Eight Types of Graphic Organizers for Empowering Social Studies Students and Teachers

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ABSTRACT. Graphic organizers offer visual models that equip teachers and students with tools, concepts, and language to organize, understand, and apply information. Many teachers, concerned that social studies tends to overwhelm students, feel social studies is viewed as a complex and confusing subject unrelated to the contemporary world. Graphic organizers help students sort, show relationships, make meaning, and manage data quickly and easily before, during, and after reading and discussion. They are useful for reading difficult material, highlighting information, valuing cultural diversity, meeting needs of special populations, and supporting language learning. In this article, the authors present eight types of graphic organizers with descriptions, vocabulary, and examples applicable to citizenship and government, economics, geography, and history in pre-K–12 settings. Teachers should modify and extend the examples so learning is student centered, student directed, developmentally appropriate, active, challenging, and productive.

Keywords: graphic organizers, learning, social studies, student centered

Graphic organizers are visual models (Ausubel 1960) that provide teachers and students with tools, concepts, and language to organize, understand, and apply information to achieve a variety of purposes and outcomes. Many teachers are concerned that social studies overwhelms their students; often, students view social studies as a complex and confusing subject unrelated to their contemporary world (Kotttlér and Gallavan, forthcoming). Graphic organizers, or concept maps (Novak and Gowin 1984), help students sort, simplify, show relationships, make meaning, and manage data quickly and easily (Crawford and Carnine 2000).

Application to Social Studies
Specific types of graphic organizers empower social studies teachers and students to control a large amount of reading, comprehend a wealth of ideas, and consider multiple perspectives associated with learning social studies, particularly citizenship and government, economics, geography, and history (Flood and Lapp 1988). Graphic organizers provide practical classroom tools that immediately engage students and readily connect them with content and processes while working independently, with partners, in small groups, or as a whole class (Hew et al. 2004). Graphic organizers are required by many state curricular standards in social studies and other subject areas.

Teachers or students can produce graphic organizers as tools to process or integrate into the product; they can be created on paper, on a board, or with computer software. Students become more motivated, demonstrate faster short-term recall, and show greater long-term achievement when organizers are used effectively in social studies. Graphic organizers empower students to take responsibility for their own learning, negotiate and personalize meaning, share information with others, and make group presentations (MacKinnon and Deppell 2005).

Most social studies classrooms include all types of students (Boudah et al. 2000). Graphic organizers can help
students read difficult text, charts, and diagrams; highlight information; value cultural diversity; and learn English. They help social studies teachers cover an increasing amount of content combined with growing attention to standards and testing. Graphic organizers allow teachers and students to isolate, summarize, and manipulate social studies information in ways that are student centered, developmentally appropriate, active, challenging, and productive (National Council for the Social Studies 1994). They can make learning social studies terminology, structures, and functions manageable and memorable.

Graphic organizers supply teachers with techniques that assist them with planning by providing tools for designing curriculum, implementing instruction, facilitating assessment, showing relationships between content and context, and transferring conceptual development from self to others (Merkley and Jefferies 2000/2001). Once teachers incorporate graphic organizers into their planning, teaching, and reflection repertoire, they realize that the applications are limitless.

In this article, we present eight types of graphic organizers to engage, excite, and empower social studies teachers and students. Graphic organizers let students access their preferred style of learning or type of intelligence, express and exchange their discoveries with their peers, comprehend the big picture through smaller representations, and see results quickly. These approaches reinforce learning while expanding critical and higher-order thinking skills, especially analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Lambiotte et al. 1989). Graphic organizers provide options for self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher evaluation that are more captivating and practical than traditional tests and essays.

We encourage teachers to use our examples as starting points for applying the eight types of organizers across the curriculum and integrating social studies across curricula. Each of the organizers can be used in all areas of social studies. We suggest that teachers construct their own organizers on the basis of content and invite their students to select or construct their own. When selecting or constructing a particular organizer, emphasis should be placed on capturing the learning in its structure.

Eight Types of Graphic Organizers

We categorize eight types of graphic organizers according to their purposes for learning (see appendixes A through H). We also include a reference list of vocabulary associated with each type of organizer. Identifying the appropriate vocabulary found in the text is key to using and completing a graphic organizer and discussing the relationships relevant to it. Teachers should also select the relevant vocabulary words found in the text or discussion and add new words to the organizers.

The graphic organizers we present can be used in three ways:

• before reading and discussion as a way to pre-assess knowledge, introduce or preview a topic or issue, set the stage, brainstorm ideas, and motivate interest
• during reading and discussion to provide a tool for taking notes; retaining information; checking, extending, and highlighting the learning as a formative evaluation; and renewing interest
• after reading and discussion to review, reinforce, or assess learning, establish the foundation for future projects and activities, and serve as a summative evaluation (Vacca and Vacca 2001).

Graphic organizers allow teachers and students to acknowledge what is known, dispel misinformation and misconceptions, brainstorm new possibilities, predict outcomes, process information, share ideas, and see their outcomes in simple and easy-to-recall representations (Keppell 2001). In the following sections, we describe each type of organizer and how it is used.

Assume and Anticipate

These graphic organizers (see appendix A) fit well at the beginning of a learning experience or unit to check prior knowledge and opinions, introduce a topic or issue, and motivate and inspire interest in the content. As teachers ask students what they know about a topic or issue, this type of organizer records past experiences and existing questions. As the learning unfolds, teachers and students return to their graphic organizers to record new discoveries in a different section. Space to document connections to current and future learning helps to personalize and extend the learning. “What you Know, what you Want to know, and what you Learned” (K-W-L) charts are a common example of this type of organizer; they capture concepts and terms that can be revisited during and after reading.

Position and Pattern

This type of graphic organizer (see appendix B) helps teachers and students see how one idea relates to another in a particular order or chronology and how the pattern occurs and reoccurs in different applications or contexts. They are useful for recording notes during reading and discussions. Readers can visualize cause and effect by drawing pictures or recording words in a clear sequence such as on a time line or chain.

Group and Organize

These organizers (see appendix C) help teachers and students understand how an idea is associated with an overarching concept or purpose. Graphic organizers that group and organize are beneficial during partner and small-group work. Items may be categorized or classified formally, as found in the textbook, or informally, according to the reader’s choice. An example of this kind of organizer is the tree.

Compare and Contrast

These organizers (see appendix D) include shapes that represent the selected topic or issue to illustrate how examples are the same as or different from one another. An example is a Venn diagram. Teachers can incorporate graphic organizers that help students compare
and contrast as they progress through a unit and to show multiple perspectives relevant to a topic. The students’ rationale may be formed on the basis of information gained from specific text or application of ideas within their own experiences.

**Relate and Reason**

These graphic organizers (see appendix E) place information in a particular order or sequence to demonstrate student understanding of inductive and deductive thinking patterns. *Inductive* thinking patterns provide evidence supporting or promoting big ideas or significant concepts. *Deductive* thinking patterns provide evidence for underlying reasons and related rationale for an inference. Teachers and students can use these organizers to uncover more details and make connections.

**Identify and Imagine**

These organizers (see appendix F) include shapes, such as stars and light bulbs, that help students name, describe, brainstorm, and extend thinking related to parts of a larger idea or practice. They are ideal for recording data and expanding on concepts and skills. These organizers motivate students and spark creative thinking.

**Estimate and Evaluate**

These organizers (see appendix G) are used to explain and differentiate an idea or a different perspective related to both content and process. The size of the space or section can correspond to the size of the estimation or evaluation. Analysis charts are an example of these organizers, which are good additions to reports and presentations.

**Combine and Create**

Often, one type of organizer does not fit teacher or student needs, so teachers can encourage students to construct their own (see appendix H). Each section of the newly constructed graphic organizer captures a concept, structure, or function for a specific purpose. This category of organizer gives teachers and students freedom to express ideas through individualized approaches.

**Conclusion**

Graphic organizers provide an ideal tool for teaching and learning social studies with all types of students and at all grade levels. They allow teachers and students to summarize and evaluate information into visual models that can be used quickly and easily. Organizers also help students record and recall information, see relationships, use appropriate language, and comprehend concepts. Teachers can use graphic organizers to prepare lessons and guide student achievement. Graphic organizers make learning manageable and fun.

**REFERENCES**


APPENDIX A

ASSUME AND ANTICIPATE GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Purpose: shows what is known, taken for granted, probable, and possible and what has captured student curiosity

Associated vocabulary: anticipate, assume, believe, calculate, comprehend, consider, contemplate, deliberate, dream, expect, feel, forecast, foresee, foretell, guess, hope for, imagine, invent, judge, know, known, lie ahead, look for, mediate, muse, negotiate, picture, ponder, predict, presume, ruminate, require, sense, suppose, take for granted, think, trust, understand, venture, visualize, weigh

Citizenship and Government, primary

Good citizenship

what I know and do

what I wonder

what I learned and will do

Economics, intermediate

What I know about funding a project

Questions I want to ask

People with whom I will meet

New information to share

Geography, middle grades

Things I think I know about a particular location

Things I want to learn

How I am going to find out

Things I have learned and will share with my group

History, high school

Know

Wonder

Learned

How Learned

Will Do

Life of Martin Luther King Jr.

APPENDIX B

POSITION AND PATTERN GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Purpose: shows sequence, order, or cause and effect

Associated vocabulary: after, ahead, already, arrange, arrangement, array, before, begin, behind, cause, chain, design, earlier, effect, end, first, following, formerly, in advance, in the past, initiate, instigate, last, later, led to, locate, model, next, organize, pattern, penultimate, position, place, pose, previous, prior, produce, progression, rank, set, simultaneous, situate, sooner, start, subsequent

Citizenship and Government, intermediate

5 = President

3 = Speaker of the House

1 = Secretary of State

List the order of succession to fill the U.S. presidency

Economics, middle grades

A = weekly allowance

B = expenses

C = extra income

D = emergencies

E = savings

Geography, high school

If global warning continues then

Fill in the blanks.

Outcome A

Outcome B

Outcome C

History, primary

Add pictures or photographs with captions to tell life stories.

age 0 1 2 3 4 5

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APPENDIX C

GROUP AND ORGANIZE GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Purpose: shows type, category, or classification

Associated vocabulary: arrange, array, assemble, catalog, categorize, classify, compartmentalize, coordinate, differentiate, display, distinguish, fix, grade, group, label, like, manage, order, organize, place, plan, position, put together, rate, sort, systematize, tag

Citizenship and Government, middle grades

Name the states in each region of the United States

Northeast

Northwest

Geography, primary

Draw and write the name of one plant and one animal that lives:
• in the tree top and sky
• above ground
• on the ground
• under the ground

Economics, high school

Information about individual countries: names of currencies, denominations, exchange rates, and per capita income

History, intermediate

Write two major U.S. events in each circle from the time (1) when your grandparents were children, (2) when your parents were children, and (3) now during your childhood.

APPENDIX D

COMPARE AND CONTRAST GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Purpose: shows similarities, differences, and relationships

Associated vocabulary: alike, alternatively, analogous, arrange, assemble, associate, balance, categorize, classify, common, compare, contrast, conventional, cluster, congregate, customary, different, differentiate, dissimilar, diverge, exceptional, exclusive, evaluate, gap, gather, group, joint, link, many, mutual, only, ordinary, parallel, unique, rare, related, same, shared, similar, sort, unlike, unusual

Citizenship and Government, high school

Name three types of governments. For each, place one item that is unique and one item that is shared between two governments and among all three in the appropriate locations.

Economics, primary

Draw and label three needs and three wants on each side. Draw and label three items that are both in the center.

Geography, intermediate

Identify a different type of terrain on each step in order of elevation; by the arrow, write a way the two types of adjoining terrain are alike.

History, middle grades

Describe a holiday in each box that is celebrated by people around the world. At the top and bottom of each box, list two unique ways the holiday is celebrated.
APPENDIX E
RELATE AND REASON GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

**Purpose:** shows part to whole and whole to part relationships

**Associated vocabulary:** add, all, analyze, associate, assume, attach, branch, capacity, chunk, complete, conclude, connect, construe, contribute to, deduce, division, entire, fraction, full, function, gather, generate, group, infer, ingredient, make, part, piece, portion, position, produce, quantity, realize, relate, section, segment, share, slice, sum, support, together, total, unbroken, undivided, whole

**Citizenship and Government, primary**

List the names of your city, state, zip code, and country on the lines.

**Geography, middle grades**

Give the names of the four seasons and one example of a related weather event in each arrow.

**History, high school**

On each stem of the fishbone, write one societal condition associated with the Vietnam conflict.

APPENDIX F
IDENTIFY AND IMAGINE GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

**Purpose:** shows ways to name, describe, brainstorm, and extrapolate

**Associated vocabulary:** anticipate, associate, build, categorize, choose, classify, construct, create, depict, detect, determine, devise, distinguish, emerge, establish, expect, explain, express, form, found, generate, identify, imagine, inspire, invent, find, identify, isolate, link, make up, originate, picture, portray, recognize, relate, select, show, spot, suggest, suppose, think, visualize

**Citizenship and Government, intermediate**

Name the presidents and vice presidents since 1980 and predict the next president and vice president.


**Economics, middle grades**

Imagine all the ways you could spend $1,000,000.

**Geography, high school**

Brainstorm all the uses for a river and for the land near the river.

**History, primary**

Label one sun with major events that have happened in your life. Label the other sun with your dreams and goals.
**APPENDIX G**

**ESTIMATE AND EVALUATE GRAPHIC ORGANIZER**

*Purpose:* shows ways to explain, differentiate, and examine through various perspectives

*Associated vocabulary:* account for, analyze, angle, approximate, assay, assess, attitude, calculate, clarify, consider, decide, defend, describe, determine, differentiate, estimate, evaluate, explain, explore, give reasons, guess, inspect, investigate, justify, notion, observation, opinion, perception, perspective, position, price, rationalize, reckon, scan, side, sift, standpoint, study, test, viewpoint

**Citizenship and Government, middle grades**

1. Estimate the actual number the people and the percent of the population who (1) vote, (2) pay taxes, and (3) own homes.

2. Describe four ways a town makes money in ratio to revenue.

**Geography, primary**

Name each of the four cardinal directions and one place you think you would find when walking in that direction away from the school.

**History, intermediate**

In each column, list three groups of people who have immigrated to the United States and some of the unique experiences you imagine they encountered.

**APPENDIX H**

**COMBINE AND CREATE GRAPHIC ORGANIZER**

*Purpose:* shows ways to incorporate parts of different organizers or design a unique representation to capture ideas and achieve special purposes and outcomes

*Associated vocabulary:* blend, build, cause, coalesce, combine, come together, coin, conceive, construct, contain, craft, create, demonstrate, depict, design, effect, encompass, exclude, fashion, feature, form, generate, illustrate, include, initiate, instigate, integrate, invent, join, make, merge, mingle, mix, produce, separate, show, start

**Citizenship and Government, high school**

Show the steps for how a bill becomes a law and how the law becomes part of our daily living.

**Geography, intermediate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>land</th>
<th>air</th>
<th>water</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Categorize forms and uses of transportation. Write five words in each box. Draw a next to your favorite item in each box.

**Economics, primary**

Ways I Earn Money

Ways I Spend Money

**History, middle grades**

In each shape, write the name of a current world leader, the name of the country, and his or her position on health care. List commonalities on the center lines.
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Congress and the Classroom: Ideology and the Expanding Federal Roles in Schools from the Cold War to No Child Left Behind, by Lee W. Anderson. The author compares the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 with past federal education policies, such as the National Defense Education Act of 1958. In this analysis of the circumstances that led to passage of No Child Left Behind, he explores why changing conservative and liberal ideologies have led to more federal involvement in schools. 2007. Penn State University Press (University Support Building 1, Suite C, University Park, PA 16802-1003 or http://www.psupress.org).

Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice, edited by Gary L. Anderson and Kathryn G. Herr. This three-volume set synthesizes the diverse scholarship available on traditional and emerging forms of social, cultural, and aesthetic activism. Authors from many academic disciplines provide a comprehensive historical look at the topic and a clear picture of current trends, such as globalization of commerce and consumer values and speed and personalization of communication technology. The series is of interest to students and scholars in the fields of education, health care, sociology, environmental science, and public policy. 2007. Sage (2445 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320 or http://www.sagepublications.com).

Ghost Empire: How the French Almost Conquered North America, by Phillip Marchand. In 1682, Rene-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle explored the land around the Great Lakes, the Mississippi River, and Texas and claimed it for France. However, he was later murdered by his own men, and France’s claim to the land did not hold. In this book, the author analyzes La Salle’s flawed but fascinating character and ponders what a French North America would have looked like. He also describes the legacy of this ghost empire today, from churches to battle reenactments, in Canada and the United States. 2007. Praeger (88 Post Road West, PO Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881-5007 or http://www.praeger.com).

A Little Piece of Ground, by Elizabeth Laird with Sonia Nimr. This children’s book describes life during war and peace through the eyes of a twelve-year-old Palestinian boy named Karim. He and his family are trapped in their homes by a strict curfew, but Karim wants to play outside and see his friends, despite the constant danger. The book provides insight to children who may be curious or confused about what they have heard and read about the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. 2006. Haymarket Books (PO Box 180165, Chicago, IL 60618 or http://www.haymarketbooks.org).

Social Dancing in America: A History and Reference, by Ralph G. Giordano. This two-volume series compiles the history of the most popular social dances in America (1607–present), where they began, which were fads and which became classics, and why. The author also examines what attracts American men and women to social dancing; how social dancing parallels the social, economic, and cultural traditions of the time; and how Spanish, American Indian, African, and European culture have contributed to popular American dances. 2007. Greenwood (88 Post Road West, PO Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881-5007 or http://www.greenwood.com).

Sport in Ancient Times, by Nigel B. Crowther. The author looks at the role of sport in prehistoric times, ancient Greece, ancient Italy, and the Byzantine empire. Through exploration of various historical games, he describes how athletics contributed to cultural norms that extended beyond physical prowess into military associations, rituals, status, and politics. Prominently featured subjects include gladiators, Cretan bull-leaping and boxing, military sports in prehistoric Egypt, and funeral games during the Trojan war. The author also explores team sports, the social status of winning athletes, and the changing role of women in sports in ancient times. 2007. Praeger (88 Post Road West, PO Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881-5007 or http://www.praeger.com).
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