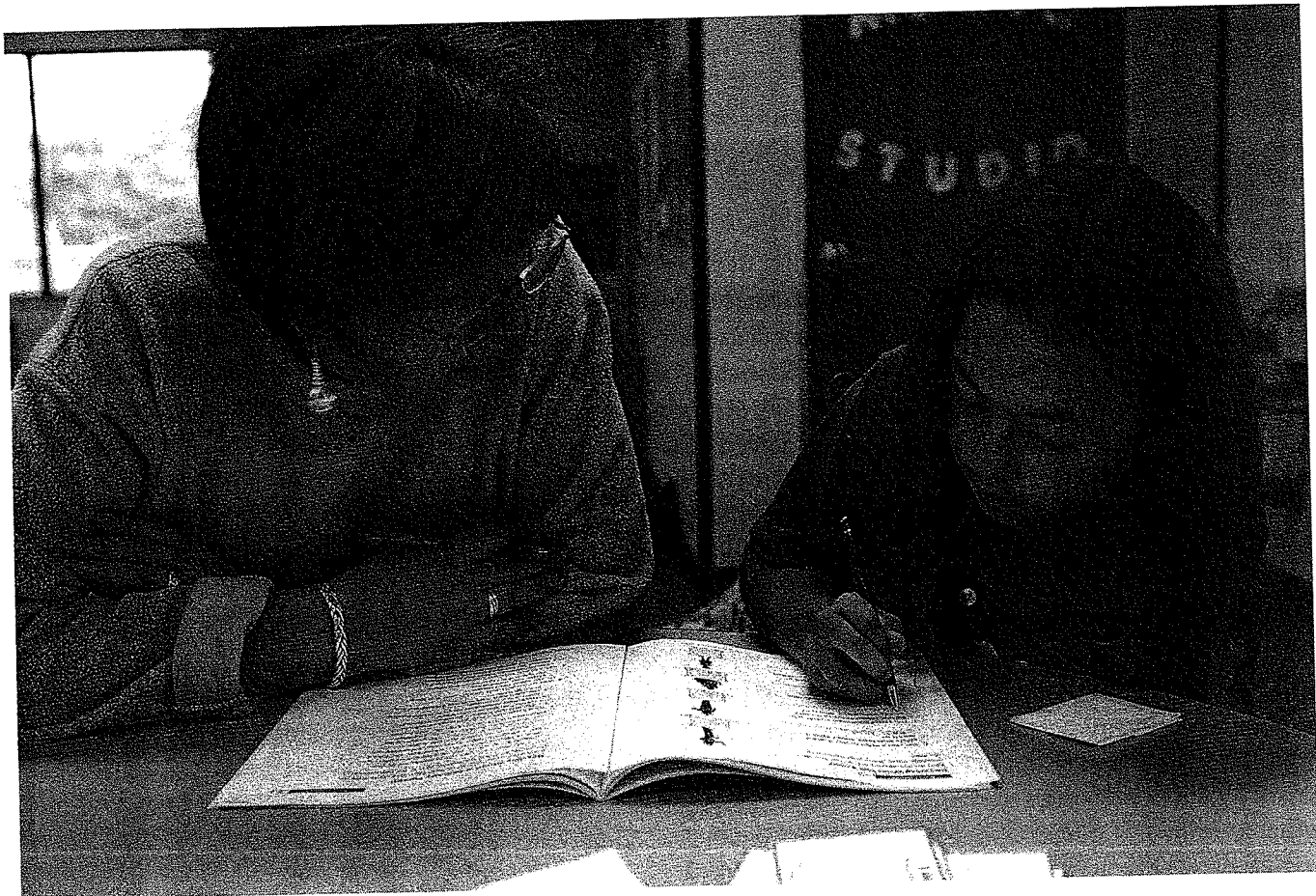


Effective Assessment



Steps at a Glance

- 1 Assess students' performance during daily activities.
- 2 Give both individual and group grades to assess groupwork equitably.
- 3 Employ simple techniques to assess writing assignments efficiently.
- 4 Create simple systems to make assessing student notebooks manageable.
- 5 Use end-of-lesson tests to assess comprehension of key social studies concepts.

Introduction

An effective assessment process in social studies emphasizes activities in which students use their various intelligences to both demonstrate *and* further their understanding of key concepts in authentic ways. Because learning is reinforced through such assessment, students reach a deeper and more long-term understanding of new material. They also perform better on standardized tests because the assessment focus is on cultivating richer understanding of key concepts, not on test preparation in and of itself. This approach is based on the idea that effective assessment

- **Measures what matters most.** Evaluative activities and tests should focus on key concepts and higher-level thinking, not on what is easiest to assess.
- **Taps into multiple intelligences.** An array of assessments allows all students the opportunity to show what they know.
- **Involves activities that are indistinguishable from good learning activities.** Assessment activities should be both educational and engaging, involving challenging, real-life problems and tasks.
- **Fosters the habit of self-reflection.** Assessment activities should encourage students to evaluate their own work and to reflect on their own progress.
- **Prepares students for standardized tests.** Assessment should include questions similar to those students will encounter on standardized tests.

STEP
1

Assess students' performance during daily activities.

Effective assessment begins with the assessment of day-to-day activities, which benefits both teachers and students. For teachers, regular, on-going assessment provides timely feedback on the effectiveness of instruction. This information is essential for identifying what is working for students and what is not, so teachers can adjust instructional plans accordingly. For students, it sends the message that every activity is important—not just busywork—and therefore worth assessing. It also encourages students to apply high standards to all of their work. And it helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses in a safe, low-stakes setting and to reflect on ways to improve future efforts.

You can build assessment into almost any activity in two ways. First, when you begin an activity, take time to make your expectations for students clear and explicit. You can do this verbally or in writing or, when possible, by providing models of finished products. Second, at the end of an activity, allow time for students to reflect on how well they met your expectations, either by having them do a self-assessment of their work or conducting a debriefing with the entire class.

Here are additional suggestions for assessing Visual Discovery, Social Studies Skill Builder, Experiential Exercise, and Response Group activities:

Visual Discovery You can assess students' visual-literacy skills and understanding of key concepts presented in a Visual Discovery activity based on

- their answers to your questions during the visual analysis.
- their participation in act-it-outs that bring the images to life.
- the thoroughness of their Reading Notes.

Social Studies Skill Builders As pairs present their work to you for feedback during Social Studies Skill Builders, you can assess

- the quality and accuracy of their written answers.
- each student's ability to work effectively and cooperatively with a partner.
- how well the pair manages their time and stays on task.

Experiential Exercises After you have debriefed Experiential Exercises, you may want to assess your students on

- how well they met your behavior standards and learning expectations.
- their responses to questions during the debriefing.
- follow-up activities in which they connect what they learned in the activity to broader social studies concepts.

Response Groups During Response Group activities, you may want to assess your students on

- participation in group discussions.
- the presenter's ability to clearly express the group's ideas.
- the quality of their written responses (for upper-elementary students).

Giving students regular feedback makes the assessment process a natural part of the classroom experience.

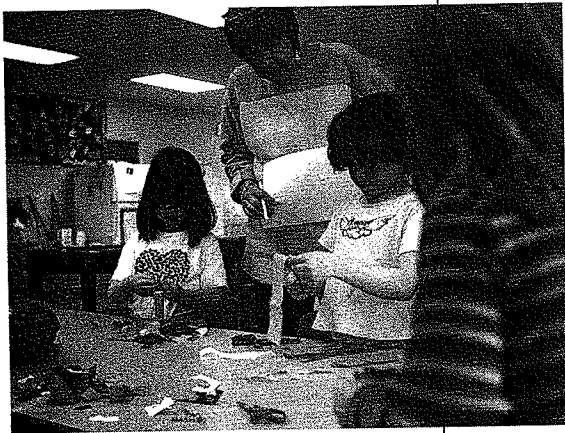


STEP
2

Give both individual and group grades to assess groupwork equitably.

Assessing groupwork raises many questions: *Should group evaluation be determined by the quality of the final product or the process used to create it? Should each student in a group receive the same grade? How do you create individual accountability within a group? What do you do about the student who does very little but whose group does excellent work, or the outstanding student whose group does mediocre work? How do you keep track of the goings-on in all groups so that you can evaluate the groups fairly? What role, if any, should students have in the evaluation process?* Here are five steps for evaluating groupwork activities that address these questions. They give students a clear understanding of how they will be assessed, hold both individuals and groups accountable, make the grading process equitable, and allow you to assess activities quickly and easily.

Groups function effectively when the performance criteria are clear.



“Brag Sheets are lifesavers in parent conferences. Many parents are leery of group projects and group grading because their child might be held back from a good grade because of the other students, or their child may end up doing all the work. The students’ explanation of their contributions help parents to understand the grade.”

- 1. Set clear criteria for evaluation.** Tell students they will be assessed not only on the quality of the final product, but also on how effectively they work as a team. This underscores the value of using cooperative skills.
- 2. Make individuals and groups accountable.** Weigh half of a student’s grade on individual contribution and half on the group’s performance. Every member gets the same group grade; individual grades differ. In this way, students who do outstanding work in a weak group will be rewarded for their efforts, and students who do little but benefit from being in a productive group will not receive a high overall grade. Importantly, students find this system fair and equitable.
- 3. Record notes as groups work and when they present their final products.** Observe groups as they work, and take notes on how well they exhibit cooperative skills and how each group member is (or isn’t) contributing to the group’s success. Then record notes on the quality of their final product when they share it with the class. In this way, you can quickly formulate a group grade that is based on both how students worked and what they produced.
- 4. Have students complete self-assessments.** At the end of groupwork activities, have each student complete a Brag Sheet (see the opposite page), a self-assessment in which they evaluate their contribution to the group as well as the group’s performance. This allows students to reflect on the group’s effort and gives you additional information on which to base your assessment. It also gives students the opportunity to “brag” about their contributions—such as extra work done outside of class—so that their work gets evaluated fairly. Make it clear that Brag Sheets are confidential.
- 5. Determine group and individual grades.** Use the notes you recorded during the activity plus students’ Brag Sheets to formulate group and individual grades. Base the group grade on how well the group worked together (process) and the quality of what they produced (product). Record the group and individual grades on each Brag Sheet, total them, write comments, and return the Brag Sheets to your students.

Brag Sheet

Name _____

My role in the group was _____

Student Assessment

My most important contributions to my group were

Our group did really well at

	not very well		very well		
	←				→
I completed all parts of my role.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I was nice and helpful to others.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I followed directions.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I stayed on task.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
We worked out problems on our own.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

Teacher Assessment

Teacher Comments:

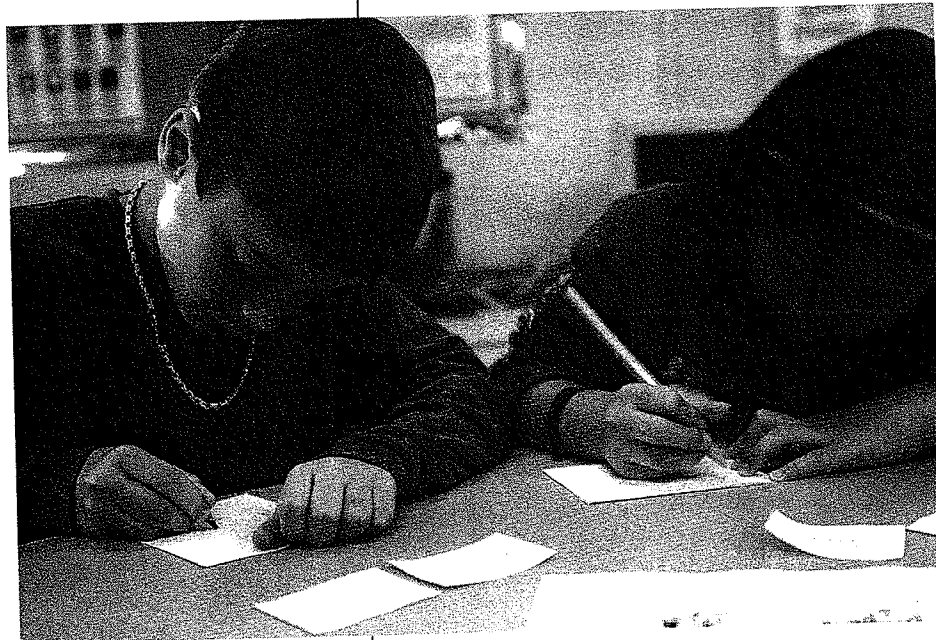
Group grade _____

Individual grade _____

Overall grade _____

Celebrate Student Writing

Young children love to share their work with others. You might encourage them to give dramatic readings of their work. You might submit pieces to the school paper, display writing in the halls, or help students submit writing to the local paper or writing contests. And a publishing party is a wonderful opportunity for everyone to celebrate what the children have written.



Caption to come

“Self-evaluation is new to most students. They figure once they turn a paper in, it is out of their lives forever. Asking them to take the time to evaluate their work forces them to reconsider some of their answers and choices.”

STEP 3

Employ simple techniques to assess writing assignments efficiently.

Assessing writing assignments can be taxing and time consuming, especially if you expect to thoroughly grade every piece of writing your students produce. Here are some alternatives that will give your students substantive feedback on their writing while saving you from a crushing paper load:

Use peer-feedback groups. Having students exchange and review one another's papers during the writing process will minimize the time it takes you to grade rough drafts. See page 49 for a complete description.

Have students write in a first draft/final draft format. Then grade only the final draft.

Use focused grading. Grade for only one or two specific parts of the assignment other than content accuracy, such as an introduction that grabs the reader's atten-

tion, focus, quality of supporting details, a conclusion that summarizes the main points, rich vocabulary, strong writer's voice, or organization. At the beginning of each assignment, clearly define the criteria for assessment.

Use a portfolio system in which students keep selected samples of their work throughout the semester. After students complete several writing assignments, have them choose two or three to revise further. Thoroughly grade these writings.

Stagger due dates. To manage your paper load, stagger the due dates you set for major writing assignments across the curriculum or among your classes.

Create a basic rubric to allow students to assess their own work during the writing process. Tailor the form to reflect the criteria of particular assignments. See the example on the opposite page.

Writing Assessment Form

Name _____

Assignment _____ Date _____

	Possible Points	Student Assessment	Teacher Assessment
1. I finished my rough draft on time.			
2. I gave polite and constructive feedback in my group.			
3. I used feedback to revise and improve my rough draft.			
4. I used social studies concepts correctly.			
5. I supported my ideas with details and stayed focused on my topic.			
6. I wrote organized sentences that make sense and help my readers understand the topic.			
7. I wrote my final draft in the correct format.			
8. I finished my final draft on time.			
9. I wrote all words neatly and used space between words and sentences.			
10. I edited my rough draft for spelling, grammar, and punctuation.			
Total			

Student Comments

Teacher Comments

STEP
4

Create simple systems to make assessing student notebooks manageable.

These suggestions will help you manage the load of assessing notebooks while still giving students regular, helpful feedback:

Informal Assessment

Here are ways to assess notebooks on a regular basis, thus giving students immediate feedback and saving yourself time during formal evaluation of notebooks:

- **Glance at notebooks during class each time they are used during the first several weeks of the year.** Walk around the room as students are working, offering positive comments and helpful suggestions. This is especially important early in the year as you set expectations for notebook quality. (Remember, students do what teachers *inspect*, not what they *expect*.)
- **While students begin a new assignment, check their work from the day before.** Give students a mark (such as 0 = not done, ✓- = needs work, ✓ = average effort, and + = excellent), a sticker, or a special stamp. This helps ensure that students complete their work on time and allows you to give more immediate feedback on it.
- **Provide a model of outstanding work for a particular assignment.** Have students, in pairs, assess their own work according to the model.
- **Allow students to use their notebooks on a quiz or test.** This surprise comes as a pleasant reward to students who have thorough, accurate content information in their notebooks.

Formal Assessment

Some teachers collect and formally assess notebooks every three to four weeks; others do so less frequently. However often you decide to assess, here are some suggestions for making the process easy for you and meaningful for students:

- **At the beginning of the year, clearly explain the criteria on which notebooks will be assessed.** This may include the quality and completeness of assignments, visual appearance, neatness, and organization.
- **If you use notebooks in different content areas or with different classes, don't collect them all at once.** Stagger collection so you have only one set to grade at a time.
- **Don't feel compelled to grade every notebook entry.** Carefully assess the most important entries, and just spot-check the others.
- **Create and distribute a notebook assessment form for students to complete before they turn in their notebooks.** See the examples on pages 75 and 76. Notebook Assessment Form 1 allows you to designate which assignments will be graded. Before using this form, make sure students know the assessment criteria for the assignments. Notebook Assessment Form 2 allows for a more holistic assessment of the notebook. Tailor the forms to suit your needs.
- **Require that students do a self-assessment of their notebooks.** This enables them to reflect on their learning and to critically review their progress. Explain that if your assessment differs markedly from theirs—better or worse—they will be able to discuss with you the reasons for your assessment. Make it clear that ultimately your grade is binding.

"Kids love stamps; I use them all the time as I review Reading Notes. If I plan to assign a number grade later, I position the stamp to remind me of the quality of the work: a right-side up hedgehog means full credit; turned on his nose means I had to prompt the student; upside down means I had to give the student the answer. My kids don't seem to notice the various positions, so they don't know I am using a code system."

Notebook Assessment Form 1

Name _____

Assess yourself on each assignment listed. Also assess yourself on the organization and neatness of your notebook. Then I will make my assessment. If our assessments differ, you may politely arrange a time to meet with me to talk about the difference.

Notebook Assignment	Date Due	Possible Points	Student Assessment	Teacher Assessment
Preview: School in a Foreign Country	10/8	5	5	5
Reading Notes: Sensory Figures	10/15	20	17	18
Processing: Plymouth Real Estate Ad	10/18	20	20	20
Reading Notes: Comparing Colonies	10/26	20	18	16
Processing: "Goodbye" Letters	10/28	20	15	17
Preview: Dilemmas	10/30	5	4	4
Reading Notes: Facing Slavery	11/4	20	20	20
Organization		20	18	17
Neatness		20	15	10
Total		150	132	127

Student Comments

I think my notebook is good. My Plymouth real estate ad was my favorite. Maybe more pilgrims would have come if they saw it! I also like the slavery lesson. That's why I think those reading notes are the best.

Teacher Comments

Overall, nice work. I especially liked the real estate ad, too. You blended strong visuals with a good slogan and represented the features of Plymouth well. Suggestions for improvement: Use a little more color in your notebooks, and pay attention to neatness and spacing in your writing.

Notebook Assessment Form 2

Name _____

Assess yourself on each of the items listed. Then I will make my assessment.
If our assessments differ, you may politely arrange a time to meet with me to talk about the difference.

	Possible Points	Student Assessment	Teacher Assessment
Content			
• I completed all my assignments.	_____	_____	_____
• I gave my best effort on all assignments.	_____	_____	_____
• I used color to show key vocabulary and the most important ideas from the chapter.	_____	_____	_____
Organization			
• I did all assignments in the correct order.	_____	_____	_____
• I labeled all assignments correctly.	_____	_____	_____
• I cut and pasted material correctly.	_____	_____	_____
Neatness			
• My writing is easy to read.	_____	_____	_____
• My notebook is colorful.	_____	_____	_____
• My pages are not wrinkled.	_____	_____	_____
Total	_____	_____	_____

Student Comments

Teacher Comments

Use end-of-lesson tests to assess comprehension of key social studies concepts.

At the end of a topic of study and as the last part of the assessment process, students should be given a culminating test that allows them to demonstrate, in a variety of ways, what they have learned. The test should not, however, follow the form of traditional tests in which students respond to questions that demand only simple recall of basic facts. Instead, end-of-lesson tests should include different types of questions and

- Tap more than just linguistic intelligence. Since traditional tests in social studies are purely linguistic, an effective test should also tap other intelligences, such as visual-spatial, logical-mathematical, intrapersonal, and musical-rhythmic.
- Blend closed- and open-ended questions.
- Require students to do some form of writing.
- Measure reading comprehension in the content area.
- Contain elements found on standardized tests—like multiple-choice questions—so that students are confident when they encounter them.

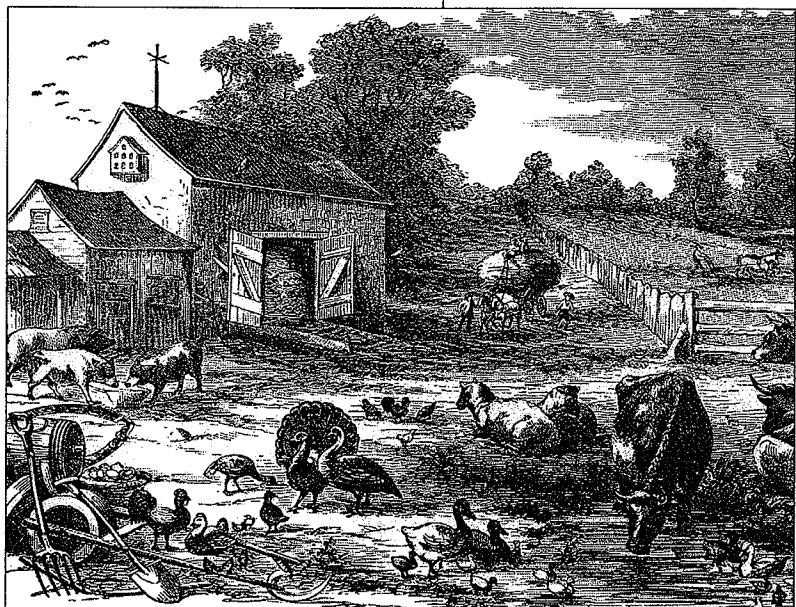
Here, then, are different types of questions from an upper-elementary *Social Studies Alive!* end-of-unit assessment that concludes a study of agricultural changes in the Midwest. Though the questions represent only a portion of the test, notice how they collectively meet the aforementioned criteria.

Multiple Choice

6. What is as true of farming today as it was in 1800?
- Most farmers want to be self-sufficient.
 - Running a farm is a lot of hard work.
 - Most farmers make a lot of money.
 - The average farm is about 50 acres.

Visual Analysis

7. What does the illustration show?
- a Midwest farm in about 1700
 - a Midwest farm in about 1800
 - a Midwest farm in about 1900
 - a Midwest farm in about 2000
9. The family living on this farm
- worked hard to be self-sufficient.
 - used fertilizers to improve their crops.
 - grew enough food to feed 75 people.
 - raised large herds of cattle to sell.



“These formal assessments really prepare children for standardized testing. Having been assessed along the way, when they reach this formal test, they usually smirk a little during the multiple-choice portion. ‘Is this the test?’ they ask. They have learned so much in the unit that they complete this section quickly so they can get to the multiple-intelligence part of the test. They are truly unstressed about taking tests!”

“The bulleted points in the Applying New Learning assignments tell students exactly what is required and make it easy for me to quickly evaluate whether a student has included the necessary elements. I have this format as a model for writing my own assignments.”

Reading in the Content Area

10. Between 1800 and 1920, the number of farms in the United States
- A. increased year by year.
 - B. stayed about the same.
 - C. reached 10 million.
 - D. fell to under a million.
12. Why do most farm families give up farming?
- A. They are no longer able to be self-sufficient.
 - B. They don't have enough land to make a good living.
 - C. They want their children to grow up in cities.
 - D. They can't make enough money to pay their bills.

Applying New Learning

13. Think about what you have learned about farming in 1800, 1900, and today. Choose one time period. Invent a tool or machine that might have helped farmers and their families at that time. Draw and label your invention, and write a description of it that explains
- what it is called
 - how it would be used
 - why it would be used

Most unique among the types of questions on *Social Studies Alive!* assessments, Applying New Learning items tap different intelligences and allow students to show what they know in creative ways and in varied formats. Four more examples are given here.

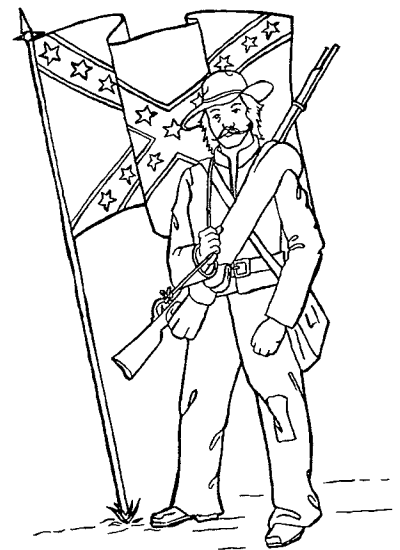
Writing Lyrics to a Civil War Song

During their spare time, Civil War soldiers often rewrote the words (lyrics) to well-known songs of the period to describe some aspect of their experience. Pretend you are a Civil War soldier, and do the following:

- Think of a well-known song with a simple tune that most of the other “soldiers” in class know (for example, “Old McDonald Had a Farm”).
- Write new words to the song. The lyrics should describe one aspect of the soldiers’ experience that you read about in this chapter (like combat conditions or medical care).
- Your new song should include at least three interesting or important facts about the aspect you choose.
- Create an appropriate title for your song.

Example: “A Confederate Soldier’s Daily Rations”
sung to the tune of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”:

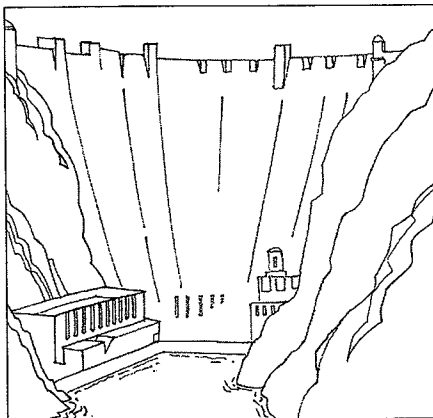
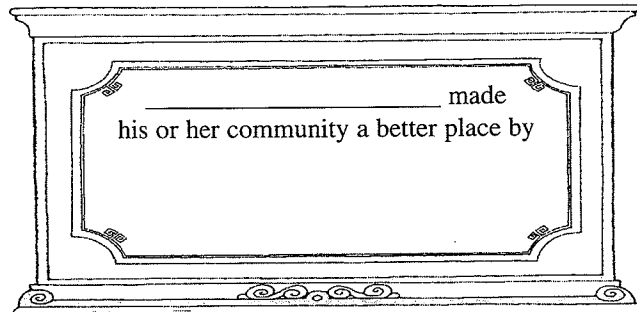
*Pick-, pick-, pickled meat
Hard tack, chicory;
this is what I get to eat,
If I'm luck-, lucky.*



Writing About Someone Who Made a Difference

Select one of the people you learned about in this chapter. Create a statue for that person by following these steps:

- In the space at right, draw a statue that represents how that person made his or her community a better place to live. Your statue must include that person and at least one other figure.
- On the plaque below the statue, write the person's name. Then complete the plaque by explaining what that person did to make his or her community a better place.



Writing a Letter About the Southwest

Write a letter to a friend describing how the Southwest would be different today if dams had never been invented. Include these topics in your letter:

- How the geography of the Southwest would be different
- How the lives of people in the Southwest would be different
- How animals and the environment of the Southwest would be different

Add drawings to your letter if you wish.

Designing a Billboard About the Southeast

Design a billboard encouraging people to settle in the Southeast. Your billboard should include the following:

- At least four colorful symbols or simple drawings to represent characteristics of the region. Pick the characteristics that would most likely encourage people to settle in the Southeast.
- A short caption (two to five words) for each symbol or drawing that explains what the drawing or symbol means.
- A short, clever slogan that will help people remember why they should settle in the Southeast.

