



Ignite! Social Studies: A Practical Approach To Effective Pedagogy

With its full suite of social studies courseware for middle school, Ignite! offers a multimedia-rich, online learning environment that provides full coverage of social studies curriculum. The courses are carefully designed to support the best practices of middle school social studies instruction, taking into account the developmental characteristics of early adolescence, the great variety of students' learning styles and interests, and teachers' needs for an effective and engaging instructional tool.

Ignite!'s social studies courses include *Early American History*, *World History*, *World Cultures & Geography*, and *Texas History*. Because states often differ in the content required by their standards, Ignite!'s course materials are easily tailored to meet specific state curriculum needs.

This summary discusses the following elements of Ignite!'s instructional approach:

- Social Studies and Early Adolescence – linking middle school students' personal concerns to learning social studies
- The Human Element of Social Studies – making social studies come alive
- Answering the Question "Why?" – enabling a deeper understanding for higher order thinking skills
- Multimedia as Sound Pedagogy – teaching students in the ways they learn best
- Flexible Implementations – supporting the practical demands of the classroom
- Comprehensive, Research-Based Instruction – providing quantity and quality

! Social Studies and Early Adolescence

Social studies is essentially the study of people and the world in which they live. Because it is based on the reality of people's lives, it consists of far more than just names, places, and events. It is full of the natural messiness of human experience: desires and fears, conflict and cooperation, good and bad decisions, intended and unintended consequences, success and failure, and emotions of all kinds.

The study of social studies is far more engaging and more meaningful for middle school students when it reflects these human realities. Research shows that these issues are particularly salient for middle school students at their early-adolescent stage of development. They are constantly exploring social relationships, dealing with conflict, learning about rules and authority, determining their ethical and moral standards, and defining their own position in society. Their daily struggles echo the human drama that lies behind the world's societies, cultures, and history. Cognitive science teaches us that people are better able to understand and integrate new knowledge when it is presented in a way that fits within the framework of what they already know. Presenting social studies content in terms of the personal and social concerns of teenagers can both increase motivation and enhance learning.

! The Human Element of Social Studies

Ignite!'s social studies courseware highlights the human elements of social studies, using multimedia to draw students into the material with dramatizations of historical events, animations of spirited debates between opposing viewpoints, emotion-stirring original songs, and other formats. For example, an animated cartoon examining life on the frontier compares the first-person stories of a Native American child and the child of a settler family, and describes what it is like to deal with uncertainty and adventure as a young member of a family. In another piece, a rap song expresses the feelings of frustration and disempowerment felt by African Americans after the post-Civil War promise of "40 acres and a mule" was broken. A fictionalized diary of a young girl living in industrial-era England describes the challenges and hardships faced by the working class. These and other such media pieces allow students to learn about social studies in terms of issues that are already familiar to them.

! Answering the Question "Why?"

Students are hard-pressed to make sense of what people do without understanding the reasons *why* they do it. How can one truly understand the series of British taxes imposed on the American colonies, and the colonists' growing resistance, without understanding the viewpoints and events that led to this power struggle? Taking the time to explore the reasons and causes helps students tie together the people, places, and events of human experience in a way that makes sense. Otherwise, students get the impression that social studies is simply a scattering of isolated actions, and that history and human events happen magically, all by themselves.

Ignite!'s courseware helps students to understand the reasons for why things happen in a number of ways. At a personal level, media pieces explore the motivations, beliefs, and emotions that lie behind the things people say and do. By identifying with the personal and interpersonal forces in people's lives, students are better able to comprehend the reasons for events. At a more abstract level, certain media pieces are designed to explicitly trace the cause/effect relationships that tie events together over time, helping students recognize the threads, trends, and patterns that run through human events.

! Multimedia as Sound Pedagogy

Ignite!'s multimedia approach provides a sound pedagogy that delivers significant benefits to students and teachers. The combination of visual, aural, and interactive materials helps students learn concepts *faster*, meaning teachers can cover more content than they would with traditional print-based instructional materials. In classrooms where time is a precious commodity and required content strands are continually added to a teacher's responsibilities, Ignite!'s multimedia approach offers a significant advantage.

In addition to the growth in required content, another challenge facing teachers is addressing diverse learning styles. The rich multimedia environment of Ignite!'s courseware enables teachers to meet this challenge. In each course, concepts are conveyed through song, poetry, video,

animation, interactive maps and diagrams, and many other formats. Then, because each concept is presented through multiple media pieces, each emphasizing a different combination of learning styles, Ignite!'s courses allow students to find the media piece (or pieces) that speak to how they learn best. Multimedia caters to diverse learning styles much more effectively than traditional print-based instructional materials.

! Flexible Implementations

Ignite!'s social studies courseware is designed to meet the practical demands of the classroom. Depending on their particular needs, teachers have the flexibility to use the courses for whole class instruction, group activities, individual learning, or a combination of these methods. With whole class instruction, teachers use the broadcast capabilities of multimedia to engage all students and create multiple teaching moments. Group activities are used to foster project and collaboration skills, while individual learning allows students to proceed at the pace that best meets their unique needs.

Going well beyond multimedia, Ignite!'s social studies courseware also incorporates many other features designed to improve – and document – student comprehension and retention. Teachers have the flexibility to assign pre-designed creative essays that provide exploratory, open-ended environments, which in turn encourages students to hone their research skills and write their conclusions for an audience. Ignite!'s courses also provide built-in assessments that test both simple recall and more advanced thinking skills such as identifying cause and effect relationships, interpreting data, and distinguishing fact from opinion. The flexible implementation options, both in how teachers use the courses and the individual components presented to students, allow each teacher to employ Ignite!'s courses in the ways that makes sense for their classrooms.

! Comprehensive, Research-Based Instruction

Each Ignite! social studies course contains hundreds of media pieces and assessments. The treatment of both content knowledge and social studies skills is based on how middle school students learn best. The courses span all middle school grades, meaning universal social studies concepts like sequencing, categorizing, and interpreting timelines and maps are reinforced repeatedly. By the time students complete middle school, their multiple exposures to these concepts position them for future success in social studies and a better understanding of the world around them.

Schools operate under strict accountability requirements that sometimes force teachers to emphasize covering all required material over ensuring that all students master the content. Many educational publishers reflect this shift, focusing on covering all of the standards but forgetting the unique characteristics and needs of the students. Ignite!'s social studies courseware suite provides thorough coverage of standards, while also tailoring the material to the developmental needs and interests of middle school students and the variety of learning styles they possess. As a result of using the Ignite! system, students care more, understand more, and learn more.