



Problem and Solution: Grades 3–5

OVERVIEW:

Social studies instruction is about more than memorizing facts and dates. It is about using information from the past to guide our future. As outlined in the C3 framework, social studies education needs to focus on helping students recognize societal problems, work through investigations of possible solutions and consequences, and learn to take action. The following mini-lessons are designed to introduce students to the process of using content knowledge to recognize problems and work toward solutions as they strive to improve their communities, both locally and globally.

Mini-Lesson I

Problems and Solutions in History (20 minutes)

Background: Recognizing problems helps students understand historical or social challenges, such as conflicts or societal changes. By finding solutions presented in a social studies text, students can see how problems lead to actions and outcomes, building their comprehension of historical events. Note that while the instruction can be applied to any *Expedition: Learn!* lesson, the examples provided are based on the lesson “Role Models of Civic Virtue.”

- Emphasize the importance of learning to recognize problem and solution relationships by sharing how it helps students better understand informational texts.
- Also emphasize how historians or scientists use it in their work to identify challenges and the strategies or actions taken to address them, leading to a greater understanding of historical events.
- Introduce the vocabulary to students:
 - *problem*: a challenge, issue, or situation that needs to be addressed; answers the question, “What needs to be solved?”
 - *solution*: the action or plan taken to resolve the problem; answers the question, “How was the problem solved?”
- Share with students that they will practice identifying problems and solutions by learning about significant people who are known for solving problems in society.
- Refer to the passage about Sylvia Mendez on page 2-Build. Read the passage aloud. Review the images and their captions as well.
- Display the [Problem and Solution graphic organizer](#).
- First, define context as needed:
 - *context*: the background information or situation that helps explain why something is happening, including the time, place, and circumstances.

- Explain to students that problems always arise within a specific situation or historical context, so understanding the time period and circumstances is important. Recognizing the context surrounding a problem helps clarify why the issue emerged and guides us toward understanding the solution.
- Model how to complete the first box, “Context,” as follows:
 - *racial segregation in education in the 1940s*
- Model how to complete the second box, “Problem” as follows:
 - *Mendez was denied equal education due to segregation based on her race/ethnicity.*
- Strategically call on students to identify the solution presented in the text. Complete the final box, “Solution,” as follows:
 - *Sylvia’s family sued the school district, won the case, and ended segregation in her district.*
- To wrap up, remind students that recognizing problems and solutions in a text helps us better understand the challenges people faced and how they worked to overcome them.
- Ask students how the solution to Sylvia Mendez’s problem in the 1940s had a long-lasting impact. Encourage them to think critically about why their actions matter in a broader context.

Mini-Lesson II

Multiple Problems with Multiple Solutions (30 minutes)

Background: Recognizing that multiple problems have multiple solutions encourages students to think about how different choices and actions can lead to various outcomes. This helps learners understand that historical events and societal changes are shaped by diverse perspectives and approaches. In social studies texts, problems and solutions are not always clearly defined. Some problems have multiple layers or are deeply intertwined with other issues, making it hard to pinpoint a single problem or solution. Often, problems and solutions span an entire time period and are best understood by examining their development over time. Looking for clue words can help with identifying problems and their respective solutions. This also helps students appreciate the impact of those solutions across time and cultures, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of history and progress. Note that while the instruction can be applied to any *Expedition: Learn!* lesson, the examples provided are based on the lesson “What Was the Great Depression?”

- Emphasize that various time periods in history require us to recognize multiple problems and solutions, making it an important skill for social studies. Highlight how historians use this skill to examine different challenges and the range of strategies or actions taken to address them.
- By understanding that there are often several solutions to different (or sometimes even the same) problem, students gain deeper insight into historical events, how societies adapt, and the complex nature of decision-making.
- Share with students that they will practice identifying multiple problems and multiple solutions that are scattered throughout a text by learning about the Great Depression.
- Explain to students that one way they can identify problems and solutions is by analyzing the use of certain words.
- First, display the [Problem-and-Solution Text Structure](#).
- Read the “About the Structure” section. Explain to students that they will be looking for words in the text that describe problems and solutions. Read the “Clue Words” section and explain that there may be other words that hint at a problem or solution that are not included in this list; for example, words that describe emotions.
- Read the lesson aloud as a class and model how to fill out the “Words I Found” section, strategically calling on students as clue words appear. Synthesize responses together, using the following examples as a guide:
 - *help, hopeful, improve, problem, stronger, struggle, suffered, trouble, unfair, weakened, worse*

- After students have identified clue words that hint at various problems that arose during the Great Depression, invite them to use the bottom part of the organizer to identify specific problems and solutions from the text. Emphasize that students should focus on the consequences of the Great Depression, not the causes. For example:
 - *Problem: People were worried about the economy.*
Solution: They spent less money.
 - *Problem: People didn't like Hoover's ideas.*
Solution: People elected Roosevelt instead.
 - *Problem: There were not enough jobs for people.*
Solution: The New Deal created jobs.
 - *Problem: Banks failed and closed, and people lost their money.*
Solution: The FDIC was made to protect people's money.
- Debrief by asking students how word choice gave them clues when identifying problems and solutions. Optionally, ask students to come up with a few of their own solutions to the problems that occurred during the Great Depression.

Mini-Lesson III

Problem and Solution Beyond the Classroom (20 minutes)

Background: Understanding problems and solutions isn't just a reading skill. It's something we use in real life to make our communities better. Social studies helps us understand how people in history have faced problems and how their solutions have shaped the world we live in today. Once students have mastered recognizing problems and solutions, consider extending this skill to a meaningful lesson beyond the classroom.

- Review what students have learned about identifying problems and solutions, like descriptive words or emotions they identified in the previous mini-lesson.
- Emphasize to students that, just like in history, we have problems and solutions in our own neighborhoods. By learning how to recognize and think about problems and solutions, students are developing skills that can help solve challenges in their own life and community.
- Explain how identifying and thinking about problems and solutions in real-life situations is valuable. It helps students become good citizens who can contribute to making their community better.
- Ask students:
 - Have you ever noticed a problem in our town? Maybe at a park or near your school? Or even at school?
- Then divide students into small groups and give each group a simplified local news article or community update about a problem (e.g., road repairs, school overcrowding).
- Have each group identify the problem and discuss the solutions mentioned in the article or come up with their own. Each group should fill out one or more of the graphic organizers included in this toolkit.
- Invite each group to share the problem they identified and the solutions discussed.
- Ask the class:
 - Are there other solutions to this problem? What could people in our community do to help?
- Encourage creative thinking and discussion about different ways to address the issue.

Check for Understanding

If you observe ...	Then try ...
students struggling to identify the problem in a text	asking simple guiding questions, like “What is the main challenge the character or group is facing?”
students providing vague or incomplete solutions	prompting with questions, such as “What would you do to fix this problem?”
students confusing the problem with the solution	using a visual organizer to clearly separate the problem from the solution and reviewing how each relates to the other.

Problem and Solution

Topic/ Title of the Lesson

Context

Problem

Solution

Context

Problem

Solution



Problem and Solution Text Structure

About the Structure

The text states a problem and one or more ideas that might help solve the problem.

Clue Words

challenge, issue, problem, question, trouble, answer, conclusion, prevent, prevention, solve, solution

Words I Found

Problems

Solutions

