairs and relationships between the terms and ideas. (This activity comes *after* reading and helps learners get at the deeper dimensions of the connections among concepts as students problem solve to determine relationships.)

Common types of relationships include the following which may serve as a model when creating the analogies. This activity can be completed by students individually or cooperatively. If students work in groups, they receive the added reinforcement of hearing the words, saying the words, and reading the words.

1. *Part to Whole*  
*representative is to House of Representatives, as senator is to Senate*
2. *Cause and Effect*  
*prosperity is to peace as poverty is to revolution*
3. *Person to Situation*  
*King George III is to monarchy as Andrew Jackson is to democracy*

## Application of Strategy

Directions: Determine the relationship between the first pair of words, and then circle the letter of the word that similarly relates to the second pair of words. These words are taken from Chapter 14 of the textbook: *American Government, Freedom, Rights, Responsibilities*. You may refer to the book if necessary.

### Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens

1. FEDERALIST is to REPUBLICAN as ANTIFEDRALIST is to:  
a) Congress b) Libertarian c) American Independent d) Democrat
2. EATING is to DINING ROOM as VOTING is to:  
a) platform b) Republicans c) Democrats d) polling place
3. RACE is to RUNNER as ELECTION is to:  
a) voter b) platform c) candidate d) government
4. BOOK is to WRITER as CONSTITUTION is to:  
a) framers b) voters c) political parties d) citizens
5. GAMES are to BASEBALL as ELECTIONS are to:  
a) Constitution b) political parties c) United States d) July 4, 1776

*50 Literacy Strategies for Beginning Teachers, 1-8* Terry Norton and Betty Lou Jackson Land, Copyright © 2008. Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall

### STRATEGY: CHAINING

#### Description

Chaining provides a graphic representation to students to aid them in understanding chronological sequence or in comprehending how one cause may lead to one effect, which may then become a cause leading to another effect or a problem and solution representation

#### Procedure

1. The teacher uses a template of the CHAINING strategy on an overhead projector or may write it on poster paper or the blackboard.
2. The teacher and students share an event that has sequential or chronological order, cause and effect relationships, or both.
3. The teacher and students, as a class, discuss the meanings of cause and effect or chronological order before reading.

- The teacher models an example and writes the answer in the appropriate box. (A concept bank provides additional scaffolding if needed.)

### Application of Strategy

This strategy helps students understand a chronological sequence, a cause and effect series, or a problem-solution pattern of organization from a narrative or expository passage.

TITLE:

Cause -Problem - Event

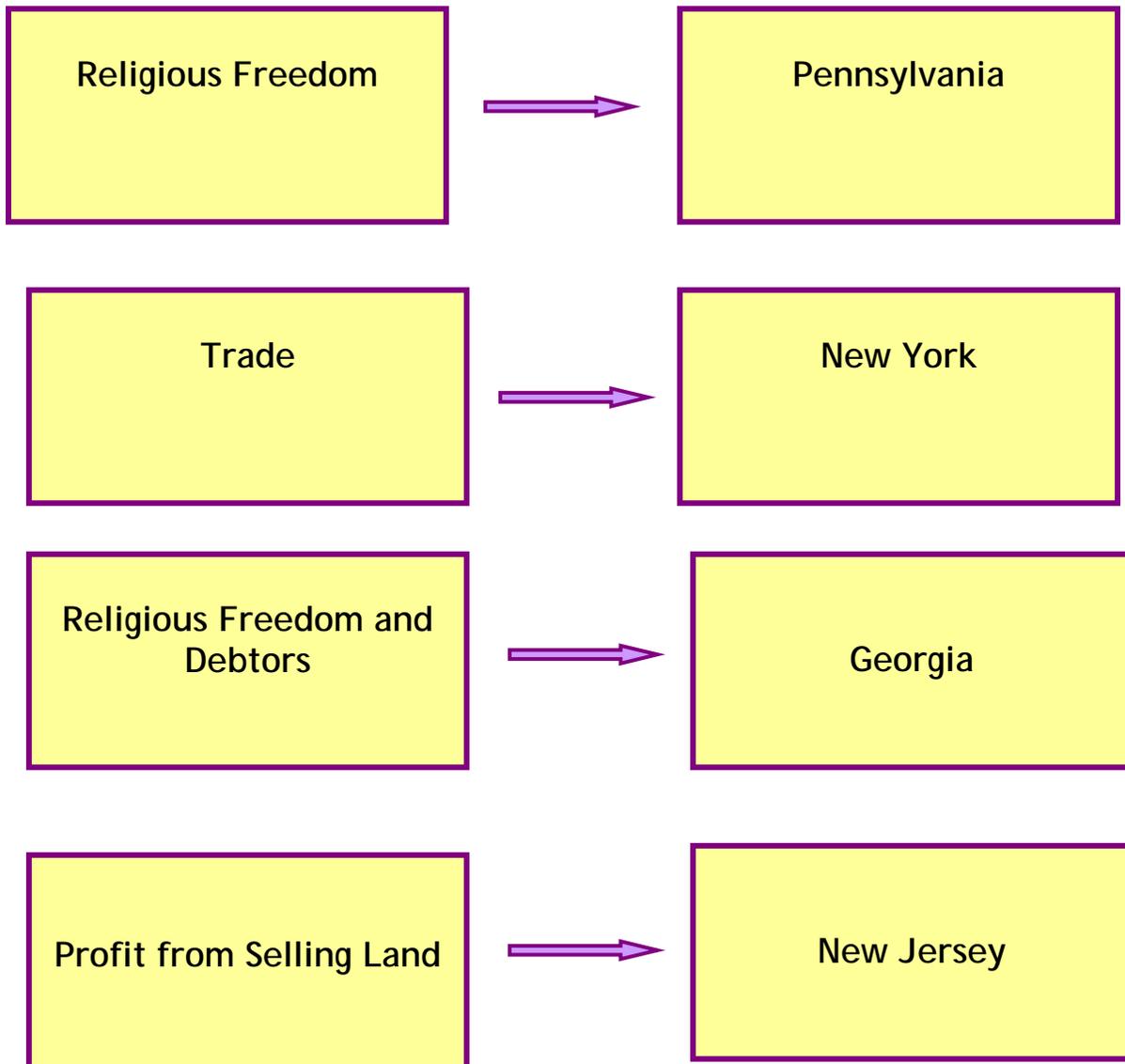
Effect -Solution- Outcome



Source:

*50 Literacy Strategies for Beginning Teachers, 1-8* Terry Norton and Betty Lou Jackson Land, Copyright © 200 . Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall

### Reasons for the Creation of the 13 Original Colonies



STRATEGY: CONCEPT CIRCLES

Description

Concept circles are circles with words or phrases placed in sections of the circle and can be used in a variety of ways. You would use this instructional tool when you would like students to participate in concept thinking about content vocabulary. Concept circles can be used to help students' discussions, to review word meanings and word families, and to provide support for students' writing.

### Procedure

Here are examples of four different uses for this strategy:

1. Have students put words or phrase in each section of the circle and ask them to write about the connections they see between the words and phrases. *Why are these words in a Concept Circle together?*
2. Put vocabulary words in three of the sections of the circle. Students add a word in the fourth section and then write about why they chose that word to add and how the words in the circle form a concept.
3. Ask students to choose four vocabulary words from their study of a topic or a text and use those four words to write about what they have learned about the topic. These can be teacher or student generated lists of words.
4. Ask students to shade either the words that go together or the words that don't fit with the others. Students can then talk or write about what attributes caused a word to be included or excluded.

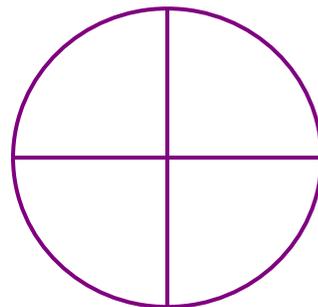
### Application of Strategy

Students use the four words in each quadrant to write about the chosen topic.

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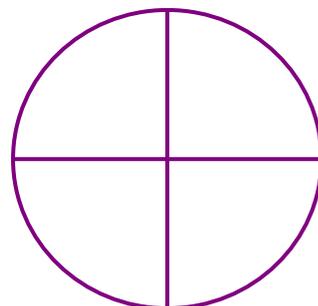
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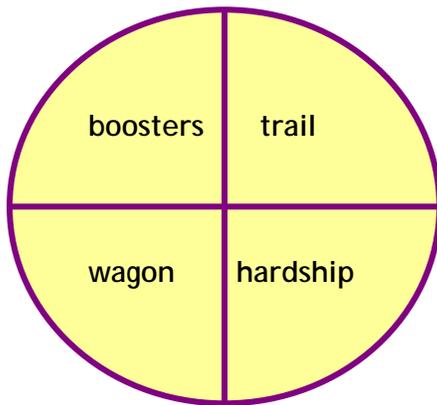
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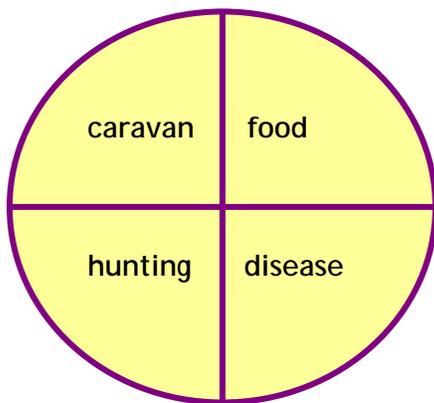
## Westward Expansion



Traveling West caused many *hardships*.

There were boosters, men, who were trying to force people to move West.

Your *wagon* would need to hold many things. For example, travelers carried food, clothes, medicine, and bedding.



Another difficulty was the condition of the trail itself. It could be very rocky or muddy or even flooded.

*Diseases* were killing the settlers.

*Hunting* buffalo was one way of getting food.

Bad weather slowed down the progress of the caravans.

Source:

*Inside Words: Tools for Teaching Academic Vocabulary, Grades 4-12* by Janet Allen. Stenhouse Publishers, 2007.

## Strategies to Teach Content and Language Using Students' Prior Background and Culture

Social studies is a nationalistic subject. Its viewpoint can be defined as *global with a local focus*. Wars, conquest, alliances, power shifts, and leaders are subject to local interpretation, i.e. national. Students may see the same historical events from different points of view. The particular understanding of history with which ELLs are familiar may differ from the one U.S. schooled students have learned.

In addition, in many parts of the world history is rewritten as new rulers come into power. Current national, regional, ethnic, and religious perspectives influence the way the past is seen. It is important that, we, as teachers, recognize these potential discrepancies. We are all products of our culture and as such cultural beliefs are deeply ingrained and not easily changed or even abandoned.

Background knowledge is fundamental to new learning. It has been stated that the single best indicator of how well a student can learn new content is the amount of relevant background knowledge or experience the student already has. That is why activating students' prior knowledge is an essential learning strategy. For the ELLs in their classes, teachers must first determine that they have the relevant background to be successful in learning the new content. The second step is to then build background knowledge where it is lacking before presenting new material.

Source:

Cruz, Nutta, O'Brien, Feyten and Govani. , *Passport to Learning: Teaching Social Studies to ESL Students*. National Council for Social Studies, 2003.

### STRATEGY: BRAINSTORMING

#### Description

Brainstorming is a simple and effective strategy to introduce a new topic. It activates students' background knowledge and engages their interest. At the same time teachers can determine whether or not students have enough background knowledge to move ahead.

## Procedure

1. To begin brainstorming write a topic word on the board, overhead transparency, or chart paper. Do this with an open-ended question:

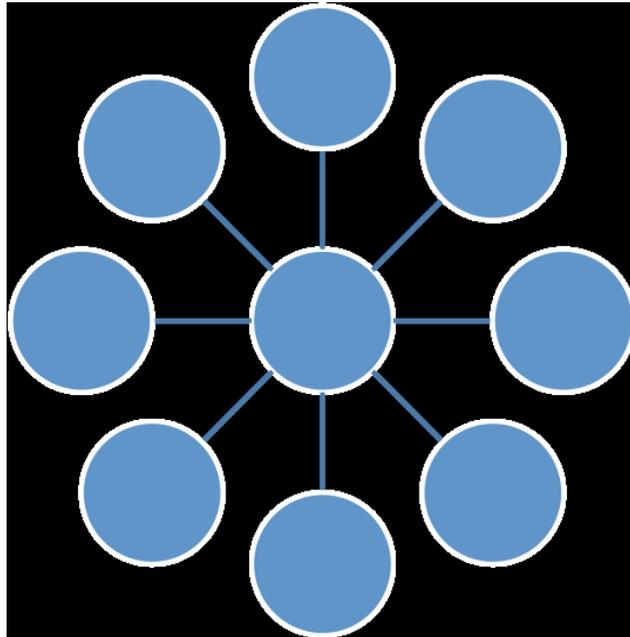
*“What do you think of when I say this word\_\_\_\_?”*

2. As students respond, write their words and phrases around the topic word to form a graphic display. *Accept all answers, right or wrong.* When you feel ready to move on with the lesson, tell students that you will return later to reexamine these ideas by saying:

*“Let’s save these answers. We’ll come back to them later to see what we have discovered about them.”*

## Application of Strategy:

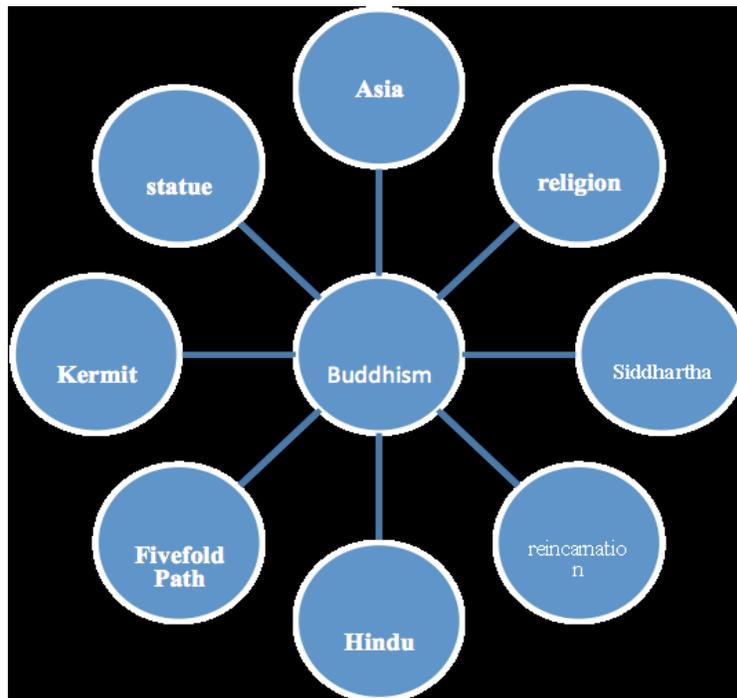
Brainstorming is an effective tool for building background knowledge



## Example

*“What do you think of when I say Buddhism?”*

### Religions of the World: Buddhism



### STRATEGY: PREVIEWING CONTENT VOCABULARY

#### Description

This strategy is based on Dales' (1965) research on what it means to know a word. Dale cited four levels of word knowledge.

- 1. I've never seen the word before*
- 2. I've heard the word before, but I don't know what it means*
- 3. I recognize the word in context and know that it is connected/related to \_\_\_\_\_ (words or concepts).*
- 4. I know the word and can use it properly*

With limited time to devote to word study, this activity can help you choose the least known words for pre-teaching.

### Procedure

1. Use the graphic organizer for Previewing Content Vocabulary to guide your students through this activity.
2. Read the title of the text or chapter to students and ask them to brainstorm words they think they will encounter in reading a text.
3. After students brainstorm the words, direct them to the word list at the bottom of the graphic organizer. (These words are taken from the text that the students will read. You can read these words to the students or have them work in groups and determine their level of knowledge of each of the content words. They will encounter these words in reading the upcoming text or chapter.)
4. Students list each word in the appropriate category based on their prior knowledge of the word. Words in the third and fourth quadrants can be explored in the context of reading and discussion. Words that most students classify as unknown (never seen or heard) should be words focused on for pre- teaching prior to students' reading of the text.

### Application of Strategy

This strategy would be used to assess your students' knowledge of the words and concepts in a specific text. With limited time devoted to word study, this activity can help you choose the least known words for pre-teaching.

### Previewing Content Vocabulary

Based on the title, words I would expect to read in this chapter	
I've never heard the word...	I've heard the word but don't know what it means...
I think the word means or is related to...	I know the word
Content Vocabulary	

## The New Kingdom: A Woman Pharaoh

Based on the title, words I would expect to read in this chapter...

queen ruler  
desert pyramid

<p>I've never heard the word...</p> <p>Hatshepsut hieroglyphs</p>	<p>I've heard the word but don't know what it means....</p> <p>archaeologists</p>
<p>I think the word means or is related to...</p> <p>a person who digs for important things</p>	<p>I know the word</p> <p>temple monument</p>

### Content Vocabulary

Hatshepsut  
Pharaoh  
obelisk  
expeditions

hieroglyphs  
reign  
archaeologist  
Thutmose III

reforming  
temple  
monument  
expansion

Source:

Janet Allen. *Inside Words: Tools for Teaching Academic Vocabulary Grades, 4-12* Stenhouse Publishers, 2007.

## Strategies for Assessing ELLs' Knowledge of Content and Language

Recent emphasis on school accountability has focused on student assessment. The center of attention is now on the standardized tests that determine whether students have met state and local standards. However, the importance of classroom assessment practices should not be overlooked.

### STRATEGY: MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

#### Description

This question format requires English language reading skills generally above the level of ELL students. Well-written questions demand critical analysis of four or more options in order to select the best answer. Options that are long or worded with subtle distinctions can cause confusion that prevents ELLs from demonstrating their content knowledge. For example:

*The Battle of Antietam was important because*

- a) the South regained all of Virginia but Stonewall Jackson was killed*
- b) Confederate troops abandoned Kentucky and increased Grant's determination to win*
- c) Richmond was saved from capture and northern forces retreated.*
- d) the Confederate retreat gave Lincoln the occasion to issue the Emancipation Proclamation*

Multiple choice tests are challenging for ELLs because the format is unique to the American school system. The majority of students from other countries have had little or no experience with this type of test. Lack of familiarity then makes this format difficult. There are additional problems with this type of question format. Questions that include the words *never* or *always* may penalize the more knowledgeable students who think of exceptions that mislead them from selecting the intended choice.

#### Procedure

1. Write questions that test factual knowledge such as names, dates, places, and or definitions.
2. Create answer choices where one option is definitely wrong, and the remaining alternatives are challenging.

## Application of Strategy

ELLs need to become familiar with the multiple choice format, so it is a good idea to introduce this strategy by offering only two options or choices per question.

*DIRECTIONS: Circle the answer that best completes the question.*

*Which revolution led to the concept of banking, the creation of guilds, and the creation of capitalism in Europe?*

- a) Commercial*
- b) Agricultural*
- c) Scientific*
- d) Industrial*

*Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?*

- a) Abraham Lincoln*
- b) George Washington*
- c) Thomas Jefferson*
- d) Benjamin Franklin*

Source:

Jodi Reiss. *Teaching Content to English Language Learners: Strategies for Secondary School Success*, Longman, 2005.

## STRATEGY: SELF-ASSESSMENT

### Description

These strategies are useful to supplement and complement other types of evaluation. Teachers can create individual checklists that students complete reflecting their personal feelings about comprehension of text or topic, contributions to class or group work, and areas of strength, weakness, and/or improvement. Students can add additional information if you add an extra column or include a section at the bottom.

### Procedure

1. Create the following graphic organizer on a sheet of paper and xerox.
2. Distribute to students at the end of each chapter or unit, or at the end of each week, month, or grading period.

## Application of Strategy

This activity helps to open and maintain the lines of communication with ELL students. It empowers them by contributing to their own evaluations. The students' insightful input can often help teachers find more effective techniques and approaches to facilitate the students' comprehension.

Textbook Chapter 12			
Week of _____ I understood the reading. I highlighted the text. I used a dictionary. I worked with a friend.			

Textbook Chapter 12	Usually Not	Sometimes	Almost Always
Week of _____ I understood the assigned reading. I highlighted the text, I made note cards. I made vocabulary cards. I participated in class discussions. I asked for help when I was unsure			

I also want to tell you that \_\_\_\_\_

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## MINI LESSON PLAN

The following is a lesson plan that will provide information on how to teach a specific content in Social Studies to ELLs.

### Teaching about the American Flag

#### Purpose

Feelings of patriotism are very strong in the United States at this time in our history. It is very important to teach our English language learners about the songs and symbols of America so that they show respect at appropriate times.

#### Description of Strategy

Students will activate prior knowledge by *brainstorming* with the teacher what they know about the American Flag. The teacher will write "American Flag" on the board and draw a circle around the words. As students state the words that come to mind the teacher will write them and begin to create a web. At this time the teacher will determine how much or how little the students know.

#### Procedure

1. The teacher will download the U.S. Flag Fact Sheet [http://www.everythingsel.net/downloads/U.S\\_flag.pdf](http://www.everythingsel.net/downloads/U.S_flag.pdf) and either via a laser projector or a transparency of the flag made ahead of time the students will view the flag and the vocabulary pointing to the stars, stripes, and field of blue. Explain how the symbols on the flag are important. The American flag has fifty stars, one for each state in the United States. The thirteen stripes stand for the first thirteen colonies
2. Teacher will explain the vocabulary as s/he shows the parts of the flag.
3. Students will then answer the questions about the flag that are projected either orally or in a notebook.
4. Teacher will then ask students to name the colors of the American flag. Explain that we say the colors in a certain order: "Red, white and blue." Tell how each color has a special meaning. In the American flag, for instance, the blue stands for justice, the white

stands for purity, and the red stands for courage. Put these terms into words the students can understand using examples. For example, justice means fairness; purity is clean; and courage means not afraid.

5. *Brainstorm* with students some of the items that are special to them. Have them create a personal or class flag, You might also teach the meanings of the colors commonly used on flags so that students can choose colors for their designs.

- blue: fairness, faithfulness, sincerity
- black: grief; feeling very bad
- green: hope
- orange: strength; being strong
- purple: high rank (like a president, king or queen)
- red: courage; not being afraid; braveness
- red-purple: sacrifice
- silver or white: faith; purity
- yellow or gold: honor; loyalty

6. Show students how to fold the U.S. flag correctly. See [Flag Fold](http://www.usflag.org/fold.flag.html).

7. Review with students the Pledge of Allegiance:

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands. One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

8. Tell students what the appropriate behavior is during the flag salute. Explain that they must stand respectfully during the Pledge but are not required to say the words. Explain that Americans pledge allegiance to the flag to show their loyalty to their country.
9. Demonstrate what the words of the Pledge of Allegiance mean. Use the download [Pledge of Allegiance activity](#). Have students cover up each definition with the correct word from the pledge. Cut out the word from the right hand side of the activity. Fold on the dotted line so that you have a window that opens. Cut out the entire square with the Pledge and the definitions on it and glue it to blue and red paper.
10. Explain that the word "pledge" is a synonym for the words "promise". *Brainstorm* with your students a list of times that they have made a promise.

## Additional Support for Teaching ELLs to About America

1. 1 Work in small groups to draft an ESL class pledge, then vote on pledges and adopt one.
2. Explain to students that a seal is used to represent something such as a country. Download a blank seal from the U.S. seal: <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/books/julyfourth/Greatseal.shtml>.

A colored copy of the U.S. seal can be found at The Great Seal of the United States. <http://www.greatseal.com/> Ask students to design a personal seal to represent themselves or their family.

Source:

Adapted from: [http://www.everythingsl.net/lessons/teach\\_america.php](http://www.everythingsl.net/lessons/teach_america.php)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Journal Articles and Essays for Teaching Social Studies to English Language Learners*

<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/resource/ells/social.pdf>

This research offers specific strategies in teaching Social Studies to English Language Learners.

<http://www.usca.edu/essays/vol162006/ahmad.pdf>

This article focuses on the challenges and successes in developing an effective instructional environment for teaching secondary-level social studies curriculum to a sheltered population of ELL's.

[http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/subject/teaching\\_ell.phtml](http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/subject/teaching_ell.phtml)

While this is not a scholarly essay, it does examine some of the special needs of the English Language Learner, and also discusses teaching techniques to help these students succeed in the social studies classroom.

[http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=EJ776293&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=EJ776293](http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ776293&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ776293)

These are results from a study of high school teachers using diverse approaches to develop an effective instructional environment in social studies *The full text is available at NYU library online.*

<http://www.scientificjournals.org/journals2007/articles/1029.htm>

This article focuses on the challenges older ESL students that can face when interacting with subject area material. It highlights an instructional practice to meaningfully engage adolescent second language learners with authentic text using non-fiction work.

<http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/2329>

This short article is very useful in providing academic protocols in classroom settings across the curriculum in addition to teaching ELLs the use academic language.

[Preparing Mainstream Teachers for English-Language Learners:](#)

File Format: PDF/Adobe Acrobat - [View as HTML](#)

This article provides the framework that identifies the areas of expertise necessary for mainstream teachers to teach in classrooms with native and non-native English speakers.

[http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american\\_educator/issues/summer08/goldenberg.pdf](http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/summer08/goldenberg.pdf)

This article addresses what the research does and does not say about teaching English Language Learners.

### Graphic Organizers for Social Studies

[http://www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/graphic\\_organizers.htm](http://www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/graphic_organizers.htm)

A plethora of graphic organizers.

<http://www.cheney268.com/Learning/Organizers/SocialStudies.htm>

These graphic organizers are more complex than the traditional ones.

<http://www.readingquest.org/strat/>

In addition to graphic organizers, strategies for reading comprehension in social studies are included.

<http://college.cengage.com/education/duplass/socstudies/1e/students/graphic.html>

Contains graphic organizers for the use of the Social Studies teacher as well as the student.