

# Sorting Out Social Studies

## Video Workshop Transcript

**Welcome to our workshop on Social Studies.** I'm Janice Price and I'm one of Rainbow's team of consultants. I'm the eldest member of that team, both in age and time at Rainbow, which means I have the greatest historical perspective, of course. It *should* mean that I'm qualified to give you both an overview of social studies education—and a means of sorting out the many curriculum products that fall into that category.

Homeschoolers “get” history. The Miller family has been immersed the entire year in prairie life as their school work has centered around the Little House books. The Beck family participates in civil war reenactments complete with zipperless costumes and tin plates. The Baird family looks forward each year to the Reformation Faire sponsored by their church. They sew period costumes and practice their jousting skills. The Montoya family participate in a home-school cooperative that studies world history in four year rotations incorporating lots of hands-on activities. One year they'll be learning Egyptian hieroglyphics; another, the impact of the black plague; another, the colonization of South America; and another, the [Battle of] Britain.

Homeschoolers “get” history. But Social Studies? Well, maybe not so much. In the Rainbow catalog we have over 225 pages devoted to History and Geography products—some 15,000 items. Did you know there are less than 100 products that have “social studies” in the title? But you hear the phrase all the time and you end up wondering just how it relates to history and geography.

We're going to get into the specifics of each but it's good to keep in mind that the two terms are used somewhat interchangeably by many people. Social Studies is sort of a catch-all term. Another thing that's good to remember is that Social Studies tends to be used by the educational establishment, homeschoolers tend to prefer history and geography. Let's take a look at why that is.

The word history comes to us from the Old French word “estoire” or “story” and from the Latin “historia” which means narrative of past events. Webster's 1828 dictionary adds other elements to the definition. History is an account of facts, particularly of facts respecting nations or states; a narration of events in the order in which they happened, with their causes and effects.

American History—or world history—then, is the study of the chronological records of the events of America—or the world—with a focus on their cause and effects.

Seems simple enough, doesn't it?

On the other hand, defining Social Studies is no easy task. It's sort of like pinning Jello to the wall. For one thing, the term has been constantly in transition.

In our day and age, every good school subject must have standards. And to develop standards, one must have a task force. Or, so I suppose. At any rate, the NCSS Task Force on Standards for teaching and learning Social Studies defines “social studies” as those which provide coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. According to this task force, the primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.

Are you confused yet? That all sounds rather lofty, doesn't it. Contrary to its intent of pulling everything together, though, “social studies” curricula—at least in the elementary grades—tends to separate out these elements into topics that are then studied briefly in small chunks each year.

# Sorting Out Social Studies

## Video Workshop Transcript

This is reinforced by the actual standards that have been developed for the various grade levels. One middle school standards-based “social studies” approach devotes 36 pages to Global Studies, 34 pages to Map Skills, 26 pages to World Geography, 39 pages to World History, 30 pages to US History, 36 pages to US Government, and 38 pages to Economics.

Unfortunately, the results of this approach are not very impressive.

A 2008 study found that:

- 25% of the seventeen year olds surveyed could not identify Adolf Hitler and an amazing 10% thought he was a munitions manufacturer.
- This study also revealed that less than half of the high school seniors can place the Civil War in the correct half century.
- One third did not know that the Bill of Rights guarantees the freedom of speech and religion.
- And when asked when “Columbus sailed for the New World,” more than 26% of these 17 year olds believed that Columbus sailed *after* 1750! Whatever happened to “in fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue”?

History was once a core subject of study in every grade beginning in elementary school. In *Little Town on the Prairie*, fifteen-year-old Laura Ingalls—along with a fellow student, Ida Wright—participated in a recitational review of the history of our country from its discovery to the present which was, of course, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The book tells us that after briefly talking about America’s discovery, Laura “launched upon the great history of America. She told of the new vision of freedom and equality in the New World, she told of the old oppressions of Europe and of the war against tyranny and despotism, of the war for the independence of the thirteen new States, and of how the Constitution was written and those thirteen States united. Then, taking up the pointer, she pointed to (the picture of) George Washington.”

Laura and Ida completed the recitation by going President by President and giving a brief sketch of the significant contributions of each to the great American story.

Education today—whether public school or homeschools—typically does not train for those types of recitations, but you have to admit it’s impressive. Instead, over the past century, the teaching of chronological history such as Laura received has been steadily replaced by teaching Social Studies.

The course “Social Studies” was first introduced in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in the beginning history was recognized as its core. In the 1920s and 30s, though, educational theorists began to complain that teaching about heroes and history stories was nothing more than “day dreaming” and they wanted schools to deal “realistically” with the problems of the neighborhood and the community.

Fueled by the idea that academic subjects were only necessary for college bound students, the goal of social studies became good citizenship with the view that historical studies did not contribute to social change and therefore had no value. History became preserved for the elite.

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many social studies professors showed open disdain for history suggesting that the study of the past was a useless exercise that attracted antiquarians and hopeless conservatives. Sadly, in the late 1980s, a president of the National Council for Social Studies referred to history as “pastology”.

# Sorting Out Social Studies

## Video Workshop Transcript

Thankfully, there's been a shift in the past 15 years. A significant effort to revive the teaching of history in schools has blossomed, and it's showing up in curriculum. For instance, we've recently added a public school curriculum series, the *AGS Social Studies* for middle school—which although the series carries the title of Social Studies it's actually separate courses in World History, American History, American Government and World Geography. This sounds like the way that the Christian Schools—and publishers like *Bob Jones* and *A Beka* have been doing it for years.

Social Studies, then, for our purposes, is like a mosaic—a beautiful picture created by strategically placing small stones in exactly the right place to create a pattern. And an appropriate analogy, too, I might add, since mosaics are an example of historic art.

So, imagine a mosaic with dark colors representing history fanning out from the center—world history, American history, state history, and personal history. Similar fans in another color represent physical and political geography, economics, and government, and we can begin to see the interrelationships. Then all around the edges are the disciplines that either impact history—or help us to understand it. These are the elements that make up the “rest of the story.” We know them by their high school or college course titles—government, economics, anthropology, archeology, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, and sociology (does that one sound familiar?). But it's easier to think of them as cultures, laws, religions, and lifestyles.

Homeschoolers have a wonderful opportunity to throw out the piecemeal social studies approach the schools are burdened with and study history as a cohesive whole. In other words, studying history in a way that includes geography, has lots of information about cultures, lifestyles, and religions, as well as government, laws and political boundaries.

And it can be a rich study that draws upon biographies, autobiographies, atlases, maps, original source documents such as diaries and journals, official documents such as the Magna Charta or the Declaration of Independence, and historical fiction. History can be studied as that beautiful mosaic—where each stone—or element—has its own unique contribution to make to the beauty and message of the whole.

History-based unit studies or literature-based history studies take it even further by exploring the interrelationship between history and geography with art, music, literature, and science.

In other words, homeschoolers are able to step back and consider the mosaic as a whole—to see the patterns and interrelationships—rather than spending all their time focusing on single pieces.

**Is there a best way to study history?** Well, you're going to discover there's a lot of discussion on that question. Let's take a few minutes and discuss the approaches you are most likely to encounter.

The Chronological Approach suggests that history should be taught in order from the beginning of time. Since the chronological approach starts at the beginning, where history begins is actually a critical question. A secular chronology includes a lengthy period known as pre-history which begins with the supposed appearance of the first hominids somewhere around 100,000 years ago. Most of our secular publishers take this perspective although it's often possible to ignore the initial chapters and start with the first recorded civilizations.

On the other hand, the Judeo-Christian tradition looks to the Old Testament to establish a chronology based on creation. These dates still vary some with Bishop Ussher establishing the date of creation as 4004 BC while those studying the Septuagint suggest 5500 BC. Obviously, both suggest a much shorter time frame.

Diana Waring's *History Alive*, *The Mystery of History*, *Biblioplan*, *Streams of Civilization*, and the *Veritas & Memoria Press* products all follow a Bible-based chronology.

# Sorting Out Social Studies

## Video Workshop Transcript

This seems like a good place to talk about timelines. Like Laura's gallery of presidential portraits, timelines help us to see the relationship between people and events. Some, like the *Parthenon* classical timelines and the *Adams Chart of World History* provide a listing of all events in chronological order. Others like those from *Knowledge Quest* or *Home School in the Woods* allow the student to build the timeline adding events and people. The same concerns about starting points, however, are a factor in timelines.

The Patriotic Approach promotes teaching American history first and more in-depth with a focus on patriotism and only later adding world history. Patriotism is defined as a devotion to one's country and typically includes a focus on American exceptionalism—the belief that America has a greatness of purpose that no other nation possesses. It's easy to see that this is the approach that Laura experienced in her Little Town.

*Beautiful Feet*, *TruthQuest*, *Exploring America* and *America the Beautiful* from Notgrass' publishers would all fit into the category of Patriotic Approach studies. Also under that banner would be traditional Christian textbook providers such as *A Beka*, *Bob Jones University* and *Alpha Omega*. Several other curricula products would be considered Patriotic—but are not from Christian publishers: *The History of US*, *Uncle Eric Books*, and *Holt American Anthem*.

**What about geography, economics, and government?** In the realm of social studies these will emerge as complete courses at the high school level but will be covered in bits and pieces in grade school social studies texts.

In our history mosaic approach, they would be covered as part of history—but from the perspective of how they interrelate with history. For instance, cultural atlases and regular atlases are common references for history studies.

Let us take a quick look at what these subjects involve:

- The **study of geography** includes both physical geography and cultural or political geography.
- **Physical geography** deals with the natural features of the earth. It looks at the water, air, animals, and land of the planet earth (everything that is part of the four spheres: the atmosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere). Physical geography is closely related to geography's sister science geology, but physical geography focuses more on the landscapes at the surface of the earth and not what is inside our planet.
- **Cultural geography**—sometimes called political geography—refers to human culture and its impact on the earth. Cultural geographers study languages, religion, foods, building styles, urban areas, agriculture, transportation systems, politics, economies, population and demographics, and more.
- **Map Studies** are included as part of both cultural geography and physical geography. Series like *Maps, Charts, and Graphs* as well as *Map Skills for Today* provide a systematic way of ensure that these skills are not forgotten.
- The **goal of education in civics and government** is to prepare students to be competent citizens; to be committed to the fundamental values and principles of American constitutional democracy. "Government of the people, by the people, and for the people," in Lincoln's phrase, means that the people have the right to control their government. But this right is meaningless unless they have the knowledge and skills to exercise that involvement and possess the traits of character required to do so responsibly.
- **Economics** studies the methods by which individuals and societies organize production activities and allocate scarce resources to meet material wants and needs. Economics is a logical way of thinking about economic matters rather than a set of answers. The study of economics helps to prepare students to make rational economic choices both in their own lives and in their participation in policy decisions as citizens of a city, state, nation, and the world.

# Sorting Out Social Studies

## Video Workshop Transcript

You are probably beginning to realize why I chose a mosaic to illustrate social studies education and perhaps why I can say that the term is interchangeable with how homeschoolers talk about history. With each of these subject areas there is obviously much overlap in topics covered and presentation. Most history curricula will also incorporate geography studies and often economics and government.

About now you are probably wanting me to just tell you what is best. Guess what? There is no right or wrong way to teach social studies to your children. The sheer volume of products creates a confusing array of choices, doesn't it? And while there are many excellent curricula available for teaching children history, not all are the right fit for every family. Learning the philosophy and approach of these curricula will help you to make the right choice for your family.

The **FAMILY** acronym is beneficial in helping you sort out the Social Studies curricula dilemma. Actually, you can apply it to all curricula decisions.

There are six factors that make your family unique—and which are important when choosing curriculum—Faith, Approaches to homeschooling, Money, Individuals, Life, and You. We'll take a brief look at each of these factors in terms of Social Studies but if you would like more information on these then I suggest you check out our video workshop—*Choosing Curriculum the FAMILY Way*.

### **Our “F” in Family is for Faith (or philosophy).**

Judging by the moms and dads I talk to every day, This factor—the faith perspective of curriculum—is very important.

We've probably all heard the play on words—history is His Story. This pretty much sums up why many homeschoolers would consider this factor to be the most important in terms of choosing history or social studies curriculum. History, Geography, Economics and Government curriculum from Christian publishers will tend to be written from a biblical worldview and with an eye to the role that Christian faith played in the lives of key historical figures. Or the role that the church played in the civilization and development of nations. Or the impact that key providential events might have had as turning points in history.

*Mystery of History*, Bob Jones, The Notgrass publications, *Living History of Our World* are all examples of Bible-based curricula.

We have a History Curriculum Comparison Chart available on our website that lists curriculum as Bible-based, secular, or neutral. The secular designation means that care is taken to treat all religions equally which, in terms of history or geography, may end up ignoring key aspects of a person's life or of a culture—or key people. Some might term these curricula as “politically correct.”

*History Odyssey*, Holt, *History of US*, *Child's History of the World*, *Story of the World* are all examples of secular curricula.

Curricula marked as neutral typically refers to the question of the age of the earth and means that neither an old earth nor a young earth factor into the way the information is presented.

*Runkle Geography*, *Big Book of Social Studies* and *Big Book of History*, *Trail Guides to American and World Geography* are all examples of neutral curricula.

# Sorting Out Social Studies

## Video Workshop Transcript

### Our “A” in Family is for Approaches to homeschooling.

The educational approach you are following is likely to make a large difference in how you approach social studies.

The Classical Education Approach employs a chronological approach to history. According to Susan Wise Bauer, author of the *Well-Trained Mind*, the goal of classical curriculum is to teach the student the proper place of her community, her state and her country by seeing the broad sweep of history from its beginning and then fitting her own time and place into the pattern. The Classical Approach teaches history in a chronological manner through the Trivium stages of learning.

The Grammar Stage (ages 6-10) focuses on absorbing information and memorizing the basic facts of history and geography. *Veritas* history programs help the student by providing a song and art flashcards for each time period.

The Logic or Dialectic Stage (ages 10-12) emphasizes logical discussion, debate and drawing correct conclusions. Programs like *You Decide!* and *Critical Thinking in U.S. History* challenge the Logic stage student.

The Rhetoric Stage (ages 13-18) continues with systematic, rigorous studies but seeks to develop the clear, forceful, and persuasive use of language. The *Omnibus* program has been developed with these stages and emphases in mind. The classical history studies utilize a cyclic approach and every four years cover all of history. Classical time periods are typically the:

- Ancients (5000BC-400AD)
- Medieval/Early Renaissance (400-1600AD)
- Late Renaissance/Early Modern (1600-1850)
- Modern Times (1850-present)

The Charlotte Mason philosophy of teaching history is based upon the reading of whole books and original documents. Sometimes called the Literature Approach, to classify it as either chronological or patriotic is difficult. Miss Mason promoted a chronological view of history in her writings; however, more contemporary advocates focus more on US History. At the core of the CM philosophy is the idea that education is an atmosphere, a discipline, and a life; it is about finding out who we were and how we fit into the world of human beings and into the universe God created.

*Beautiful Feet*, *Living History of Our World*, and the *Trail Guides to Learning* would be classified as Charlotte Mason or literature-based approaches.

Traditional Textbooks from Christian publishers as well as secular publishers have tended to follow the patriotic approach covering national history in the elementary years followed by some world history at the junior high level and complete courses in American and world history, geography, government and economics at the high school level. As we've discussed earlier, secular publishers have been more inclined to include an array of other social studies topics alongside their history and geography during the elementary years.

Courses from these publishers will usually have colorful student texts which attempt to engage the student visually and provide academic detail. Information is designed to flow from the teacher to the student so teacher's manuals are often vital parts of the course as are tests.

# Sorting Out Social Studies

## Video Workshop Transcript

Christian publishers would be *Bob Jones*, *Christian Liberty Press* and *Alpha Omega* while *Harcourt Horizons*, *Core Knowledge History and Geography*, and the *Holt* high school courses are all from secular publishers. One Christian publisher, Notgrass, has introduced a history and literature approach wrapped up in a very user-friendly format. Combining texts that feature history as a story, supplementary readers that emphasize original source document, and suggested literature, these courses are the equivalent of three credits at the high school level—History, English, and Bible/Theology/Worldview.

In many ways, history and unit studies seem to be made for each other. There are excellent courses like the *Prairie Primer*, *Learning Adventures*, or *Trisms* that have done the lion's share of the work for you; providing lesson plans, resource lists, hands-on activities, and cross-curricular assignments. There are also wonderful guides such as the Amanda Bennett material or the *Soli Deo Gloria* studies that provide a framework and leave you to supply the details. Many homeschoolers have also put together their own unit studies based on specialized interests such as civil war battles or the desire to study a particular time period in a particular way utilizing local resources or independent research.

### **The “M” in FAMILY is for Money.**

Social Studies subjects lend themselves very well to multi-age schooling which can be much more cost effective. Also, if a literature-based approach or a unit study approach is used, the library can become a good friend—and a money-saver. In terms of maps and timelines—many resources are available online.

It's good to remember that time is money and if you're willing to invest more time then you can usually save money. Co-ops can be another way of studying history with a minimum investment.

### **The “I” in FAMILY is for Individuals.**

When we start looking for creative products that will be a good fit for the different types of learners in our families, history and social studies are fertile ground. Just listen to these possibilities.

Storytelling CDs like *Your Story Hour* and Diana Waring's *History Revealed!* will captivate not only your auditory learners but your other learner types as well. Audio books to accompany texts such as those for *Story of the World* or *Mystery of History* make history more enjoyable for struggling readers. DVD series like *Drive Thru History* or history studies via movies like the *American and World History on the Screen* series will appeal to both your auditory and visual learners.

And just look at the possibilities for hands-on learners: *History Pockets*, Lapbooks, *Maps & Timelines*, *Draw & Write Through History*, Wood Model Kits, Dover history-based coloring books, Safari History Toobs, Build Your own Castle or Western Fort, Model soldier kits, Excavation Kits, Historical Paper Dolls, *Eat Your Way Around the World* or *Eat Your Way Through the USA*, and puzzles of all kinds.

And almost everybody loves games: *Professor Noggin's Games*, *Perspective: The Timeline Game*, *10 Days in Asia* (or *Africa*, or *Europe*, or the *USA*).

And don't forget the myriad of excellent resources available for avid readers: G.A. Henty books, *Childhood of Famous Americans*, the Sower series biographies.

Not to mention the wild selection of time period related literature that can be found in *All Through the Ages* or *Turning Back the Pages of Time*.

# Sorting Out Social Studies

## Video Workshop Transcript

### The “L” in FAMILY is for Life.

Sometimes life gets in the way of homeschooling. A mid-year pregnancy, caring for an aging relative, or a move. When that happens, sometimes we have to adjust the way we want to do history and social studies. No matter how exciting a unit study might appear, if this is not a good year for something that requires a high level of teacher-student interaction, the good news is that there are options.

The *Starline Press*, the *Switched on Schoolhouse*, *Lifepacs*, *Cicero* online: all allow for the student to work somewhat—or completely—independently. Choosing a single course that can be handled this way provides an excellent way to preserve your time and ensure that there will be enough of you to go around.

### Our “Y” in FAMILY is You.

When choosing curriculum for Social Studies—or for any subject, for that matter—it is important to recognize the amount of support that you, as the teacher will need. Following a well-laid out unit study curriculum like the *Prairie Primer* is much less demanding on you than trying to prepare your own geography and history studies based on the *Little House* books. Be sure to take a good look at what is provided in terms of lesson plans, teaching helps and answer keys as you make your curriculum decisions.

These **FAMILY** factors provide a way to look at the aspects of curriculum that are most important to you as well as a way of evaluating what each particular product has to offer.

Your family’s social studies mosaic can be as intricate and detailed and interwoven as you care to make it. I was in college before I realized that what I knew about history had anything to do with other subjects. Perhaps I was just slow but I tend to think it was because of the subject-based education I had received. Since I was going to the time and effort to homeschool, I wanted my children; and I want my grandchildren to see the relationships, not just memorize the details.

It’s over-used I know, but that’s because it’s so very true: we must not let our children and grandchildren be destined to repeat history just because they do not know history.

If you have questions about history or social studies curriculum, please call Rainbow and talk to a consultant.