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We are history too: Using text sets to honor Latinx stories in social studies and ELA integration

As a new teacher, I seek to create new opportunities for my students. I want my students to read and learn about people with whom they personally identify, and I also want them to learn about and respect people who are different from themselves. If I use the social studies textbook my students will learn a lot about white men. This is a disservice to all my students. My white students will rarely learn about people who are different from themselves and my nonwhite students will not have the opportunity to learn about people with whom they personally identify. It takes a lot of time to find resources to teach social studies from a multicultural perspective, but I'm willing to do it because doing so gives my students opportunities I never had. As a Latina student in K-12 education, I never remember learning about contributions made by Latinas, but I'm proud to say that my students do. (Marta, personal communication)

Unfortunately, this teacher anecdote is commonplace. Social studies is the discipline where one would expect inclusion of Latinx¹ experiences to be most present, yet there is a lack of representation, as well as inaccuracy, within many social studies curricula (Davis, 2019; Heilig, Brown & Brown, 2012; Noboa, 2012). One study found that Latinx students attributed the lack of cultural diversity in the social studies curriculum as a major contributing factor in their unfavorable perception in the subject (Busey & Russell, 2016). The omission of Latinx culture in social studies education, taken together with a small Latinx teacher population - only

¹ We have chosen to use the term “Latinx” to acknowledge the intersectionality of gender diversity within this multiethnic, multiracial group.

8% nationally - contributes to a “discourse of invisibility” (Ladson-Billings, 2003), in which the curriculum centers and normalizes white culture, while simultaneously, reinforces a belief that people of Color are insignificant to our nation’s history.

Conversely, when Latinx students’ racial and ethnic identities are affirmed within the curriculum, they have a more positive self-identity and show greater commitment to school (Antrop-González, 2006). As the Latinx student population continues to grow, it is essential that Latinx students see themselves represented fully within the curriculum. Teachers must work to supplement existing Eurocentric social studies curricula in order to develop a culturally responsive social studies. Teachers may look to national organizations for guidance. The National Council for Social Studies (2017) put forth a “Powerful, Purposeful Pedagogy in Elementary Social Studies” position statement. Within this statement, NCSS asserted elementary social studies should be *meaningful* and *integrative*. In this paper, the authors discuss text sets as one way to thoughtfully integrate Latinx experiences into the elementary social studies curriculum, ensuring meaningful, integrative, and culturally relevant social studies instruction.

Need for Latinx Children’s Literature

Social studies becomes *meaningful* when one is represented within the curriculum and challenged to understand the world in which we live. Latinx students need to see themselves reflected in the curriculum in order to envision the role of Latinx community members as actively engaged in civic ideals and practices. Concurrently, white students and other students of Color need to see Latinx people represented as important members of the community and not pushed to the margins of the text and/or represented in stereotypical ways. Picture books within

the social studies curriculum can elevate the status and importance of culturally, economically and linguistically marginalized groups, such as the Latinx population.

The use of Latinx picture books in social studies education could enhance the school curricula to include Latinx perspectives and promote Latinx students' engagement in civic participation. Unfortunately, similar to studies showing the lack of Latinx representation in social studies standards and textbooks, there is also a lack of Latinx characters in picture books. Currently, only 7% of children's books published by US publishers were about Latinx people (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2019). As an example, the authors searched for picture books featuring Latinx inventors for this article. We struggled to locate picture book examples and, in turn, extended one of our text set topics to "inventors and artists." Yet, Newton (2007) highlighted 177 contributions by Latinx individuals to the STEM field. Recognizing our role as consumers and gatekeepers of knowledge, educators can increase the demand for Latinx picture books as a means to meet the needs of our students. Later in the article, the authors have curated a list of Latinx picture books to help elementary school teachers supplement their social studies curriculum and work to build more meaningful social studies for all students.

Social Studies & Literacy Integration

In addition to teaching meaningful social studies, elementary teachers must consider how to make social studies *integrative*. In the current education climate, social studies receives less and less attention in most elementary school classrooms (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Farkas Duffett Research Group, 2012) due to high stakes testing pressure (Pace, 2011) and perceived lack of autonomy by teachers surrounding curricular decision-making (Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014). NCSS explained that, "powerful social studies teaching crosses disciplinary boundaries

to address topics in ways that promote social understanding and civic efficacy” (NCSS, 2017, p. 187).

The Common Core (Council of Chief State School Offices & National Governors Association, 2018) standards echo this call for integration requiring reading and writing skill application with historical texts, including primary sources. Additionally, the ELA Reading Anchor Standard CCRA.R.6 requires students to “assess how point of view” shapes a text (CCSO, 2018, para. 7). Bennett and Hinde (2015) asserted that healthy integration in the social studies as one where students use disciplinary skills from multiple disciplines to understand social studies concepts and make connections to their everyday lives; therefore, “reading, writing, and mathematics [are] tools by which [students] understand and communicate their understanding of the world” (Bennett & Hinde, 2015, p. 27). Social studies and literacy integration is essential to authentic learning in the elementary classroom, and within this article, the authors encourage teachers to consider how the use of picture book text sets can be used as a vehicle for integrative social studies with meaningful, culturally relevant texts.

Using Text Sets

The use of text sets offers a way to integrate social studies and literacy and to focus on critical issues within the social studies while highlighting historically marginalized voices, such as the diverse experiences of Latinx people in the United States. Tschida and Buchanan (2015) defined text sets as “selected literature drawn from different reading levels, genres, and media that illustrate a common concept” (p. 40). Text sets are a versatile tool as they provide multiple perspectives on a topic (Giorgis & Johnson, 2002) while allowing for varied access points to meet the needs of all readers in the classroom (Tracy, Menickelli, & Scales, 2017), as selected texts can be on different reading levels and represent a range of genres. Bersch (2013) and

Auberach (2006) found the use of text sets increased discourse among students and encouraged students to generate questions that could lead to critical inquiry of the topic or theme.

A common concern among social studies educators is the “danger of a single story” (Adichie, 2009) our students may hold about certain topics or groups of people. Bersch (2013) used an immigration text set with her students as a way to expose them to the multiple experiences immigrants faced coming to the United States. Additionally, Tschida and Buchanan (2015) developed a text set on family diversity to challenge the notion of the traditional heteronormative nuclear family often portrayed in elementary school curriculum. We have chosen to use text sets highlighting Latinx characters and experiences as a way to disrupt the single story often depicting Latinx people as immigrants in order to expose students to the great variance within Latinx cultures and histories.

Tschida and Buchanan (2015) developed a helpful process for assembling an effective text set:

1. Identify the big idea – Teachers need to determine if their text set will focus on a topic or event, or if their set will be more of a theme. In our case, we have chosen various themes to highlight Latinx perspectives.
2. Identify multiple perspectives about the big idea – This step ensures teachers disrupt the single story narrative about the chosen topic or theme. For example, in one of our text sets below, we have focused on the theme of family. For this text set, we intentionally chose picture books highlighting families from different Latinx ethnicities as well as different family situations.

3. Locate possible qualifying texts – At this point, teachers must consider the multiple reading levels needed for the students. Additionally, teachers need to select books with rich stories and accurate social studies content.
4. Make final text selection – Finally, teachers should consider the purpose of using the text set. What do you want students to do with the information gained from the texts? Later in this article, we will discuss different ways teachers may use the text sets we highlight.

Text sets allow teachers to meet the needs of students, to integrate social studies content and reading skills, and to center critical issues and voices historically marginalized. In the remainder of the article, we explain how to use text sets to center Latinx experiences in regard to: families, immigration, inventions and art, and activism.

Latinx Text Set in Social Studies

Elementary social studies state standards often include required content such as families, famous or influential Americans, and the Civil Rights Movement. The standards rarely include Latinx perspectives and experiences, except for the stereotypical image of immigrants and the occasional inclusion of individuals such as César Chávez (Davis, 2019; Hilburn, Journell, & Buchanan, 2016); therefore, we chose to use the commonly focused areas of Family Life, Inventors & Artists, Immigration, and Activism as big ideas for each text set we created. Then, we developed essential questions for each text set which encourage inquiry of Latinx perspectives and experiences in each of these common standard foci (see Figure 1). For each text set, we included 6-11 books representing a variety of reading levels, genres, and English and Spanish language.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

The essential questions for each text set helps teachers to frame the text set study so students consider the Latinx voices highlighted while also considering how these historical figures and events have present-day implications. In the following section, we highlight the Activism text set as an example of the literature variety with text sets and ways in which teachers could use text sets with their students.

Activism Text Set Example

The NCSS (2010) theme of “Civic Ideals and Practices” states that, “Learning how to apply civic ideals as part of citizen action is essential to the exercise of democratic freedoms and the pursuit of the common good” (para. 39). States often translate this national standard into state standards focused upon the origins of the United States government, highlighting the work of white men throughout the country’s history. Latinx students need to see themselves as active community members. In addition, this theme advocates for civic participation in political activities as well as using the democratic process to influence public policy.

Civic engagement (and its perception) among Latinx community members is important within the social studies. Given the importance of voting and its subsequent influence on democratic policy, it is concerning that Latinx and white voters have drastically different voter turnout rates. For example, despite Latinx voter turnout significantly increasing from 27% in 2014 to 40% in 2018; Latinx turnout rates in both elections were significantly lower than white voter turnout which was 45% in 2014 and 57% in 2018 (Misra, 2019). Despite, statistics such as these, there are many stories of present-day Latinx activism taking place (Tirado, 2019). Teachers need to incorporate more Latinx figures and social movement examples about democratic participation, including protesting and civil disobedience, as a way to show Latinx

students the heritage of political activism within their communities and families. Doing so could help Latinx students become more informed and more active citizens in the future.

Activism Text Annotated Bibliography

Roberto Clemente: Pride of the Pittsburgh Pirates (Winter, 2008); Preschool-Grade 3

This story details how Roberto Clemente started playing baseball in Puerto Rico and was eventually drafted to the major leagues in the United States. The author describes racism Clemente encountered as one of the first Latinx baseball players and the first Latinx player inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. While this accomplishment is noteworthy, his humanitarian service is equally impressive. This book describes his commitment to humanitarian work and how Clemente died in a plane crash taking aid supplies to Nicaraguan earthquake victims in December of 1972.

Pablo Neruda: Poet of the People (Brown, 2011); AD 740L, 5-8 years old

Readers learn about Neftali, who was born in Chile and later changed his name to Pablo Neruda. Brown tells the story of Pablo Neruda's life and his love for words. At the age of 16, he began publishing his poems describing the beauty of Chile. Later, he wrote poems that illuminated the hardships some people faced in Chile, and the government tried to arrest Pablo. He fled and continued to tell stories of Chile throughout his life. Students who enjoy this beautifully illustrated book could follow this book up by reading Pam Munoz Ryan's (2012) *The Dreamer*.

Martí's Song for Freedom (Otheguy, 2019); 7 - 12 years

José Martí was a Cuban poet and national hero. Readers of this bilingual book will become immersed in Martí's poetry through the use of original stanzas from Martí's writings. This book highlights Martí's fight for the freedom of all people. Martí was enraged by the

enslavement of people by rich landowners in Cuba (colonized by Spain). He took action against this oppression by writing and speaking around the world for Cuba's independence. Consequently, Spain declared Martí as an enemy at age seventeen, and he was not allowed to return to Cuba. The book's afterward provides detailed information that place the story into context and deepens understanding.

That's not Fair! Emma Tenayuca's Struggle for Justice (Tafolla & Teneyuca, 2008); AD 650L

Emma Tenayuca was born in San Antonio, Texas, in 1916. This bilingual book tells her story from a young girl who recognized unfair living and working conditions for people in her neighborhood to a young woman who led 12,000 pecan shellers on a two-month strike. The strike concluded with the pecan company owners agreeing to raise the wage of workers. A detailed biography of Emma's life is presented on the last page.

Side by Side/ Lado a Lado: The Story of Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez/ La Historia de Dolores Huerta y César Chávez (Brown, 2010); 870L, Preschool-3

The stories of Dolores Huerta and César Chávez are told in parallel (and bilingual) format until the two meet as young adults. Although their journeys to activism have different origins, the author outlines how these two individuals worked together to improve the working conditions for farmworkers. The book describes the grape strike, Immigration Act of 1986 and the 340- mile activist march to improve the working conditions of farmers.

Sí, Se Puede/Yes, We Can!: Janitor Strike of L.A. (Cohn, 2013); Kindergarten – 2

Through the fictional experience of Carlitos and his mother, who works as a janitor, Cohn tells the story of the successful janitors' strike in Los Angeles in 2000. The story focuses on Carlitos, as he seeks a way to support his mother who is taking part in the strike. His teacher explains how farmworker strikes improved working conditions in the past and helps Carlitos and

his classmates make signs for those marching in the janitor strike. The story concludes with Carlitos' mother assisting hotel workers marching for higher wages, thus demonstrating how a community helps one another. Students may be particularly drawn to this text, not only because it is a bilingual book, but also because it is written from a child's perspective.

Dolores Huerta: A Hero to Migrant (Warren, 2012); Grades 2-5

This book tells the story of Dolores Huerta, and her many attributes—mother, teacher, organizer, and friend – she utilizes in her quest to seek higher wages and fair working conditions for the migrant workers. Particularly noteworthy is the manner in which this book describes how some believed Dolores should not lead this movement and instead allow men to take charge, yet she did not back down.

Undocumented: A Workers' Fight (Tonatiuh, 2018); Grades 5-8

This book begins with Juan as a young boy working the fields to provide for his family after his father passes away. Tonatiuh describes Juan's journey across the border to find work as a bus boy in a restaurant working 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, and making less than half of minimum wage. The story focuses on Juan and other undocumented workers' activism to earn a living wage.

Todos Iguales/All Equal: Un Corrido De Lemon Grove/A Ballad of Lemon Grove (Hale, 2019);
Grades 3-7

In 1930, Mexican American children in Lemon Grove, California, were segregated from their peers at school. Their schools was a barnlike structure, which was smaller and inferior to their white peers' school. Mexican parents worked together to file a lawsuit against the school

board. This bilingual book brings to life the first successful school desegregation case in the United States.

Instructional Strategies with Text Sets

There are a plethora of ways elementary school teachers could use the activism text set in their classroom. A simple strategy would be to set up cooperative learning jigsaw groups for the text set. The teacher could assigned each student a book differentiated by interest and reading level. All students would have the same essential question to investigate while having the responsibility of sharing new information from their assigned book with their jigsaw group. In addition to the jigsaw strategy, we have highlighted some specific instructional strategies teachers may use with the activism text set.

Primary Sources

In addition to reading the historical picture books within this text set, teachers could pair a primary source with each text. For instance, teachers could access primary source photographs such as an image (<https://digital.utsa.edu/digital/collection/p9020coll2/id/9656>) of pecan shellers striking in San Antonio, Texas, in the 1938 strike led by Emma Tenayuca (UTSA Special Collections, n.d.). Students could analyze the photographs responding to questions such as (Library of Congress, n.d.; National Archives, 2018):

- Identify and describe the people and objects you see in the image.
- Is there a caption with the photograph? If so, what does it tell you?
- What is the setting of the photograph?
- What is happening in the photograph?
- Is there any text in the photograph? If so, what does it say?

- When was the photograph taken?
- Who do you think took the photograph?
- Why do you think the photograph was taken?
- How does the photograph compare to picture book, *That's Not Fair! Emma Tenayuca's Struggle for Justice* (secondary source)?

The teacher could use this opportunity to introduce and/or to practice historical disciplinary skills, or the teacher could provide multiple primary source photographs or texts for students to corroborate across sources as they learn to work as a historian.

Activist Art

The use of art during social movements has been a consistent strategy throughout U.S. history from protest signs, political cartoons, and civil rights songs. Today, people use visual art through social media to bring light and perspective to social issues. Amplifier (n.d.) is an example of an organization highlighting artists' messages seeking equity and justice through art (See www.amplifier.org for examples). Teachers could show examples of artwork bringing light to Latinx activism historically, such as images of the United Farm Workers Union flag, and presently, such as the #DefendDACA poster (<https://amplifier.org/#downloads-immigration-migration>). Then, students could create artwork representing the activism they read about in one of the activism text set books. Another possibility would be for students to research a current social issue where Latinx activists are leading the way to seek equity for all people, such as the protesting of detention centers at the southern border. Students could create art posters, protest signs or songs to represent the activist message about a current issue.

Timeline

Particularly with the Activism text set, providing historical context to the events is necessary. Students could create timelines utilizing the information in each picture book and deciding the most important facts, which could be placed in the time line. Pairing the major events from the texts onto timelines allow students to consider the NCSS theme “Time, Continuity and Change.” Teachers may use the timeline to prompt questions such as, “How are events from the past similar and different from contemporary events of today? How does historical activism inform important social and labor movements now?”

Conclusion

All students need to be represented within the curriculum in order to feel valued and included while also providing insight into the lives of people different from ourselves. As a discipline, social studies curriculum has historically upheld an exclusive narrative focusing on telling a Eurocentric story of the past and present. The integration of social studies and ELA, through text sets, provides elementary teachers the opportunity to develop meaningful, culturally relevant curriculum. In particular, text sets lessen the promotion of stereotypes by providing multiple stories and varied experiences across Latinx ethnicities. Latinx people have undoubtedly contributed to the global and U.S. society, and their inclusion in school curricula is long overdue.

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Figures

Topic	Essential Questions	Book Suggestions
Family Life	<p>What binds families and communities to one another?</p> <p>What are some unique aspects about being a Latinx family/community member?</p>	<p><i>Dear Primo</i> (Tonatiuh)</p> <p><i>Grandma’s Chocolate/El Chocolate de Abuelita*</i> (Price & Fields, 2010)</p> <p><i>El Juego de Lotería*</i> (Lainez & Arena, 2006)</p> <p><i>All the Way to Havana</i> (Engle, 2017)</p> <p><i>La Noche Buena/A Christmas Story</i> (Sacre, 2014)</p> <p><i>Lucía the Luchadora</i> (Garza, 2017)</p> <p><i>Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing up Latino in the United States**</i> (Carlson, 2013)</p> <p><i>Día de Los Muertos</i> (Thong, 2015)</p> <p><i>Alma and How She Got Her Name</i> (Martinez-Neal, 2018)</p> <p><i>My Papi has a Motorcycle</i> (Quintero, 2019)</p>
Activists	<p>How have Latinx activists influenced their communities?</p> <p>How have these influences affected my community?</p>	<p><i>Roberto Clemente: Pride of the Pittsburgh Pirates</i> (Winter, 2008)</p> <p><i>Pablo Neruda: Poet of the People</i> (Brown, 2011)</p> <p><i>Martí’s Song for Freedom*</i> (Otheguy, 2019)</p> <p><i>That’s Not Fair! Emma Tenayuca’s Struggle for Justice</i> (Tafolla, & Teneyuca, 2008)</p> <p><i>Side by Side/Lado a Lado*</i> (Brown, 2010)</p> <p><i>¡Sí, Se Puede! / Yes, We Can!: Janitor Strike in L.A.*</i> (Cohn, 2013)</p> <p><i>Dolores Huerta: A Hero to Migrant Undocumented</i> (Warren, 2012)</p>

<p>Immigration</p>	<p>How are the experiences of Latinx immigrants similar and different from one another?</p> <p>Describe how Latinx immigrants overcome the hardships of immigration.</p> <p>Given that immigrants face hardships, how can we help Latinx immigrants feel welcome in their new home?</p>	<p><i>Two White Rabbits</i> (Buitrago, 2016) <i>Stormy Seas: Stories of Young Boat Refugees</i> (Leatherdale, 2018) <i>Migrant: The Journey of a Mexican Worker</i> (Mateo, 2014) <i>My Diary from Here to There*</i> (Pérez, 2015) <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> (Tonatiuh, 2013) <i>La Frontera: El Viaje con Papa/My Journey with Papa*</i> (Mills & Alva, 2018) <i>My Name is Jorge on Both Sides of the River*</i> (Medina, 2014) <i>Yes, We Are Latinos*</i> (Ada & Campou, 2016)</p>
<p>Inventors & Artists</p>	<p>How have Latinx inventors, artists, and writers influenced local communities and the world?</p> <p>How can we learn from Latinx heroes?</p>	<p><i>Ada's Violin</i> (Hood, 2016) <i>Me, Frida</i> (Novesky, 2015) <i>Diego Rivera: His World and Ours</i> (Tonatiuh, 2011) <i>Portraits of Hispanic American Heroes</i> (Herrera, 2014) <i>The Flying Girl: How Aida de Acosta Learned to Soar</i> (Engle, 2018) <i>My Name is Gabriela/Me llamo Gabriela</i> (Brown, 2005)</p>

Figure 1. Latinx picture book text sets. This figure provides a set of texts by theme with essential questions to guide inquiry. An asterisk represents a bilingual text, and the double asterisk represents the need for teacher discretion with some content.