

Social Studies Project Planner

A one-project planning sheet for grades 6–12. Print it, fill it in, run one project. Free — no email, no account.

Step 1 — The driving question

Write the question students will spend the project answering. Then test it against all four.

The question passes only if every box is true	
☐	A student cannot answer it on day one.
☐	A single search will not answer it.
☐	Two reasonable people could answer it differently and both defend it.
☐	Answering it requires the content you have to teach anyway.

Step 2 — Map it to the C3 Inquiry Arc

The C3 Framework (NCSS, 2013) is not a PBL program, but the arc and a good project are the same shape — which is how you show an administrator what standard the project serves.

C3 dimension	What it is in your project
1. Developing questions and planning inquiries	
2. Applying disciplinary concepts and tools	
3. Evaluating sources and using evidence	
4. Communicating conclusions and taking informed action	

Step 3 — Name the audience before day one

Who outside this classroom will read, watch or use the finished work? Write the actual name.

If they say no, run it anyway and send the work to next year's class. An audience of the students who come after you is still an audience, and it is the one that never falls through.

Running It and Checking It

Checkpoints to set before students start, and the four failure modes to check before you hand the work back.

Step 4 — Three checkpoints

Checkpoint	Date	What students hand in
Sources approved		
Draft claim		
Revision after critique		

The four failure modes — run this on the finished product

Check	
☐	Craft with no argument. Could a student have earned an A on this without reading a source? If yes, the class time belongs somewhere else.
☐	Presentism. Does the work reconstruct why a decision made sense to the people who made it before evaluating it? “They were monsters” is a conclusion, not an analysis.
☐	Simulation that should not be run. No role-play of slavery, the Holocaust, genocide, internment or the Middle Passage. Students may be assigned a policy position , never an identity .
☐	Unsourced claims. Every claim carries a footnote, bracket or source line. Claims that cannot get one get cut — especially in the conclusion, where students reach for a documentary ending.

Grading so group work cannot hide a weak student

Score this individually	Score this as a group
Content knowledge · evidence use · sourcing · the student's own written claim	Collaboration · the shared product · meeting checkpoints · presentation to the audience

If one number covers both, a strong group will carry a student who learned nothing and the grade will not show it.

Notes for next time