The SDSL School Library

Monthly Update

November 2026

Civic and Ethical Literacy: You May Be Doing More Than You Think

Of the three strands in the SD School Library Standards, Civic and Ethical Literacy can sometimes feel like the one that receives the least attention. But take a closer look at your everyday work, and you may discover that you are already supporting this strand in more ways than you realize. From helping students understand how to use information responsibly to teaching digital citizenship, modeling respectful communication, and guiding students through the research process, school librarians create countless opportunities for students to practice responsible participation in an interconnected world. This month, let's explore what Civic and Ethical Literacy really looks like in the school library and recognize the meaningful work you may already be doing.

Learning Through Play

November is International Games Month, a great opportunity to bring a little extra fun and connection into your school library! Games can do more than entertain. They encourage problem-solving, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and good sportsmanship. Whether you host a board game day, introduce students to new card games, set up a puzzle challenge, or incorporate games into a lesson, even small activities can create meaningful learning opportunities. No elaborate program required! Consider trying something new this month and see how games can bring students together while building skills that extend far beyond the game board.

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SCHOOL LIBRARY RESOURCES

- SDSL CE Catalog
- SDSL Training Catalog
- School Library Services Handbook
- SDSL Electronic Resources
- Monthly Update Archives
- Guides for School Librarians
- PD Opportunities
- School Library Scoop
- School Library Pulse

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MORE THAN DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

When we hear Civic and Ethical Literacy, we might immediately think of digital citizenship lessons or discussions about responsible technology use. Those are important pieces of the strand, but the **SD School Library Standards** encompass much more.

The overarching standard states that students recognize the rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of living and learning in an interconnected world. Across grade levels, the objectives address digital citizenship, online activity and digital footprints, ethical use of information, copyright, plagiarism, acceptable use, and respectful communication and collaboration.

Many of these objectives are already woven into the everyday work of school librarians. They don't always require a separate lesson or a special project. Sometimes, they happen in a five-minute conversation, a research assignment, or a routine reminder about how we work and learn together.

LOOK AT WHAT YOU'RE ALREADY DOING

Teaching students to use information responsibly
When you teach students to acknowledge authors, cite sources, avoid plagiarism, or follow copyright and fair use guidelines, you are addressing Civic and Ethical Literacy. These lessons help students understand that using information comes with responsibilities, whether they are writing a research paper, creating a presentation, or incorporating images into a project.

Building responsible digital citizens
Helping students understand online safety, follow acceptable use policies, protect personal information, and consider the lasting impact of their online activity directly supports this strand. Even a quick conversation about what students post, share, or communicate online can reinforce these skills.

Modeling respectful communication
The standards include appropriate listening and speaking skills, respectful collaboration, and the exchange of ideas. When you establish expectations for library discussions, guide students through group work, or help them navigate a disagreement during a collaborative activity, you are supporting these objectives.

Helping students understand citizenship
The standards introduce citizenship in the early grades and gradually build toward more independent and responsible participation. Opportunities to discuss classroom and library expectations, shared responsibilities, and how individual actions affect a learning community can help students begin to understand what it means to be a responsible member of a community.

Connecting rights with responsibilities
Students have opportunities to learn about the responsible use of resources, technology, and information. Explaining why library expectations exist, discussing how to care for shared materials, and helping students understand the responsibilities that accompany access to digital tools are all practical ways to connect rights and responsibilities.

THE STRANDS WORK TOGETHER

Civic and Ethical Literacy does not have to stand alone. In fact, it often overlaps naturally with the other two strands of the SD School Library Standards.

When students conduct research, Information Literacy helps them locate, evaluate, and use information. Civic and Ethical Literacy reinforces the responsibility to credit sources, follow copyright guidelines, and use information appropriately. When students share their learning, they can practice respectful communication and responsible participation alongside the skills they developed during the research process.

One lesson can support multiple strands, and that is exactly how the standards are intended to work. The standards provide a roadmap for student learning, not a checklist of isolated lessons that must be taught separately.

A SIMPLE NEXT STEP

This month, take a few minutes to look at the Civic and Ethical Literacy objectives in the **South Dakota School Library Standards**. As you read through them, think about the lessons you teach, the expectations you reinforce, the conversations you have with students, and the routines you have established in your library.

You may discover that many of these objectives are already part of your practice. If you identify an area you haven't addressed recently, consider one small way to incorporate it into an upcoming lesson or activity.

Strengthening Civic and Ethical Literacy can begin with recognizing the meaningful work you're already doing in your library. Small steps can make a big impact!

School Library Standards Update

The SD School Library Standards are currently undergoing revision. The proposed revisions, along with the current standards and a summary of the rationale and vision, are available on the South Dakota Department of Education's website. Take a look at the proposed standards to see what's changing and how the revisions may shape school library instruction moving forward.

Explore the revision process: South Dakota School Library Standards Revision

CULTUREGRAMS

Direct Link

Reliable cultural information about countries, U.S. states, and Canadian provinces. Available in World, Kids, States, and Provinces editions, the resource provides age-appropriate overviews of daily life, customs and history. Slideshows, interviews, recipes, infographics, and photos help students build authentic global awareness.

TIME SAVING TIPS

Use the Kids Edition when assigning country reports. The reading level is elementary to middle school, making it accessible for all learners.

Infographics, photos, videos, and audio clips are great for instant mini-lessons, especially in social studies and world cultures classes.

Use Teaching Activities (78 included) to quickly integrate CultureGrams into creative projects, discussions, and writing assignments.

Use custom comparison tables and graphs to quickly create data-driven assignments and help students compare information across countries.

IDEAL FOR CLASSROOM USE

Activity 1: "A Day in the Life" Cultural Snapshot
Purpose: Builds empathy and global awareness by helping students compare daily routines around the world.

- Students select a country from the Kids or World Edition and read the "Life as a Kid" or cultural overview. They then create a short journal entry describing a typical day for a child in that country and compare it to their own.

Activity 2: Culture + Geography Infographic Challenge
Purpose: Strengthens data literacy by using CultureGrams' graphs, tables, and infographics.

- Assign each student a country and have them examine demographic infographics like population, languages, religion, or education. Students create a comparison chart between two countries and explain at least three meaningful differences.

Activity 3: Global Recipe Connections
Purpose: Builds cultural understanding through food traditions and cross-curricular connections (social studies + FACS).

- Students explore a country's recipe options in CultureGrams, choose one food item, research its cultural significance, and present why it matters to that region. Optionally, hold a "no-heat cooking lab" with simple dishes.

DID YOU KNOW?

CultureGrams includes interviews with children and adults from around the world, which are great for perspective-taking lessons.
Every country page has audio clips of official names and national anthems, plus printable flags that are perfect for cultural celebrations or geography units.

Dakota Valley Upper Elementary and Middle School Library

Librarian: Erin Nilges







At Dakota Valley, librarian Erin Nilges has transformed the library into a true hub of school life. Centrally located in what Erin calls "the magical hallway," the library serves as a place to read, study, collaborate, receive academic support, create, and connect with others. Erin has thoughtfully adapted both the collection and the program to meet changing student needs, from genrefying the collection and making audiobooks and Playaways more accessible to shifting from a traditional specials rotation toward meaningful collaboration with classroom teachers. Her willingness to say "yes" to opportunities, combined with strong relationships with students, teachers, and administrators, has helped create a library that is busy, flexible, and deeply connected to the school community.

More Than a Place for Books

The Dakota Valley Library wears a lot of hats! Students use the space for reading, tutoring, testing, studying, creating, and socializing. A study room/green screen room, free book cart, technology support, and even the DVCARES Store make the library a resource for many different aspects of student life.

From Specials to Collaboration

Erin has intentionally shifted away from a traditional specials rotation and toward collaborative instruction with ELA and reading teachers. Together, they provide meaningful instruction in research and information literacy grounded in the SD School Library Standards, including evaluating sources and using SDSL databases.

A Library That Responds

Erin uses circulation data and LibraryTrack to better understand how students use the library and what they want to read. Her genre-based collection, monthly book clubs, themed displays, and reading promotions encourage students to explore new books and authors while keeping the collection responsive to their interests.

Leading Beyond

Erin's leadership extends beyond the library walls. She serves on building Leadership Teams, supports NHS and Yearbook, and recently led an AI 101 for Teachers session during Dakota Valley's first staff edcamp. Her approach to PD connects colleagues with reliable resources they can continue exploring on their own.