

Course Overview:

American Studies is the inquiry-based study of American narratives through the use of artifacts (novels, short stories, poems, non-fiction works, films, visual arts, and primary source documents). Using the study of rhetoric, thematic connection, analysis, and reflection, American Studies integrates the English and Social Studies disciplines. It is *not* a pairing of two survey courses taught side-by-side. Rather, a fully integrated instructional approach is the goal. Integrated instruction in the American Studies classroom looks like one course, with teachers working in concert in a variety of ways: as a planning team, as instructors in the classroom, and as evaluators of students' work. Greater integration privileges an approach where students can make connections across the two disciplines, and because of this emphasis on connections, the course privileges depth more than breadth. The inquiry-based nature of the course demands that questions, not coverage, be the focus.

Key questions about the American experience help unify the course by erasing disciplinary distinctions between social studies and English, and in attempting to answer these key questions, students – and instructors – pursue a larger understanding of what it means to be American. Many methods can be used to pursue these questions. Teams have approached them thematically, chronologically, or with a combination of the two. Using *themes*, or main ideas that stretch across the separate disciplines, is a meaningful way to erase disciplinary distinctions and integrate the course content. But even with a thematic approach, *context* is an important piece whenever studying a literary or historical artifact, and teachers who focus on a thematic approach still provide this context for their students. American Studies teachers don't have to see their organizational approach to the course as a dichotomy. Teams don't need to choose either a chronological or a thematic approach; each approach can be appropriate at different times in the year and/or with different audiences. (For additional notes on how questions can be used as an "organized center" see page 29 of *Interdisciplinary Curriculum: Design and Implementation*.)