



# SOCIAL STUDIES

**The Use of Coherency Storylines  
in the Development of Standards of Learning  
and Curriculum Frameworks**



**OKLAHOMA  
ACADEMIC  
STANDARDS**



# The Use of Coherency Storylines in the Development of Social Studies Standards of Learning and Curriculum Frameworks: *Adding Unity, Specificity, and Transcendancy to Social Studies Curricular Decisions*

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## ■ Coherency Storylines

Coherency Storylines have been used for the first time in Oklahoma in designing the *Oklahoma Academic Standards for the Social Studies*. Coherency Storylines are a set of *storylines* selected to advance and develop the telling of a *curriculum story*. Coherency Storylines are very fine-grained *curriculum threads* that elaborate, illuminate, and illustrate a larger subject strand such as *Economic Opportunity in United States History*. Coherency Storylines may be used within a single grade level or course, across a grade band, within the spectrum of a multi-grade level subject like United States history, and/or across the entire curriculum framework Pre-K–12.

The purpose of Coherency Storylines is to provide a structure to design a curriculum framework. Coherency Storylines are more specific in nature than strands such as geography, history, etc. and finer-grained than content themes like *Power, Authority, and Governance*. They function as true curriculum threads within a discipline strand (history, geography, etc.), as well as the across the several social studies disciplines strands. They can be made very finely focused and even be thought of as *curriculum fibers*. Curriculum fibers when woven by purposeful design comprise a coherent curriculum strand. Coherency Storylines act as a *plumb line* by which the placement of Social Studies content expectations within the curriculum framework can be more objectively selected or omitted.

Coherency Storylines give *unity of story* within subject disciplines, strands, and courses. Coincidentally, Coherency Storylines allow transcendancy of story across themes, strands, and the entire curriculum framework Pre-K–12. Coherency Storylines are threads that provide color, weave, and texture to the curriculum fabric. Taking the analogy of curriculum as a fabric, we can illustrate the concept by asserting that the Coherency Storylines function by giving function, pattern, and unity of design to the curriculum framework. They give purpose to the curriculum stories within and across grade levels and multi-grade content; and provide a *transcendancy of design*.

An example of this is the Coherency Storyline of *Foundations, Formations, and Transformations of the American System* within United States History. This Coherency Storyline spans the U.S. History curriculum in Grade 5, Grade 8, and High School. This Coherency Storyline, when pulled through those three distinct parts of the U.S. history curriculum provides a plumb line by which specific U.S. history content may be included or excluded. The Coherency Storyline guides content selection based upon the discussion and decision of whether it *develops* the storyline or *distracts* from the storyline. This thread should be more finely focused only on the political aspects or the economic features of the American system making them a curriculum fiber, or these two fibers can be combined for a more specific Coherency Storyline bi-focus thereby creating a coherent strand.

This Coherency Storyline could function in the lower elementary level to introduce early learners to American civics and history topics like notable Americans, to guide the selection of high-interest non-fiction reading series of foundational, formational, and transformational events in American history, or even the selection of basic domain specific vocabulary terms. Additionally, this Coherency Storyline could guide the selection in the lower elementary grades of national symbols, national historic landmarks, national parks, patriotic music, and national holidays/observances.

What is essential in the use of Coherency Storylines is the parameter descriptor. The Coherency Storyline's purpose needs to be focused and tightly designed. It should tell specifically the kinds of content to be associated with the Coherency Storyline and what cannot be used as it would cause the Coherency Storyline to diverge from its storyline. Content expectation should be held to the standard of "Was the event, person, group, document, etc. *significant and key* to the founding of the nation, to the formation of the nation, and in the continuing transformation of the nation?" The main consideration to answer is "*Was this person or event systemic changing?*" If the specific content was key and significant, then it should be very seriously considered for inclusion in the standards/framework as it helps develop the historic storyline. Conversely, if it did not lead to system-wide change(s), then it should not be included as it is probably minor in comparison. It most likely distracts from the primary storyline. With that in mind, individuals, groups, events, documents, etc. may be interesting to study in their own right *but* should be included only for their significant and key impact upon the American system. To include any interesting person just because the standards do not have a person from a particular "demographic group" is insufficient cause for inclusion because it is *gratuitous inclusion*. It results in a weakened historic narrative. The use of Coherency Storylines elevates the decision-making process to one of significance and relevance.

To follow this line of design reasoning, consider the following: in the formation and transformation of the United States, many treaties could be included in the curriculum framework. Treaties often covered several topics but often served a particular purpose such as the cessation of fighting, settling territorial disputes, trade rights, etc. Look at the top two treaties included in Figure 1.

Now, a series of questions need to be considered to help determine if this specific content should be added to the framework.

- In what ways was each event systemic changing?
- Should both treaties be included in the framework?
- Should both be excluded?
- Should one be included and the other excluded?
- If so which one?
- Why?



Figure 1

The decision should be justifiable with historic reasoning as to why the selected content was systemic changing.

Since the focus of the Coherency Storyline is the political foundation, formation, and transformation of the American system, the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 would be very appropriate, whereas the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 would not be nearly as appropriate as all major signatories were at war with each other within a decade.

Consider the topic of events and treaties relating to the American Indian experience. There are so many treaties with all of the tribes spanning American history that selecting appropriate treaties is a real curriculum content challenge. Taking the line of reasoning from above and using Figure 1, which one should be included to support the primary storyline – the *Indian Removal Act of 1830* or the *Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek*? Many scholars would say that since the *Indian Removal Act* was the primary basis for all subsequent land cessions and removal treaties with the numerous American Indian nations that it was the signature transformative event in changing the American system for both whites and the American Indian nations.

Based upon the use of the Coherency Storyline, the committee literally came to the conclusion as illustrated in Figure 2.



Figure 2

### ■ The Primary Coherency Storyline for the Oklahoma Academic Standards for the Social Studies

The Coherency Storyline, *The Foundation, Formation, and Transformation of the American System – Politically and Economically*, is THE storyline for the entire Social Studies framework as it operates as a plumb line that pulls the entire curriculum framework towards the goal of developing literate citizens. It provides unity of story for the entire framework and focuses on key ideas, events, people, groups, and concepts that laid the foundations for the 13 British colonies becoming the United States. This primary Coherency Storyline gives transcendence of the narrative across the grade levels and across the several social studies disciplines of History, Civics/Government, Geography, and Economics. This Coherency Storyline provides purpose, pattern, and unity of design to the entire *Oklahoma Academic Standards for the Social Studies* framework.

The Coherency Storyline will be spun into a tighter “curriculum thread” by adding focused specificity through a bi-focus on the foundation, formation, and transformation of the American

political and economic systems. This bi-focus does not preclude the strand of geography as historic geography is a presumed part of the historic narrative. The bi-focus on the political and economic systems does not ignore the social development of the 13 original British colonies, the beginning American nation, and country as it grew and changed over the past 400 plus years. In fact, political events, developments, and decisions had social implications and impact. The same is true in the economic realm.

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