



# Social Studies Strategies: Working With Charts and Tables

## Charts and Tables

### What:

Reading Charts and Tables is a strategy to help students analyze and interpret charts and tables that they encounter in texts.

### Why:

Reading lists of facts and figures can often be confusing for readers. Charts and tables condense and summarize a large amount of numerical information and text into a compact format. Students need to be able to read and interpret charts and tables in order to process information presented in a tabular format.

### How:

Charts and tables are visual presentations of information and statistics in a simpler format for easy reference. Historians and other social scientists use charts and tables to organize, simplify, and summarize information and statistics in a way that makes the data more meaningful or easier to remember. The words chart and table are generally used interchangeably to refer to information that has been organized in a tabular format. A chart tends to have less text and little numerical data, while a table usually organizes statistics and other numerical information with a minimum of text. In both charts and tables similar kinds of information are organized in a tabular format using columns and rows. Labels and headings across the top and down the left-hand side explain what the numbers and text in the chart/table represent. Two common types of charts are a flow chart and an organizational chart. A flowchart shows a process, or how things happen. Flow charts are useful for outlining or simplifying the steps in a procedure. An organizational chart shows the inner workings of a particular organization, the particular offices, the duties of each official, and who has authority over whom. To read and interpret charts/tables, the reader should:

- Read the title or caption on the chart/table to find out what content is being presented. Ask the question, “What is the subject or topic of the chart/table?”
- Read all the headings and labels in the chart/table to determine what is being grouped and presented in each subcategory (each column and each row). Begin by reading the headings at the top to find out what categories of information they contain. Ask the question, “What kind(s) of information is being presented in the chart/table?”
- Read the information in the left-hand column, which is often organized alphabetically, chronological, or geographically. Ask the question, “What kind of categories or labels does the chart/table contain?” The vertical columns to the right of the left-hand column are the body of the chart/table.
- Look up any unfamiliar terms that appear in the headings. Study the information presented under each heading or category in the chart/table. Ask the question, “What information is presented in the left-hand row for each column heading?” Typically, a chart/table present either numerical data or text information on a subject/table.
- Identify similarities, differences, and other relationships among the data. Remember that some kind of relationship always exists between each column heading and each row.



# Social Studies Strategies: Working With Charts and Tables

- Compare the information being presented. Numerical data often can be ranked from smallest to largest.
- Analyze the relationship(s) among the numerical data and the text provided in the chart/table. Usually the data can be compared and a conclusion drawn. Ask the question, “How does the data for one topic/subject compare to that of another topic/subject?”
- Identify patterns and relationships in order to reveal information and connections about the subject/topic. Ask the question, “What patterns or relationships does the data show?”
- Use the data to make generalizations, draw conclusions, or make inferences. Ask the questions, “How can the information in the chart/table be summarized?” and “What conclusions can be drawn or inferences made from the information in the chart/table?”
- Ask a “why” question so students can evaluate the data presented in the chart/table.

## **When:**

Use this strategy as a systematic approach for reading and interpreting information found in a chart/table. While charts and tables present complex or detailed information in a simpler format than a text, students will need help to develop the skills necessary to analyze and interpret the information correctly. Use a chart or a table on a weekly basis in order for students to develop and hone their chart and table reading skills.



# Social Studies Strategies: Working With Charts and Tables

## Developing Questions for Reading Charts and Tables

In order to develop thoughtful questions that are increasingly complex, the teacher should:

- Ask a question on the subject or title of the chart/table.
- Ask questions about the headings of the columns and left-hand row of the chart/table.
- Ask questions on one piece of information from the chart/table.
- Ask questions that compare two or more pieces of information from the chart/table.
- Ask questions that require several pieces of data to be read in order to determine one correct answer.
- If two or more columns or rows are being used, ask questions that compare the data in these columns or rows in the chart/table.
- Ask questions that use the information in the chart/table that help to identify a pattern or trend.
- Ask questions that relate the information in the chart/table to content and concepts being studied.
- Ask a question that requires one or more summary statement(s) or conclusion(s) about the data in the chart/table and relates to the subject being studied.
- Ask a question that requires students to make a generalization about the information presented in the chart/table.
- Ask a “why” that requires an answer that requires students to evaluate the information presented in the chart/graph.