

## Parent Information About the New Alberta Social Studies Curriculum

### Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is about being thoughtful about everything students do and study in school. In Social Studies students are expected to develop critical thinking skills that include distinguishing fact from opinion and considering the reliability and accuracy of information.

In a critical thinking approach, students participate in a task, problem or issue with an open mind. The goal is to judge what would be the most reasonable, justifiable response based on relevant factors, or criteria. The chart below highlights how traditional and critical thinking questions might differ.

	<b>Traditional questions</b> (students simply record the information)	<b>Critical thinking questions</b> (students use information to make a judgment)
Kindergarten	What are three rules at school?	What are the two best rules for creating a safe and cooperative classroom?
Grade 2	What did the Inuit people in the past use to make tools?	Which animal—the seal or the caribou—was most important to help the Inuit people meet their needs in the past?
Grade 4	What are the climate, landscape, cultural attractions, and occupations of Canada's regions?	Convince a panel of students that your region would be the best place to move their families based on climate, landscape, cultural attractions, and occupations.
Grade 7	What were John A. Macdonald's contributions as leader?	What contributions did John A. Macdonald make that would qualify him as a truly great Canadian leader?

Consider the difference between students recording teacher-selected information about the major geographic regions in Canada on a poster as compared to students using student-selected information to convince a panel of students that a particular region would be the best place to live based on a variety of factors

The first activity is less problematic. Students locate information to answer factual questions. The correct information about each region is obvious and simply needs to be written down. It does not call for as much critical thinking. In the second activity, rather than asking students to find information to answer the factual question, it is a problem to be solved. It teaches the regions of Canada in a more meaningful way to students. They learn from each other. They still use the information, and in the end, they are more likely to remember the regional differences when assessed on the topic.

#### How might I support my child with critical thinking?

**Good critical thinkers draw upon a variety of strategies to work their way through challenges. To help your child gain clarity about an issue:**

- have your child rephrase it in their own words
- try to represent the problem with drawings or diagrams

**Good critical thinkers also rely on the following habits to address problems:**

- Talk to your child about why there might be more than one opinion about the problem
- Have them list all of the relevant details involved
- Ask them to think about the likely results of their decision

The Alberta Social Studies curriculum is built around core principles of citizenship and identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In classrooms throughout Alberta, students will critically examine and analyze important issues and concepts while they consider aboriginal, francophone and multiple perspectives from both the present and the past. This newsletter article is produced by the Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium in cooperation with the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia as a result of a grant from Alberta Education to support implementation of Social Studies.

