

*Essay*

## **Fostering Humanity in Middle Grades: Applications of Daisaku Ikeda Children's Stories in Social Studies**

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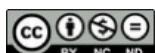
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## Fostering Humanity in Middle Grades: Applications of Daisaku Ikeda Children's Stories in Social Studies

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### Abstract

Middle school is a crucial time for shaping students' overall well-being, making it essential to nurture their humanity during these years. This article illustrates that educators can use Ikeda children's stories in social studies to foster happiness, peace, and sportsmanship. By expanding the Library of Congress Teachers' Program's "Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Primary Sources" (n.d.) to include fictional sources and linking them to nonfictional ones, teachers can create a safe space for students to express themselves and connect their ideas to real-life examples.

### Characteristics of Middle Schoolers

Navigating middle school is challenging because students undergo significant changes in physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and psychological development (Association for Middle Level Education, 2025). Physically, students undergo changes that can impact their health and self-image. Cognitively, they become eager to tackle real-life problems and engage in critical thinking, problem-solving, and debates. Socially and emotionally, their development is heavily influenced by relationships with family and peers, as well as by the effects of social media. Some students may even struggle with romantic relationships. Psychologically, they grapple with questions of identity and self-discovery. Middle school is a crucial time for shaping students' overall well-being, making it essential to nurture their humanity during these years. By promoting humanity in the middle grades, educators can support students' growth and encourage a positive attitude toward themselves and others.

### Social Studies and the C3 Framework for Middle Grades

According to the National Council for the Social Studies (2025), "The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world." The essential components of social studies include geography, history, culture and society, civic engagement and government, and economics. This field encompasses human interactions across various

disciplines, including history, political science, and government. These areas complement one another, representing the humanities and fostering a collaborative understanding of human behavior and interpretation. Humanity, inclusivity, and diversity are key aspects of social studies.

A common misconception of social studies is that it consists merely of a list of dates and facts, which is overly simplistic and misrepresents the true nature of the field. When history is presented without the complexities of the historical process, it becomes a mere shadow of its real essence. Our cognitive abilities are truly tested and expanded by exploring successes and failures, contradictions, and the complexities of events. A classroom that avoids divisive issues denies students the opportunity for intellectual growth and development. A national curriculum that glosses over these contentious elements presents a distorted view of history (Walker and Langan, 2016). Social studies serve as a lens for understanding humanity—who we are and how we function within society. One of the main objectives of social studies is to teach empathy. While exploring complex social issues, we must reflect on what these events represent to us as individuals and as global citizens.

The National Council for the Social Studies (2013) outlines four dimensions that support middle school students' readiness for college, career, and civic engagement (C3). These dimensions are: 1) developing questions and planning inquiries, 2) applying disciplinary tools and concepts across civics, economics, geography, and history, 3) evaluating sources and using evidence, and

4) communicating conclusions and taking informed action. By fostering these skills, students will be better equipped to navigate their world and take action rooted in respect for human dignity.

### **The Primary Source Analysis Guide for Nonfiction and Its Expansion to Fiction**

Students should be encouraged to explore learning through various forms of expression. While engaging in their education, they can discover multiple ways to demonstrate their understanding of the material. By allowing students to engage with complex social issues, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, educators can help them examine these interactions in depth. Discussing world events and exploring socially divisive problems enables students to watch videos on social interactions and historical narratives, which helps them consider different approaches to conflict resolution. It is crucial to foster a non-confrontational environment that promotes a humanistic approach to learning and allows for respectful, open discussions.

Primary sources often refer to original documents or firsthand accounts that provide direct evidence about a topic. In teaching social studies, treating primary sources as raw data is important. Our responsibility as historians is to find meaning in this evidence, much like a judge would evaluate the value of a resource such as eyewitness testimony. We derive meaning through interaction. By examining historical documents, such as House Bills or Executive Orders, we can gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of previous administrations regarding the law. A similar analysis can be applied to watching movies or television programs. For example, shows like “I Love Lucy” or “The Honeymooners” offer insights into life during the 1950s.

While analyzing archival data, it is essential to recognize the collective new vision for teaching social studies. This approach requires a more in-depth historical analysis through document exploration and encourages examining the past from multiple social perspectives. It also promotes a style of scientific inquiry in learning, often seen in science classrooms. Within this framework, students are challenged to go beyond textbooks and engage with history as explorers (Wineberg, 2001). This allows them not only to be consumers

of information but also to participate actively in the learning process.

Kincheloe (2004) suggests that many students are not stimulated to study multiple perspectives or learn that in U.S. culture and around the world, there are profoundly different interpretations of historical, scientific, literary, political, social, and economic issues that go beyond those presented in textbooks, content standards, and curriculum guides. Understanding and appreciating diverse perspectives are essential in social studies. However, the challenge arises when someone's perspective dehumanizes another person. Fyfe (2017) states:

We know that of the many things words can do, one is to cause significant harm. Words can cause direct psychological harm, but they can also directly or indirectly lead to physical violence. In the context of mass violence, words have been used to create and strengthen particular social relations conducive to neighbors killing neighbors. (p. 523)

We believe that the primary source analysis guide created by the Library of Congress Teachers' Program (n.d.) can and should be extended to include analysis of fictional works, such as Ikeda children's stories, to promote critical thinking and active learning. This guide consists of three key elements: observation, reflection, and questioning. Students are encouraged to engage with these elements flexibly, as there is no specific order in which they need to be addressed.

- **Observe:** Have students identify and note details.
- **Reflect:** Encourage students to generate and test hypotheses about the source.
- **Question:** Encourage students to ask questions that prompt further observations and reflections.

In addition to these elements, teachers can incorporate questions that prompt further investigation, helping students develop critical thinking and research skills. These additional notes allow teachers to share more insights with students during the analysis activities.

## Daisaku Ikeda and His Writing of Children's Stories

Daisaku Ikeda (1928-2023) was born in Tokyo, Japan. He was a philosopher, educator, peacebuilder, author, and poet. He founded 14 Soka (value-creating) schools across seven countries and established six institutes to foster culture, education, and peace. Ikeda was engaged in conversations with more than 7,000 world leaders and scholars, working to build a global network of friendship and trust. By 2025, he had received 409 honorary doctorates and over 800 honorary citizenships worldwide (Daisaku Ikeda: Peace through Dialogue, n.d.b). Ikeda studies have emerged as an important field, with presentations, publications, and applications featured at national and international conferences, journals, and books. These studies focus on themes such as “life-to-life encouragement, creative coexistence, dialogue, global consciousness, and value-creating approaches to knowledge, society, and power” (Goulah, 2024, p. 1511). Two recently published books highlight this field: *Hope and Joy in Education: Engaging Daisaku Ikeda Across Curriculum and Context*, edited by Drs. Isabel Nunez and Jason Goulah (2021), published by Teachers College Press, and *Value-Creating Education: Teachers' Perceptions and Practice*, edited by Drs. Emiliano Bosio and Maria Guajardo (2024), published by Routledge. Both books showcase the work of numerous educators and researchers in Ikeda studies, demonstrating the importance and practicality of fostering humanity through education. In their article, *Engaging Youths in Conversations on Humanity through Daisaku Ikeda Children's Literature*, Kuo and Kubicki (2022) use the three criteria: 1) story and character, 2) language, and 3) illustration and text, suggested by the University of British Columbia Library, to analyze Ikeda children's stories. They conclude that incorporating high-quality children's stories about humanity offers a powerful way for youths to create meaning and happiness for themselves and others.

Ikeda once stated, “Education will be my final undertaking in life” (World Tribune, 2024, January 2). He emphasized that the purpose of education is to cultivate humanity and achieve peace. He urged educators to positively influence children by inspiring them, modeling humanistic behavior, and creating lasting memories together. Ikeda believed, “Believing in the youth, being their friend, their

big brother or sister, and treasuring them as if they were one's own children—that, I am convinced, is the key to fostering capable young people” (Ikeda Sensei, 2022, para. 3).

Ikeda's passion for writing children's stories stems from his childhood experiences during World War II, where he recognized the profound impact that early experiences have on a child's entire life. Ikeda expressed, “I set about writing children's stories with the hope of imparting courage and hope to children, and thus contributing in some way to planting 'seeds of the heart' that teach the importance of cherishing friendship and trust” (Daisaku Ikeda: Peace through Dialogue, n.d.a). At 21, he joined his mentor, Jose Toda, at a publishing company, where he began editing a children's magazine and honed his writing skills. Ikeda concluded his reflections on writing for children by stating, “It is my earnest wish that my works not only serve to create in children the awareness that their lives are infinitely precious, but that the stories also act as a springboard to enable them to cultivate 'wings of courage and hope' with which they can soar into the skies of their mission” (Daisaku Ikeda: Peace through Dialogue, n.d.a). Ikeda's 18 videos of children's stories are translated into several languages, including English, Korean, French, Spanish, Chinese, and Cantonese. They are freely accessible to the public at <https://www.youtube.com/@ikeda.animation.channel>.

Ikeda children's stories convey his profound love for youth, humanity, and peace. He argues that “the essential responsibility of education is to foster in the minds of youth a love of humanity and a spirit to dedicate oneself for the sake of the people and for society” (Daisaku Ikeda: Peace through Dialogue, n.d.d). When education is geared to the service of humanity and motivated by a sense of responsibility, it empowers people to transform their environment through inner change, awakening the interconnectedness of all life, and spreading the powerful philosophy of human revolution for social change (Daisaku Ikeda: Peace through Dialogue, n.d.c).

## Theoretical Framework

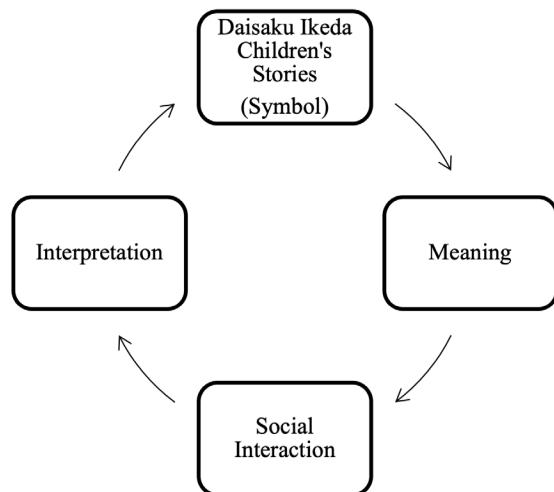
### Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism

Herbert Blumer (1986) states that symbolic interactionism is founded on three key concepts: 1) individuals respond to objects based on the

meanings those objects hold for them, 2) these meanings arise from social interactions with others, and 3) individuals process and alter these meanings through interpretation. The concept of symbolic interactionism explains how objects give meaning to people's interactions (Charon, 2009). It suggests that individuals act toward the environment based on the meanings it holds for them. Interactions with others influence these meanings and are constantly evolving. In other words, the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity is not clear-cut. Our perceptions and interpretations are continually shaped, revised, or generalized through social interactions with what are considered objective realities (i.e., neutral or fixed). Subjectivity is functional and negotiable; people respond to things based on the significance those things have for them. As meanings change over time or across different contexts, individuals adjust their actions to align with the self-image they construct within social reality and society.

We utilize symbolic interactionism to explore how students interpret the meanings of Ikeda children's stories. During instructional activities, students participate in interactions that enable them to process and reshape these meanings. This empowers them to make informed decisions that positively affect human lives. By using Ikeda children's stories as a medium, teachers can closely observe middle-grade students' interactions with these stories during analysis activities, fostering a deeper understanding of humanity (figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
*The Symbolic Interaction with Ikeda Children's Stories*



Tables 1, 2, and 3 provide concrete examples of using the primary source analysis guide for Ikeda children's stories.

### Connecting Fictional and Nonfictional Media

The literary genre of Ikeda children's videos is fiction. Fictional accounts are stories created from the imagination, meaning they may not be based on real events. These can include novels, short stories, plays, and more. In our case, the children's videos are important. Key characteristics include fictional characters, events, and settings; it often tells a story that is not true but contains themes or lessons to learn. In the following section, we give examples of extending Ikeda children's social studies videos by identifying relevant nonfiction sources. Nonfiction accounts are based on real events, real people, and facts. These include biographies, news articles, documentaries, and essays. Fiction offers indirect ways, while nonfiction provides direct ways for students to engage with the environment; both help develop reflective citizens. Table 4 illustrates that at our core, we all desire happiness. Helping people see their inner beauty helps us see our own value and worth.

Table 5 demonstrates that through the care of a cherry tree, this story teaches children the importance of perseverance, hope, and friendships in promoting peace within their communities. This story reflects the aftermath of World War II. How did the citizens of Japan carry on after Hiroshima and Nagasaki were devastated by atomic bombs? Yoshito Matsushige's account of the Hiroshima Bombing is much like the world that inhabits the cherry tree. Yoshito Matsushige survived the Hiroshima Bombing. Like Taichi, Yoshito is dealing with the aftermath of conflict. Both the fictional and nonfictional characters carry on after a great tragedy. What parallels can you find in these fictional and nonfictional accounts?

Table 6 uses the story of *The Winds of Victory* to illustrate that we can win and lose gracefully. In the video, young and professional athletes demonstrate good sportsmanship. When we watch global competitions like the Olympics, we celebrate the sport and the spirit of competition. Athletes serve as role models for children, so adults must reflect on their behavior, as future generations look up to them. Find aspects related to good sportsmanship. Providing students with opportunities to learn is

## Application of Ikeda Children's Stories in Social Studies for Humanity

**Table 1**

Analyzing "The Princess and the Moon"

<b>Example 1</b>		
<p><b>Level:</b> Middle Grades  <b>Video:</b> The Princess and the Moon (length: 25 minutes)  <b>Storyline:</b> Sashiko is a little girl who is always unhappy and tends to see things negatively. A rabbit takes her on a magical journey to the moon one day. During this adventure, Sashiko discovers that deep down, she truly wants to be happy, just like everyone else. She realizes that we are all, in fact, princes and princesses, even if we sometimes fail to see it.  <b>National Social Studies Standards:</b> Gathering and Evaluating Sources (Dimension 3)  <b>Georgia's Social Studies Standards of Excellence:</b> As an example of a state standard to demonstrate alignment, we selected "Identify and Use Primary and Secondary Sources" (SSIPS6).  <b>Application:</b> Students exploring mental health as a real-world issue. Many teenage children are dealing with social aspects like online bullying or social pressure that are unique to this generation of learners. Teachers can find primary sources dealing with modern social issues that students face.</p>		
<p><b>Observe</b>  Sachiko (1:16) is not eating and is not enjoying her day-to-day life. What are some things that are making her sad?   While on the moon (9:30), all the children are princes and princesses. Why is this the case?</p>	<p><b>Reflect</b>  Self-belief is important. Have you had a time when someone questioned your value as a person?</p> <p>The cap and the crown represent confidence. What do you think about when you consider your confidence?</p>	<p><b>Question</b>  How do you stay true to who you are as a person?</p> <p>Select two items representing your confidence and tell us why you selected those items. You can either draw those items or find pictures of those items.</p>
<p><b>Further Investigation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you consider the times when you helped someone feel included?</li> <li>• When people are unkind, it often reflects their self-view rather than the person they are targeting. What are your thoughts on this?</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Additional Notes</b>  One of the main challenges in this story is recognizing the immense value that each of us possesses. Occasionally, we may forget our worth, leading us to make selfish decisions or inadvertently hurt others. However, once we become aware of the impact of our actions, we gain the power to make amends and navigate complicated relationships.</p>		

essential. In life, we face challenges and setbacks and must learn to confront them as they arise. Overcoming these obstacles helps us become more resilient and better equipped for the future. Global competition requires respecting your opponent and prioritizing personal growth and development.

### Discussion

#### Integrating Social-Emotion Learning in Social Studies

Social studies educators play a vital role in nurturing wellbeing during middle school, impacting students' growth and fostering a positive self-image and relationships. In *The Princess and the Moon*, mental health and social-emotional development are crucial themes in the context of social learning. Educators need to

be aware of their students' needs and abilities, providing positive role models and opportunities for reflection that support mental health. This includes cultivating critical thinking and reflective practices. With the reality of trauma, including teen suicide, online bullying, and in-school bullying, it is imperative to address these issues and equip children with tools to navigate challenges at an earlier age than past generations. Today's students confront mental health issues, the effects of COVID, and social unrest as they learn. In *The Cherry Tree*, Taichi grapples with his father's death and a war-torn village, exemplifying hope for children facing loss. Similarly, *The Winds of Victory* emphasizes fair play, which is closely linked to good citizenship through kindness and respect. In the face of rising bullying and suicide rates among teens, social-emotional learning is essential. Alverson et al.

**Table 2**  
Analyzing “The Cherry Tree”

Example 2		
Level:	Example 2	Question
<b>Level:</b> Middle Grades		
<b>Video:</b> The Cherry Tree (length: 25 minutes)		
<b>Storyline:</b> After a war destroyed Taichi’s village and took away the precious life of his father, he finds hope and courage with an old, wise man as they work together to protect a cherry tree during a harsh winter. When spring arrives, the tree blossoms into new life, bringing hope back to the village.		
<b>National Social Studies Standards:</b> Communicating and Critiquing Conclusions (Dimension 4)		
<b>Georgia Social Studies Standards of Excellence:</b> As an example of a state standard to demonstrate alignment, we selected “Draw Conclusions and Make Generalizations” (SSIPS11).		
<b>Application:</b> The Ikeda children’s stories encourage students to confront complex social issues, such as the aftermath of war. In these narratives, the protagonist, Taichi, struggles with the loss of his father and the devastation of his village. Students also engage with primary accounts from a Hiroshima survivor, highlighting the real-world consequences of conflict. It’s essential for educators to avoid framing history solely as wins and losses. By presenting the harsh realities of war, we foster a humanistic perspective that prompts young learners to reflect on the true cost of global conflicts.		
<b>Observe</b>	<b>Reflect</b>	<b>Question</b>
At 7:49, an older man is tending to a cherry tree.	How does he demonstrate kindness to the cherry tree?	How do you demonstrate kindness to nature?
At 15:30, the long winter begins when the boy starts caring for the tree.	What are some ways that Taichi demonstrates care and compassion for the tree?	How do you care for plants and trees?
At 15:30, Taichi sees the cherry tree leaves growing back.	Taichi is excited to see the tree recover, as he is unsure whether the tree will heal.	Have you ever helped someone and felt happy to see them succeed?
<b>Further Investigation</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does it mean to keep trying when you have a difficult time?</li> <li>• What role do individuals play in promoting peace within their communities?</li> <li>• What personal actions can you take to demonstrate perseverance?</li> </ul>		
<b>Additional Notes:</b> Taichi’s journey, alongside the tree, symbolizes resilience and the capacity to overcome adversity. The tree, recovering from war, parallels the healing process and hope of Taichi and his mother. The changing seasons in the story reflect the various phases of life, reminding us that challenging periods are just temporary moments in our journey. While we cannot alter the past, we have the power to choose our path forward—whether with anger and resentment or with kindness and forgiveness.		

(2021) emphasize that all middle school programs should respond to the developmental needs of young adolescents. Daisaku Ikeda children’s stories address contemporary issues, making them particularly relevant. The middle school period is crucial for addressing students’ cognitive, social, emotional, moral, and cultural development (Brinegar and Caskey, 2022). Borman et al. (2021) highlight the significance of this factor in shaping students academically, socially, and emotionally. Furthermore, Brown et al. (2024) emphasize creating a school culture that values students’ strengths, promotes inclusive practices, and fosters meaningful connections among students, families, and the community.

### Promoting Democratic Education

The analysis of Ikeda children’s videos, which focuses on themes of happiness, peace, and

sportsmanship, aligns well with various social studies standards, including those related to democracy. It also supports social and emotional learning goals, such as self-awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship development. This alignment highlights that promoting and restoring humanity through social studies is not only academic competence but also a moral obligation. One of the most empowering aspects is its call to action. Teachers inspire students to apply what they learn by engaging in civic action or service learning that positively impacts their schools and communities. This empowerment catalyzes change, inspiring both educators and students to make a positive impact. Ikeda children’s stories, along with their connection to nonfiction media, deepen students’ understanding of their environment in a unique way. It not only focuses on the narratives of conflict but also sheds light on human revolution (i.e., inner

**Table 3**  
Analyzing “The Winds of Victory”

Example 3		
<b>Level:</b> Middle Grades		
<b>Video:</b> The Winds of Victory (25 minutes)		
<b>Storyline:</b> Kenji is a jealous boy on a soccer team who injures Yuta, an outstanding player. Despite his ankle injury preventing him from playing, Yuta never harbors resentment and maintains a strong team spirit to help the team succeed. Yuta’s behavior and sincerity teach Kenji the meanings of fair play and sportsmanship, awakening his sense of humanity.		
<b>National Social Studies Standards:</b> Developing Questions & Planning Inquiries (Dimension 1)		
<b>Georgia Social Studies Standards of Excellence:</b> As an example of a state standard to demonstrate alignment, we selected: Formulate Appropriate Research Questions (SSIPS14).		
<b>Application:</b> Engaging students in the exploration of athletic competition, particularly concepts like fair play, can be done effectively in a safe learning environment. Teachers should model how to formulate meaningful questions, such as, “Is being a good teammate the same as being a good coworker?” Encouraging reflection on these ideas is essential, as it lays the groundwork for more advanced question development as students progress.		
Observe	Reflect	Question
At the 4:00 minute mark, Kenji injures Yuta by doing a slide tackle.	Have you played a sport with a sore winner?	What are some characteristics of someone who overcelebrates a win?
At 6:00, Yuta is cleaning the soccer balls and states that he wants to help the team in any way he can.	How would you have responded if you were in Yuta’s shoes? Would you be angry or try to find a way to support your team?	Why is this a form of good sportsmanship?
At 12:40, the coach tells the players they cannot play with resentment and hate.	Explain the concept of fair play. What does it mean to have a spirit of fairness?	What would you do if a person did not play a fair game?
Further Investigation		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Control what you can control. You cannot control a tornado, but you can control how you respond. Do you help those around you or hide in place during the storm?</li> <li>Attitude refers to how you handle adversity, while effort signifies the amount of time and intentional work you put into any endeavor. If you have a baseball game, do you work on your batting or pitching?</li> </ul>		
<b>Additional Notes:</b> The concept of fair play is essential. How can you encourage others to give their best and respect their opponents? Can you share an instance when fair play was lacking? How do you believe one can win with honor? What comes to mind when you hear about a professional athlete’s cheating?		

transformation), diplomacy, and community-building efforts. By highlighting lesser-known narratives of peacebuilders, civil rights leaders, and reconciliation efforts, teachers can provide a more comprehensive and balanced view of history, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the complexities of human interactions. We want to ensure that it is not just the story of those who suffered during war, but also one of perseverance.

### Implementing Innovative Activities

Georgia, for example, emphasizes inquiry-based learning and civic understanding in its Social Studies Standards of Excellence (Georgia Department of Education, 2023). By integrating these standards with the C3 Framework, this article illustrates how state and national educational expectations align. Social studies

educators can effectively teach both content and social perspectives by being intentional in their teaching methods. Utilizing narratives from *The Cherry Tree* video alongside the historical context of the *Hiroshima Bombing* serves as a powerful way to foster compassion and courage, particularly in relation to global conflicts. These hands-on activities raise students’ awareness of the dignity of life and empower them to take action for peace.

Fictional and nonfictional media create a sense of community among students, fostering a shared understanding of complex social issues. These methods allow students to engage emotionally and critically with real-world topics. Fiction invites empathy by placing students in the shoes of diverse characters, while nonfiction offers factual grounding and historical context. Classroom activities such as role-play can deepen student engagement by encouraging them to

**Table 4**  
*Connecting Fictional and Nonfictional Media: Happiness*

Type	Fiction	Nonfiction
Source	The Princess and the Moon Daisaku Ikeda Children's Stories (2016b, March 16)	Accepting & Embracing Others (RocketKids, 2023, August 14)
Similarities	For example, Sachiko was sad. That is a real emotion that anyone can experience.	
Differences	What are the aspects that are not similar? For example, a magic bunny traveling from the moon is fictional. That is part of the creative experience. There are no limits to the direction that can be created in a fictional story can take. You can have characters that can fly or time-travel. What are some other differences between the fictional account and the nonfictional account?	
Types of Comparative Activities	<p>The Princess and the Moon (if time is limited, teachers can select the excerpt times).</p> <p>Explore the role of empathy from both sources (Fiction and Nonfiction).</p> <p>In the nonfictional video at the 55-second mark, empathy At the 1:01 mark, celebrate diversity At the 1:31 mark, challenging stereotypes At 1:51, building positive relationships</p> <p>Also, ask students to share their own experiences related to:</p> <p>Empathy Diversity Challenging stereotypes Building positive relationships</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The students can create a play about one of these aspects.</li> <li>• They can create a small comic book about one of these aspects.</li> <li>• The students can create their own story (nonfictional), or they can create a fictional story.</li> </ul> <p>Make sure they include one of these central elements in their story.</p>	

explore different perspectives, fostering dialogue, and promoting problem-solving. These strategies help learners explore their world, examining the systems, norms, and communities that shape their lives. By reflecting on their lived experiences alongside those represented in texts, students can make meaningful connections, challenge assumptions, and begin to envision themselves as active participants in social change. Educators can also benefit from this shared understanding and connection as part of this community.

### Taking a Stand for Justice

Justice and peace are inseparable concepts because a truly just society upholds the dignity of every person's life. A justice-oriented philosophy in the classroom can be understood as developing skills for real-world problem-solving. Teachers need to provide a space for discussing complex issues and a safe environment for those with different perspectives. In this article, Ikeda children's videos

on happiness, peace, and sportsmanship are used for analysis activities, providing social studies educators with a valuable approach to fostering students' sense of responsibility for creating peace in their environments. In his book, "One by One: The World is Yours to Change," Ikeda (2004) highlights Rosa Parks's courageous and compassionate actions, emphasizing that "the courageous cry of even a single individual standing up for justice can light a flame in the hearts of thousands and change the course of human history" (p. 148). He further asserts that "one person inspiring another, transcending all differences—this is the basis of changing society at the most fundamental level" (Daisaku Ikeda: Peace through Dialogue, n.d.d.). The insights illustrated in Ikeda's children's stories and through analysis activities teach that pursuing justice requires individual observation, reflection, and questioning. This is especially crucial for the youth, our society's future, who are dedicated to pressing onward with courage, compassion, and wisdom for their own happiness and that of others.

**Table 5**  
*Connecting Fictional and Nonfictional Media: Peace*

Type	Fiction	Nonfiction
Video	The Cherry Tree Daisaku Ikeda Children's Stories (2016a, March 16)	Yoshito Matsushige's Account of the Hiroshima Bombing (Atomic Heritage Foundation, 2022)
Similarities	What aspects from each account are similar? Some examples could be the aftermath of war for survivors. What other similarities can you and your students find?	
Differences	One of the central differences is that Taichi's story ends with the tree's survival, which signifies strength and resilience. In Yoshito's account, we see the aftermath and reference primary sources to see the long-term ramifications of war.	
Types of Comparative Activities	<p>The Cherry Tree video allows us to compare Yoshito's life to that of other people. We can also explore what transpired after Japan's surrender and the aftermath of the war with primary sources.</p> <p>The Cherry Tree Video (if time is limited, teachers can select the excerpt times).</p> <p>Explore hope in a challenging situation (Fiction and Nonfiction)</p> <p>Also, ask students to share their own experiences related to having hope at a challenging time:</p> <p>Hope Perseverance Loss</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The students can write a song about one of these aspects.</li> <li>• They can create or draw an image representing one of the abovementioned aspects.</li> </ul> <p>This topic could be challenging. Children have different life experiences and may not want to share a tragedy like the loss of a loved one, or they may experience some form of harm. This is a good time to talk to your school counselor and see if they want to participate or be available for students who need to speak with an adult.</p>	

Inspiration can take many forms, from a woman refusing to give up her seat on a bus as a symbol of resistance against segregation, to a school recognizing and addressing unfair policies for its students. Teachers must view students holistically and provide supplemental resources to foster a more comprehensive understanding of historical topics. Allowing adolescents to voice their anger and engage in open conversations about the world is essential. Engaging in discussions about current social issues signifies our commitment to students.

Social studies plays a pivotal role in interdisciplinary learning, often integrated with fields like English and Science, encouraging students to explore the interconnectedness of knowledge and fostering curiosity. According to the National Council for the Social Studies (2025), social studies standards offer substantial interpretive space for districts, schools, and teachers due to intentional design choices and political influences. This flexibility leads to

variation in curricula across states and districts, highlighting the significance of educator input. National and state guidance frames standards as goals rather than strict curricula (NCSS, 2025). These standards articulate what students should know and be able to do, while the "how" is left to local curricula and teacher discretion.

Our article aligns with national and state social studies standards by promoting teacher autonomy, accommodating local contexts, and encouraging critical thinking rather than rote memorization. By focusing on disciplinary practices through both fiction and non-fiction examples, instructional activities can facilitate deeper learning in social studies, rather than simply listing facts.

## Conclusion

The primary goal of social studies is to develop students into contributing citizens by nurturing their humanity. This article explores how Ikeda

**Table 6**  
*Connecting Fictional and Nonfictional Media: Sportsmanship*

Type	Fiction	Nonfiction
Source	The Winds of Victory Daisaku Ikeda Children's Stories (2016c, March 16)	On the Road: Middle School Football Players Execute Life-Changing Play (CBS Evening News, 2013, October 25)
Similarities	What are the similarities between fictional and nonfictional accounts? Aspects of good sportsmanship, such as noticing when a player is hurt and feeling compassion for a teammate or opponent, are evident.	
Differences	In the fictional version, the players perform overly dramatic, slow-motion actions—these are fictional games with teams that are not real. In the non-fiction story, the players try to help a teammate score a touchdown.	
Types of Comparative Activities	The videos provide examples of a cartoon that illustrates fair play, alongside real-life instances of good sportsmanship. Can you think of a non-fictional example of a sports celebration? Have students create cartoon expressions to demonstrate the emotions involved in such celebrations. Encourage them to draw their interpretations to capture those feelings.	

children's stories can help teachers foster a sense of humanity that embraces happiness, peace, and sportsmanship. By extending the "Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Primary Sources" to include fictional sources and connecting to nonfictional sources, social studies educators promote creative expression and critical thinking through various forms of media. This approach helps students transform self-doubt and societal violence into a

commitment to peaceful coexistence. Integrating human education through Ikeda children's stories cultivates empathy and a deeper understanding of both global and local issues. It allows students to explore diverse perspectives, ethical dilemmas, and their own paths to empowerment. By emphasizing observation, reflection, and questioning, educators encourage dialogue and active citizenship in the classroom and beyond.

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