

Studies Weekly Virginia

High Quality Instructional Materials



Studies Weekly and Virginia's High-Quality Instructional Materials Requirements

When Virginia adopted House Bill 2777, it was signaling its commitment to High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM). It said that HQIM are the foundation for both teaching and learning. But HQIM can have a lot of definitions. Virginia defines it using five points:

1. The content must align to state standards
2. Instructional materials must be evidence-based
3. Assessment is required
4. The curriculum must support all learners
5. The material must include teacher resources and professional learning support

Alignment to Virginia Standards

Virginia's state standards are the result of thousands of hours of work done by researchers and teachers across the state. The standards are designed to build on one another so that students are provided with a clear, supported pathway to subject mastery.

Before beginning on its custom-built curriculum for Virginia, members of Studies Weekly's staff not only mastered the standards, but traveled throughout Virginia, talking with teachers and administrators about the nuances of how they want the standards to be covered. As a result, Studies Weekly's social studies curriculum covers 100% of the state standards with attention to local detail. We are pleased to provide documentation on standards alignment to support curriculum review and adoption processes.

Coherent and Comprehensive Curriculum

Virginia understands that HQIM need to be in a school's foundational curriculum. Tacking HQIM on as a supplement does a disservice to both students and teachers. This is the reason Studies Weekly has built a comprehensive social studies curriculum that covers all bases, and then some.

UNIT 2
WEEK 4
Virginia's Waterways

An Introduction to Virginia's Waterways

Water is very important to Virginia. It's a part of Virginia's geography, history, and culture. Rivers flow through every region of the state. Some are small. Others are large and stretch for hundreds of miles. All of Virginia's rivers are important. They provide fresh water for drinking, help farmers grow crops, and support wildlife. In addition to rivers, Virginia has many other bodies of water. These include lakes, ponds, and streams.

Virginia has four major rivers that flow into the Chesapeake Bay: the James, York, Potomac, and Rappahannock Rivers. Major cities have developed along these rivers at the Fall Line. The Fall Line is an area where the land suddenly flattens. This imaginary line marks the border between the Piedmont and Coastal Plain (Tidewater) regions.

The four major river systems are separated by peninsulas as they flow into the Chesapeake Bay. A **peninsula** is a piece of land bordered by water on three sides. The Eastern Shore lies off the coast of Virginia. The Eastern Shore Peninsula is bordered by Chesapeake Bay to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. The Chesapeake Bay separates the Eastern Shore from Virginia's mainland. Water from the Chesapeake Bay flows into the Atlantic Ocean. For hundreds of years, the Atlantic Ocean has provided a way for ships to travel to and from other parts of the world. Virginia's waterways also brought people from other countries and continents to the region. Rivers allowed people to move and settle across the state.

Chesapeake Bay
Potomac River at Great Falls Park
James River
Rappahannock River
York River
Virginia State Parks staff via Wikimedia Commons

WEEKLY QUESTION
How have Virginia's waterways impacted its history, economy, and culture?

Students read an engaging student edition that is supported by additional media resources online. Teachers have a curated suite of materials, including lesson plans, slide decks, assessment tools, and more

Chesapeake Bay

Discussion Questions

How has the Chesapeake Bay impacted the history of Virginia?

How has the Chesapeake Bay impacted the economy of Virginia?

How has the Chesapeake Bay impacted the culture of Virginia?

Studies Weekly

For example, our curriculum also integrates inquiry methods, literacy development, multi-modal assessments, and student engagement. We support students as they build historical, economic, and geographical understanding while also developing critical thinking and disciplinary literacy skills.

Evidence-based Instructional Practices

Virginia wants its students to have the best educational opportunities through evidence-based instructional practices. Studies Weekly begins with the research of Wexler (2019, 2024) who shows the importance of background knowledge as an essential step in preparing students to comprehend new texts. Thus, the Teacher's Edition for each week of Studies Weekly includes background knowledge — not just for the students but for the teacher as well. This knowledge is deployed through text, video, audio, and images.

Studies Weekly also uses the C3 Framework (NCSS, 2013; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Swan, Lee, & Grant, 2018) to help students learn the discipline of social studies. Learning a discipline doesn't mean just reading articles. It means beginning with compelling questions, analyzing primary and secondary sources, engaging in evidence-based discussion, comparing perspectives, and writing down conclusions. Opportunities to source, contextualize, corroborate, and interpret historical evidence further develop the historical reasoning identified by Wineburg (2001) as central to learning history.

But we don't stop there. Studies Weekly focuses on effective classroom practices as promoted by Fisher, Frey, and Hattie. For example, using clear learning intentions, explicit modeling and scaffolding, guided and independent practice, formative assessment, feedback, and gradual release of responsibility (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2020, 2022; Hattie, 2009, 2023). Together, these features meet Virginia's expectation that HQIM include evidence-based instructional practices, meaningful assessment of student mastery, support for varied

learner needs, and resources that help educators implement effective instruction successfully (Virginia General Assembly, 2025; Virginia Department of Education, 2026).

Assessments

But how do we know that students have learned the standards? Studies Weekly provides both formative and summative assessments. Formative assessments give teachers the opportunity for data triangulation and frequent check-ins with their students' progress. Thus, they can identify misconceptions early and adjust instruction. Summative assessments provide evidence of students' cumulative understanding of content and standards.

But assessment extends beyond traditional selected-response measures. Studies Weekly offers Apply What You Learned choice boards, which provide alternative assessment opportunities. In these, students can exercise voice and choice while demonstrating their understanding through multiple modalities, allowing students to communicate their learning in different ways. Performance tasks provide additional opportunities for students to integrate and apply standards in authentic or complex contexts, demonstrating not just learning, but higher-order thinking.

Performance Task: Unit 2 Performance Task (Pacing: 45 minutes)

Objective: Students will be able to identify significant geographic features in Virginia.

Standards:

VS.1 The student will apply history and social science skills to explain the relationship between physical geography and the lives of Virginia's peoples, past and present by:
VS.1a locating Virginia and its bordering states on maps of the United States and North America;
VS.1b locating and describing the relative location and physical characteristics of Virginia's five geographic regions on a map; and
VS.1c, locating, identifying, and describing the impact of Virginia's bodies of water on its history, economy, and culture.

Teacher Instructions:

1. No reteach is needed.
2. Pass out blank paper or map outlines to students.
3. Tell students that they will be drawing a map of Virginia and its geographic features.
4. **Differentiation:** You could also provide an outline map of Virginia for students who need it.
5. Review requirements by discussing the rubric.

Materials Needed:

Paper or outline maps of Virginia
Colored pencils

Performance tasks allow for qualitative data collection

Studies Weekly also supports teachers in understanding and using their assessment data. They can use assessment maps to identify the standards aligned to individual questions and the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) associated with each item. This way, the teacher can evaluate not only what is being assessed but also the level of cognitive demand. Within Studies Weekly's online platform, standards-based reporting provides visibility into student performance by standard, enabling teachers to identify patterns of strength and need at the student and class levels.

Assessment Map	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Skills VS								
The student will apply history and social science skills to the content by:								
a. analyzing and interpreting information sources including, but not limited to artifacts, primary and secondary sources, charts, graphs, and diagrams				x				
b. applying geographic skills to identify and understand geographic features and connections	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
c. developing questions, enhancing curiosity, and engaging in critical thinking and analysis			x					
f. identifying cause-and-effect relationships to clarify and explain content						x		
i. developing products that reflect an understanding of content						x		
Standard(s)								
VS.1 The student will apply history and social science skills to explain the relationship between physical geography and the lives of Virginia's peoples, past and present by:	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
VS.1a locating Virginia and its bordering states on maps of the United States and North America;					x	x	x	x
Depth of Knowledge	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	2

Example of an assessment map

Supporting Diverse Learners and Educators

Virginia’s legislation highlights the importance of meeting the needs of all learners, including English learners, students with disabilities, students requiring intervention, and students ready for enrichment. Studies Weekly provides differentiated instructional support, scaffolded reading opportunities, and multiple access points to content that helps teachers meet diverse classroom needs.

The program also includes teacher resources, lesson guidance, and professional learning support that aligns with Virginia’s expectation that HQIM build educator capacity and strengthen implementation.

Assessment Rubric:					
Rubric for Mapping Virginia					
Skills	4 Advanced: Exceeds Expectations	3 Competent: Meets Expectations	2 Progressing: Partially Meets Expectations	1 Beginning: Does Not Meet Expectations	Score
Bodies of water	Student drew each river blue in the correct location and labeled the five major bodies of water in Virginia (James River, York River, Rappahannock River, Potomac River, Chesapeake Bay).	Student drew most (3–4) rivers blue in the correct locations and labeled 3–4 major bodies of water in Virginia (James River, York River, Rappahannock River, Potomac River, Chesapeake Bay).	Student drew some (two) rivers blue in the correct location and labeled two major bodies of water in Virginia (James River, York River, Rappahannock River, Potomac River, Chesapeake Bay).	Student drew or labeled one river blue in the correct location or labeled one major body of water in Virginia (James River, York River, Rappahannock River, Potomac River, Chesapeake Bay).	
Border states	Student labeled the locations of all states that border Virginia (Maryland, Tennessee, West Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina).	Student labeled the locations of most (4–5) states that border Virginia (Maryland, Tennessee, West Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina).	Student labeled the locations of some (2–3) states that border Virginia (Maryland, Tennessee, West Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina).	Student labeled the location of one state that borders Virginia (Maryland, Tennessee, West Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina).	
Regions	Student drew, colored, and labeled each of the five regions in Virginia: Appalachian Plateau (green); Valley and Ridge (yellow); Blue Ridge Mountains (blue); Piedmont (orange); Coastal Plain (Tidewater) (red).	Student drew, colored, and labeled most (3–4) of the five regions in Virginia: Appalachian Plateau (green); Valley and Ridge (yellow); Blue Ridge Mountains (blue); Piedmont (orange); Coastal Plain (Tidewater) (red).	Student drew, colored, and labeled some (two) of the five regions in Virginia: Appalachian Plateau (green); Valley and Ridge (yellow); Blue Ridge Mountains (blue); Piedmont (orange); Coastal Plain (Tidewater) (red).	Student drew, colored, and labeled one of the five regions in Virginia: Appalachian Plateau (green); Valley and Ridge (yellow); Blue Ridge Mountains (blue); Piedmont (orange); Coastal Plain (Tidewater) (red).	
Cities	Student identified the following major cities with a black dot and a label: Richmond, Fredericksburg, Norfolk, Alexandria, Jamestown.	Student identified most (3–4) of the following major cities with a black dot and a label: Richmond, Fredericksburg, Norfolk, Alexandria, Jamestown.	Student identified some (two) of the following major cities with a black dot and a label: Richmond, Fredericksburg, Norfolk, Alexandria, Jamestown.	Student identified one of the following major cities with a black dot and a label: Richmond, Fredericksburg, Norfolk, Alexandria, Jamestown.	
Total score:					

As Virginia districts prepare for HQIM implementation, Studies Weekly offers a standards-aligned, content-rich social studies solution that supports curriculum coherence, student engagement, differentiated instruction, and teacher success. These characteristics align with Virginia’s vision for High-Quality Instructional Materials and provide all the tools districts need to meet both instructional goals and state expectations.

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