

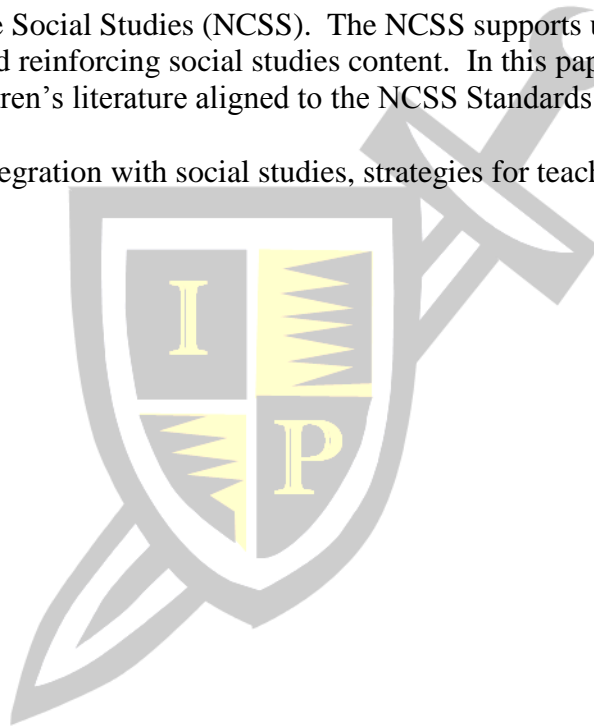
Linking children’s literature with social studies in the elementary curriculum

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ABSTRACT

The author shares information related to integrating quality literature written for children into the teaching of social studies at the elementary school level. Research within the past decade informs educators of the strong impact of curriculum standards for the social studies as developed by professional organizations. Teachers today are expected to teach the social studies content defined by these standards. The most noted standards are those developed by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). The NCSS supports using of children’s literature in teaching and reinforcing social studies content. In this paper, instructional methods for sharing quality children’s literature aligned to the NCSS Standards will be explored.

Keywords: literature integration with social studies, strategies for teaching social studies with literature



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WHAT IS SOCIAL STUDIES?

Although Social Studies has been part of the elementary school curriculum for decades, it is not an easy subject to describe. George Maxim (2010) defined social studies as a label for a school subject that brings together the social sciences in a coordinated, systematic fashion to help young people become citizens in a culturally diverse, democratic society. Social studies is multifaceted and can be broadly defined as those parts of the curriculum derived from history and the social science disciplines of geography, economics, political science, sociology, and anthropology.

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES

The leading national professional organization dedicated to the teaching of social studies is the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). The mission of the NCSS is to provide leadership, service, and support for all social studies educators. It is the largest association in the country devoted solely to social studies education. The NCSS (1997) defined social studies as "the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence." Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study of the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science and civics, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences.

In 2010, the NCSS revised their original standards and published *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment*. The revised standards, structured around the ten themes of social studies, recommend a sharper focus on purposes, questions for exploration, knowledge (what learners need to understand), processes (what learners will be capable of doing), and products (how learners demonstrate understanding) (National Council for the Social Studies 2010). Social studies decision makers in K-12 schools can use the NCSS standards to develop and promote an integrated social science, behavioral science, and humanities approach for achieving academic and civic competence with their students.

The ten (10) themes of the NCSS framework incorporate fields of study that correspond with one or more relevant disciplines. The organization believes that effective social studies programs include experiences that provide for the study of:

Culture – This theme focuses on the fact that humans create culture as a way of making sense of their social and physical worlds. The theme has a strong relationship to anthropology.

Time, Continuity, and Change – This theme helps students understand that change is inevitable, although there is some continuity and the past does influence the present.

People, Places, and Environments – This theme helps students understand that people live in varied environments. Uniqueness of place is reflected in the interaction between people and the environments in which they live. This primarily geographic theme relates to concepts such as location and spatial interaction.

Individual Development and Identity – This theme focuses on the importance of individual development and the relationship of individuals to others that inhabit their social world. This theme helps individuals consider how their own identity was formed and how it influences their outlooks and values. This theme is drawn from social psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

Individuals, Groups, and Institutions – This theme helps students understand that humans are social beings that seek membership in groups. They create social institutions to help them meet needs. Institutions and groups strongly influence their norms, values, and behavioral expectations. This theme is related primarily to sociology.

Power, Authority, and Governance – This theme is central to the development of civic competence. Studies in this theme deal with power and addresses how it acquired, by whom, and how it is used. This theme is drawn primarily from political science and civics.

Production, Distribution, and Consumption – This theme is primarily related to economics. It helps students understand concepts such as wants, needs, scarcity, human resources, capital resources, and opportunity costs.

Science, Technology, and Society – This theme helps students understand the great influence that science and technology exert on social and cultural change. To reach educated conclusions and make informed predictions about the future, students need a strong understanding of the influence of science and technology. This interdisciplinary theme covers nearly all of the social science disciplines including history, geography, economics, sociology, and anthropology.

Global Connections – This theme helps students understand that improvements in technology and transportation have increased the interconnectedness of the entire world. Events that happen in one part of the world influence all of us. Students need to understand that decisions made as citizens will have global consequences. This theme also crosses all disciplines.

Civic Ideals and Practices – This theme encompasses one of the major responsibilities of the social studies. The function of this theme is to stress the need to develop civic competence. This theme has a direct relationship to political science, civics, and history.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INCORPORATING LITERATURE INTO THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

Children's literature is often an unexplored option in the social studies curriculum; it is acknowledged in the research that good books have the potential to allow children to make personal connections to the topic being studied. Information found within the pages of a good book be it fiction or nonfiction can transport readers/listeners to another time place, or situation. Social studies learning can be enhanced in the curriculum through using and discussing carefully selected literature.

In their book, *The Power of Picture Books in Teaching Math, Science, and Social Studies*, Columba, Kim, and Moe (2009) discussed the importance of using literature in content area instruction. Children's books can provide authentic chances for readers or listeners to find themselves in the characters they meet and the situations that unfold before them. Carefully selected quality literature has the ability to elicit unique emotions and responses to stories from children and to transport them into a different time or place. They believe social studies concepts can be learned through the interaction between what the students bring with them to the reading knowledge-wise and what they learn by reading and discussing the stories and information in trade books. The teacher's role in using literature in the social studies classroom, according to Columba, Kim, and Moe is to be a facilitator who determines what and how to teach in a climate of cooperation and sharing.

Shiveley (2003) found that in recent years teachers and school districts have initiated using children's literature as the primary, or in some cases, the only resource in teaching social studies content. He supported this statement citing that more and better children's books have been published that address the themes in the social studies in a relevant meaningful manner. Teachers have abundant resources from which to select in creating social studies lessons based on quality children's books.

Krey (1998) summarized the benefits of using trade books in the teaching of the social studies citing that trade books:

1. expand a child's knowledge of human events,
2. give children an insider's view to the emotions of a human event,
3. offer a more holistic view of events that than the survey-type perspective often found social studies textbooks,
4. offer a better balance between the facts of an event and the human characteristics of the individuals involved;
5. provide students with the chance to relate to characters in our world both past and present and to connect current and historical events their own personal experiences.

INTEGRATING SOCIAL STUDIES WITH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Complex vocabulary, unfamiliar writing styles and organization, topics with which students have had little experience, and abstract concepts can make textbooks dealing with social studies concepts especially challenging for students to read. One solution to this situation is to use trade books in the classrooms to supplement the assigned text. Quality children's literature can provide the depth and coverage missing in the core textbook. Proponents of literature-based social studies instruction suggest that the use of trade books in the classroom provides the extra detail to allow students to expand upon the content as presented in most textbooks (McClure & Zitlow, 1991). As social studies concepts are taught within the context of literature, students realize that social studies is a real and interesting part of the world around them (Day, H.R., Flotz, M., Hayse, K., Marksberry, C. Sturgeon, M. Reed, S., 2002). Trade books can help children visualize the past, make significant associations among past and present events, and help develop a more comprehensive understanding of critical social issues (Shiveley, 2003). Writers of trade books have more flexibility than textbook writers. They can bring to the pages of their books richness of background, originality of style, and creativity that is often missing in textbooks (Gunning, 2012).

Since students and teachers enjoy stories, using literature is a very motivational teaching technique. When using trade books, teachers are challenged to develop activities that are interactive, reflecting the belief that students learn best through active, highly personalized experiences with social studies content. The goal of instruction should be to help students make connections to real-world situations depicted in trade book (Flowers, B.J., Kugler, P., Meszaros, B.T., Stiles, L., & Suiter, M.C., 2005). Van Fossen (2003) recommends using stories in trade books to examine the impact of social studies on the lives and actions of people, families, groups and nations.

LOCATING RESOURCES AND TRADEBOOKS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL INTEGRATION

The NCSS standards as well as the goals and curriculum suggested in most state and district frameworks, encourage teachers to access, utilize, and adapt a variety of strategies to provide meaningful instruction that enhances student comprehension of the social studies. According to Risinger (1992), student interest is heightened when quality, appropriate literature is used as an integral component of the social studies program. He stated that carefully selected literature can make periods come to life and provide a flavor of the thoughts and feelings surrounding an event.

Crabtree (1989) addressed the power of folktales, myths, biographies and historical narratives to capture children's imaginations. She claimed that immersing children in literature written about the recent past or events from eons ago allows them to become participants in the historic events. They can become involved in the daily lives of historical figures or go through the process of being an entrepreneur and starting a new business. They can learn how ancient peoples grew to understand their worlds using mythology to explain natural phenomena.

Shiveley (2003) makes a very good point in stating that although a strong case has been made in both books and articles about the value of using children's literature to teach social studies, the success of such an approach rests on the shoulders of the classroom teacher. The teacher must take the initiative and exert the effort to research, access, gather, and sort the best books from the thousands of available choices. The teacher must then align the selected books to the social studies standards required in the state or local curriculum.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has a long standing commitment to the use of children's literature and to providing resources to teachers. Each year they publish the annual annotated listing of "Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People." The books found in this document are reviewed and selected by a committee of Social Studies and literature experts. The books are published in the preceding year and are appropriate for K-12 grade learners. The books are arranged according to the thematic strands of the NCSS. The books on the list represent quality literature selected specifically to connect with each of the ten NCSS themes across grade levels. This document, found on the NCSS website (www.ncss.org) can help teachers align children's literature to the national standards. A number of publications related to integrating literature into the social studies are available through the website.

Additionally, several resources are available to teachers who are interested in incorporating children's literature into social studies education at the elementary grade level:

1. The Classroom Mini Economy by Harlan Day and David Ballard,
2. Teaching Economics using Children's Literature by Harlan Day, Maryann Flotz, Kathy Hayse, Callie Marksberry, Mary Sturgeon, and Suellen Reed,
3. Social Studies through Children's Literature by Anthony Fredericks,
4. More Social Studies through Children's Literature by Anthony Fredericks,
5. Much More Social Studies through Children's Literature: A Collaborative Approach by Anthony Fredericks,
6. Social Studies Instruction Incorporating the Language Arts by Joy Anne Hauge Morin,
7. The Power of Picture Books in Teaching Math, Science, and Social Studies by Lynn Columba, Cathy Kim, and Alden Moe,

8. Linking Literature with Life: The NCSS Standards and Children's Literature for the Middle Grades by Alexa L. Sandmann and John F. Ahern,
9. U.S. History Through Children's Literature by Wanda J. Miller,
10. Reading Strategy Lessons for Science and Social Studies: 15 Research-Based Strategy Lessons That Help Students Read and Learn from Content-Area Texts by Laura Robb,
11. Teaching Reading in Social Studies, Science, and Math by Laura Robb,
12. Building Literacy in Social Studies: Strategies for Improving Comprehension and Critical Thinking by Donna Ogle,
13. Children's Literature in Social Studies: Teaching to the Standards by DeAn M. Krey;
14. Exploring Cultures through Literature by Barbara Stoodt.

IDEAS FOR TRADEBOOK INTEGRATION

The strategies discussed in this paper encourage and support literature integration. The ability to understand trade books related to social studies content increases when the following three conditions are met: (1) the student is prepared to read and comprehend the material (before reading), (2) the student understands the organization of the material (during reading), and (3) the student reflects and extends understanding of the material by seeing how components of the text relate to one another (after reading).

Teachers can avoid unnecessary instruction by incorporating strategies that activate prior knowledge and determine what students already know about the topic at hand. When teachers begin a new unit by asking their students to share their ideas about the topic, students typically realize they know at least something about the topic. They find it reassuring that they do already possess some knowledge of the topic and that they are not starting from scratch.

One strategy to activate background knowledge is the use of a semantic map or web to help students realize what they know about a topic. A semantic map or web is a spider-like diagram drawn on the whiteboard, overhead, or chart paper where words or phrases related to the concepts being taught are written with student input describing what they know about the topic. The strategy is useful because it provides a visual representation of ideas, activates schema, builds background knowledge, teaches vocabulary and gives the teacher insight as to what the students know about a given subject. The steps in constructing a semantic map are as follows:

1. The teacher will select an important word or topic related to the social studies concept found in the trade book. The topic, for example, could be "slavery."
2. The teacher will write the topic (slavery) in the center of the board, chart, or overhead projector and will draw a circle around the word.
3. The teacher will ask the students to write as many related words they can think of from their own experiences or readings either independently or in small groups.
4. Students will share their words with the teacher who records them by placing them around the topic word using a line to connect the shared words with the topic word.
5. As student words are shared, categories will emerge. The teacher will place the suggested shared words into groups and ask the students to create names for the categories.

An effective pre-reading strategy that requires students to take a stand on a given concept is an anticipation guide. An anticipation guide is a set of statements, typically five to eight, which asks students to agree or disagree by marking in the appropriate spaces. Anticipation

guides work best with information that allows for at least some of the statements to be open ended versus factual statements with right or wrong answers.

The KWL (Ogle, 2007) strategy, a before, during, and after reading activity, engages students in creating meaning from the text as they develop background knowledge, take ownership of the reading, and then organize the material after the reading takes place. In the acronym KWL, K stands for the knowledge already possessed by the students about the topic before the reading begins; W represents what they want to learn during the reading of the material; and L stands for what they learned as a result of the reading. The teacher presents the student with a three column chart, K is in the first column, W is in the second, and L is in the last. The teacher asks students what they know about the topic of study and records their answer in the K column. Afterwards, the teacher and students brainstorm what they would like to learn about the topic in the W Column. The post reading component consists of students sharing what they learned in the L column. Through the KWL strategy, students build background and activate prior knowledge through brainstorming, asking questions about areas to investigate further, summarizing what they have learned, and determining what they need to extend their learning. The strategy, at least initially, is teacher directed.

The Quick Write (Moore, Moore, Cunningham, & Cunningham, 2003) is an informal pre-reading strategy which engages students by asking them to write what they know about a topic in a specified amount of time, usually 5 minutes or less. The strategy provides the teacher with an informal diagnosis of what students know about a topic when shared prior to beginning a unit of study. The teacher begins by developing a writing prompt related to the topic, such as, the Middle Ages, for example:

1. The teacher will direct the class by stating the following: “Before we begin our unit on the Middle Ages, write down everything you know about this topic. You have one minute.”
2. Another possible prompt for a specific lesson taught during the unit may include: “We are learning about feudalism today. In 30 seconds, write what you know about feudalism and its effect on Europe during the Middle Ages.”

Quick Writes engage students immediately and can be a catalyst for further class discussions. Through initial sharing the teacher can discern misconceptions and address them during the upcoming lesson, thus increasing the effectiveness of student learning.

Cubing (Tompkins, 2003) is a writing strategy which can be used in either a whole group or small group setting. The teacher facilitates student writing about a given topic from various dimensions by providing the concrete visual of a cube (can be plastic/wood, paper) on which each surface contains a directive for exploring the topic. The concrete visual acts as a starting point to help the students consider the multiple dimensions of the content area classroom topic. The teacher should model how to complete a cubing exercise with the entire class. Once the students understand how cubing works they can engage in this strategy in small groups and individually in an independent manner.

Steps for Cubing

1. The teacher will introduce the topic to be cubed on the board (e.g., the rainforest)

2. Students will be placed in small groups and will examine the topic (rainforests in this example) from six sides of the cube. The teacher will have a tangible cube with each of the six components written on its corresponding cube face:
 - *Describe it* (including its colors, shapes, and sizes, if applicable)
 - *Compare it* (what is it similar to or different from?)
 - *Associate it* (what does it make you think of?)
 - *Analyze it* (tell how it is made or what it is composed of)
 - *Apply it* (what can you do with it? how is it used?)
 - *Argue for or against it* (take a stand and list reasons for supporting it)
3. The teacher will hold up the cube and read one of the cube faces to the students. In their groups the students will discuss how to respond to the cubing prompt. Students record their response.
4. The teacher will read the second cube face, students will discuss and record their answer to the prompt; this continues until all six parts of the cube have been read and discussed. Students should spend approximately 5 minutes on each side of the cube.
5. The students will share their cubing responses with the entire class.
6. Bean, Readence, and Baldwin (2011) recommend students begin by using the six sides of the cube to compose descriptive paragraphs. This type of writing can be a precursor to longer writing assignments including persuasive essays, letters to the editor, and extended reports.

Understanding how information in a trade book is organized makes a difference in the ability to comprehend. Text frames (Sandmann & Ahern, 2002) can help students visualize information around a cause and effect format. With a text frame (a table with two columns; the left side labeled cause, the right side labeled effect) the teacher asks the students to read a section of the book that is written in a cause and effect format. The teacher asks the students to complete the time frame that explains the relationship by first filling in the cause and then filling in the effect.

Sketch-to-stretch is a visual activity that helps students meaningfully reflect about the characters, theme, setting, events, and other elements of material they are reading. In small groups, students create charts and illustrations to symbolize what the narrative or information text means to them. Students are instructed to incorporate shapes, lines, symbols, colors, and words in their sketches to express their perceptions of the text. Working in a social setting with the support of their peers allows students to communicate freely, to share ideas, and to extend their understanding and generate new insights (Tompkins, 2013).

Verbal and visual word association (Bean, Readence, & Baldwin, 2011) is an independent study strategy which helps students learn and remember specialized vocabulary from their readings.

The steps in the strategy are as follows:

1. During the independent reading of a text from the text set the student is to identify words he/she does not know by using a post-it note and writing the word on the post-it and adhering it to the page in which the unfamiliar word is found. This step can be modified by having the teacher identify words within the reading for students to work on using this strategy.

2. Once the word is identified, the student will draw a square and divide it into four parts as illustrated in Table 1.
3. The student writes the unfamiliar word in the box in the upper left side of the square. For instance in the trade book, *Doomed Queen Anne* by Carolyn Meyer, the word (unfamiliar to the student) “ardent” is found in Chapter 9.
4. The student then writes the definition of the unfamiliar word in the box on the lower left side of the square.
5. In the top right hand side of the square the student is to write a personal association or connection he/she can make with the word.
6. In the bottom right hand side of the square the student writes a personal connection which is the opposite in meaning of the unfamiliar word. In this example the Verbal and Visual Word Association square is found in Table 2.

This versatile vocabulary development strategy can be used in Book Clubs, Literature Circles, and in both large and small group instruction.

The Directed-Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) (Bean, Readence, & Baldwin, 2011) is a reading activity which works well with expository texts, such as nonfiction information literature. Students are initially directed by the teacher to preview the text, noting chapter headings, subheadings, charts, graphs and illustrations. Students use this information to formulate questions about the reading. With practice, this strategy becomes automatic and leads to the self-questioning of contextual materials which establishes purposes for reading.

The steps in the DRTA are as follows:

1. Before students read the text, the teacher will ask them to survey a given chapter by reading the title, headings, subheadings, and graphics. This survey of the material forms the basis for pre-reading questions. For instance in the trade book, *Food and Feasts in the Middle Ages* by Lynne Elliott, an illustrated information text, students can preview Chapter 20, *Cooking in the Castle*, by identifying the subheadings of:
 - a. In the Kitchen
 - b. Worktables
 - c. The bakehouse
 - d. Storerooms

They then turn the headings into questions, such as, What can be found in the kitchen of a medieval castle? Who works in the kitchen of the medieval castle? What are work tables? How are they organized? Is the bakehouse attached to the kitchen? How is food kept fresh in the storerooms?

2. Students are asked to write the questions they have generated based on the survey. The questions can be entered in the student’s journal or can be dictated to the teacher who writes them on the board/overhead.
3. The teacher will direct a class discussion of the questions, emphasizing the importance and value of personal purpose setting in the reading process. At this point the teacher can interject a question or two he/she feels needs to be addressed if it was not mentioned by the students.
4. The students will then read the material focused on finding answers to the questions generated. Afterwards the class will discuss the answers to the questions either as a whole or in small groups.

5. Next, in small groups the students will discuss questions the chapter did not answer about the topic and share these questions with the class. The teacher will help the students explore other sources which could supply the answers to the student generated questions.

The DRTA reading comprehension strategy is relatively easy to employ in the content area classroom and has been proven to actively engage students and increase their interests in reading for their self-selected purposes.

Body biographies (Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-Allen, 1998) is a post reading strategy which involves creating a multimedia interpretation of a character in a trade book. Once completed, the "bodies" can be displayed around the classroom and discussed in a gallery walk where small groups of students explain their illustrations. Literature related to the topic of the Renaissance which can be used in this strategy include:

- Carlson, L. (1998). *Days of knights and damsels: An activity guide*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.
- Conklin, W. (2005). *Mysteries of history: Ancient history grades 5-8*. Westminster, CA: Teacher Created Press.
- Green, R.L. (1953). *King Arthur and his knights of the round table*. New York: Puffin Books.
- San Souci, R.D. (1997). *Young Arthur*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books for Young Readers.

The steps are as follows:

1. In small groups, the students trace around one group member as he/she lies on a long sheet of butcher paper.
2. After hearing the read aloud, *Young Arthur* by Robert San Souci and reading other stories of King Arthur, the students will fill the outline of the body in with artistic representations of the king's traits, relationships, motivations, and experiences. These can be drawings, clip art, or other multimedia. The body biography should include relevant quotations and original text about Arthur. The following details are important to consider in the development of a well-designed body biography and are included on a rubric for grading small group work:
 - Placement of the art is important (for instance, Arthur's heart could feature significant relationships),
 - The body biography should help an audience visualize Arthur's virtues and vices,
 - The effective use of color should help symbolize Arthur's personality,
 - The effective use of symbols and objects should help capture Arthur's various dimensions,
 - Poetry can be used to portray various dimensions of King Arthur,
 - Portray contrasting views of Arthur (for instance, self-view versus how others perceive Arthur);
 - If Arthur changes based on the readings, use text (written words) and artwork to show this transformation.

Completing the body biography offers a creative means for students to explore the complex and often contradictory elements of characters in trade books.

The ReWrite (Bean, 1997) strategy brings musical creativity into the unit. This ReWrite could be part of a culminating lesson about the Civil War. ReWrite incorporates music into the content area classroom by following the steps listed below:

Day One

The teacher will begin by asking students in small groups to generate a group semantic map of what they have learned about the Civil War. With student input the teacher will construct a classroom map on the whiteboard incorporating the ideas from each of the small groups. The information contained in the class map provides the lyrics for the ReWrite song the students will compose and perform. Students are directed to copy the completed map and to use the information to begin developing their group rap.

Day Two

The teacher will ask students to create a “Civil War Rap” with their small group members using music as a backdrop. In groups students will use the internet/other media source to complete this task.

Day Three

The students will perform the rap in class. The teacher will use a performance assessment rubric to provide group members with feedback on their work.

CONCLUSION

Teachers have the opportunity to introduce their students to a wide variety of children’s literature, both fiction and informational texts that can build knowledge, competencies, and skills in the social studies. The strategies shared can be used with books across the strands or themes identified by the NCSS. A large number of resource materials were identified to aid teachers in finding and developing lessons to teach social studies concepts. The suggested techniques foster student engagement, critical thinking, vocabulary development and comprehension.

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APPENDIX

Table 1

Ardent	Daily exercising
Passionate/ enthusiastic/zealous/ eager	Smoking