



Problem and Solution: Grades 6–8

OVERVIEW:

The ultimate goal of social studies instruction is to create globally minded students that understand the value of being informed citizens in an interconnected world. It is important that students are provided opportunities to engage in identifying and analyzing problems and solutions in history in order to develop an awareness of history and develop their own problem-solving skills. The following mini-lessons are designed to help students learn to recognize historical problems and evaluate solutions. Students will also learn to use that knowledge to recognize problems in their own communities and work toward solutions.

Mini-Lesson I

Identify Problems and Questioning Solutions (20–30 minutes)

Background: By learning how to analyze historical problems and solutions, students can more deeply analyze historical events, including the impact they have on our lives today. In addition, as students consider how individuals confront problems, they develop an awareness of how they can solve problems in their own lives. Note that the suggested modeling and think-alouds below are based on the articles “The Emancipation Proclamation” and “Emancipation and Retaliation” in the lesson “The Emancipation Proclamation” from *Expedition: Learn!*

- Invite students to indicate whether they have heard the following expression:
 - Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.
- Explain that this expression is often used to express the importance of studying history so that we can learn from the past. Emphasize that whether we want to avoid repeating mistakes or learn from those who have solved problems, being a historical thinker means considering the problems and solutions throughout history.
- In addition, emphasize that it is critical to question the solutions to historical problems, as this ensures that we continue to progress as a society.
- Explain that there are many problems in history for which people created solutions, for example:
 - *The Industrial Revolution solved the problem of slow production of goods by creating machines to produce goods quickly.*
 - *The American Revolution was the colonists’ solution to their problem with Britain’s control over America.*
- Highlight that the solutions generated to address problems in the past and in the present are not necessarily successful or morally acceptable, but they are the ways in which people have made or are making things easier and more favorable for themselves.

- Invite students to read the first article, “The Emancipation Proclamation.”
- After reading, display the [Identifying Problems and Questioning Solutions graphic organizer](#) and work through the steps with students.
 - **Problem:** *The South had a problem with abolishing slavery.*
 - **Solution:** *The South separated from the North and formed their own government.*
- Give students a moment to develop a question. Consolidate their responses. For example:
 - *Why did the South think leaving the Union would protect their way of life?*
 - *Why didn't the South want to compromise and find another solution?*
 - *Why didn't the South find other ways to make money?*
- Invite students to read the second article, “Emancipation and Retaliation,” and turn and talk to discuss a problem and solution discussed in the article.
- Monitor conversations and strategically call on partnerships to share. Synthesize responses and add them to the organizer. For example:
 - **Problem:** *Slavery. People had grown unhappy with the institution of slavery and wanted to abolish the practice. Not all Americans agreed, and there were major divisions in the United States.*
 - **Solution:** *President Lincoln gave his famous Emancipation Proclamation speech making slavery illegal and calling for the unity of Americans. Later, the 13th Amendment was ratified, which made slavery unconstitutional.*
- Give students a moment to develop a question. Consolidate their responses. For example:
 - *Did Lincoln face any personal challenges when he gave his speech?*
 - *Did the 13th Amendment permanently solve the problems that came from the institution of slavery?*
- Emphasize for students that by examining how leaders and societies address problems, we can learn not only about history but also about ourselves and how we can approach problems.
- Share that it is important to question solutions because it helps us understand their effectiveness, limitations, and unintended consequences. This allows us to critically evaluate past decisions and apply those lessons to modern challenges.

Mini-Lesson II

Identifying Problems from Solutions (20 minutes)

Background: In social studies, the outcomes of historical events, policies, or reforms may be offered without clearly stating the underlying issues that prompted these responses. When students learn to infer these problems from their solutions, they move beyond surface-level understanding, developing the ability to analyze the causes and consequences of events. This approach places the burden on learners to read between the lines, using critical thinking to discern the societal, political, or economic challenges that led to these solutions. Recognizing problems from their solutions helps students develop critical thinking skills by encouraging them to analyze historical contexts and the decisions made to address specific issues. It enhances problem-solving skills by teaching students how to reverse-engineer solutions to identify the underlying challenges. Note that while the instruction can be applied to any *Expedition: Learn!* lesson, the examples provided are based on the lesson “The Bill of Rights: Safeguarding Individual Liberties.”

- Start by introducing the concept of working backward from solutions to identify the problems they were designed to address.
- Explain that students will sometimes encounter solutions and need to infer what problems they are solving.
- Introduce the Bill of Rights, noting that it contains solutions—rights and protections—that were created in response to specific problems faced by people at the time of its writing.

- Explain that students will look at some amendments from the Bill of Rights and work to decipher the problems they were designed to solve.
- Skim page 4-Build of the lesson to introduce the amendments. First, focus on the First Amendment's freedom of speech.
- Then display the [Identifying Problems from Solutions graphic organizer](#).
- Model how to complete the first point in the first box, "Solutions":
 - *The First Amendment protects peoples' right to freedom of speech.*
- Ask students why they think this right exists and what problem could have occurred in the past that led to this solution. Complete the first point in the second box, "Originating Problem":
 - *People were punished for expressing their opinions and ideas freely.*
- For the remainder of the mini-lesson, call on students to offer their ideas or have them work in pairs. Assign the Sixth, Ninth, and Tenth Amendments.
- Review responses. See sample responses below:
 - **Solution:** *The Sixth Amendment protects people's right to a fair, speedy trial and a defense lawyer.*
Originating Problem: *People had trials that were unfair or took too long. People needed someone who knew about laws to help defend them.*
 - **Solution:** *The Ninth Amendment protects rights not specifically listed in the Constitution.*
Originating Problem: *People were worried that if certain rights weren't listed, they wouldn't be protected.*
 - **Solution:** *The Tenth Amendment reserves powers not delegated to the federal government to the states or the people.*
Originating Problem: *People were worried that the federal government would become too powerful and states wouldn't have rights.*
- Debrief by asking students how this exercise helped them learn about the relationship between problems and solutions in history beyond the surface level.
- To extend this activity, challenge students to apply the same approach to modern-day laws or policies. Have them research a current law, identify the solution it presents, and then work backward to infer the problem that prompted its creation.

Mini-Lesson III

Cycles of Problems and Solutions in Social Studies (30 minutes)

Background: Identifying problems, solutions, the limits of those solutions, and possible improvements pushes students to think holistically, considering not just the immediate impact but also the broader, long-term consequences of decisions. Social studies is a continuous cycle of problem-solving, where historical and societal issues are addressed through various solutions that often bring new challenges. Every solution has limits, whether due to unforeseen consequences, shifts in political or social dynamics, or evolving needs. This cycle reflects the complexity of human societies, showing that progress is rarely linear and requires constant re-evaluation and adaptation. Students should learn that solutions may not always resolve every issue and that new problems often arise from the limitations of prior solutions. By learning to identify and address the limitations of solutions, students build problem-solving skills that are directly applicable to real-world challenges. Understanding that solutions have limits encourages students to anticipate future challenges. This prepares them to think proactively, identify potential issues early, think creatively about ways to improve or refine existing solutions, and suggest innovative solutions before problems escalate. It also helps students recognize that setbacks are a part of progress and that continual improvement is key. Note that while the instruction can be applied to any *Expedition: Learn!* lesson, the examples provided are based on the lesson “Communication Technologies in the 1800s.”

- Explain to students that social studies involves a series of problems and solutions, but each solution often brings new challenges. Encourage students to see this as an ongoing process of adaptation and improvement.
- Discuss that every solution is meant to address a problem, but over time, new issues may arise. Solutions are typically not permanent fixes for issues in society.
- Read the text on page 2-Build to determine the problems and solutions presented regarding the telegraph.
- Display the [Problem and Solution Cycle graphic organizer](#).
- Model how to complete the first box, “Problem”:
 - *The country was growing, and there needed to be a way to share information and communicate.*
- Complete the second box, “Solution”:
 - *The telegraph allowed people to communicate over long distances quickly.*
- For the last two boxes, strategically call on students for their responses on what the limits of the telegraph were and possible solutions to solve its shortcomings. Synthesize responses, for example:
 - **Limits of Solution:** *It could only share information through text, not voice.*
 - **Possible Solution:** *Develop a communication technology that could use voice to communicate.*
- Have students complete the same exercise for page 4-Build, focusing on cameras. Students can work in pairs, groups, or independently. After a set time, reconvene and review their responses. For example:
 - **Problem:** *Cameras were heavy and expensive, and it took too long to develop images.*
 - **Solution:** *George Eastman started producing accessible, lightweight film rolls.*
 - **Limits of Solution:** *The camera was limited to one function: taking pictures.*
 - **Possible Solution:** *Develop a communication technology that could create video, too.*
- To extend learning, ask students to reflect on how this exercise helped them build the skill of identifying problems and solutions. Encourage them to think about how recognizing the limitations of solutions can lead to innovation. For example, you could ask:
 - *What current technology do you think has limits, and what possible solutions might improve it in the future?*
 - *How might today's problems inspire future solutions, just like the telegraph led to the development of the telephone and beyond?*
- Challenge students to predict future solutions for modern-day technologies by identifying their current limits. Assign them the task of selecting a technology or system in which they can identify a problem and current solution; for example, the school cafeteria system or public transportation. Have them use the Problem and Solution Cycle graphic organizer to complete their exercise.

Check for Understanding

If you observe ...**Then try ...****identifying the problem
in a historical event**

prompting student with questions that help them recognize and name the problem such as:

- why might ___ have been upset?
- why would ___ want the situation to change?

**identifying multiple
solutions**

have students look at the problem from different perspectives or viewpoints, encouraging them to consider different solutions



Identifying Problems and Questioning Solutions

Topic/Title of the Lesson

Problem

Solution

Question

Problem

Solution

Question

Identifying Problems from Solutions

Solutions

Problems





Problem and Solution Cycle

Problem

Solution

Limits of Solution

Possible Solution