

Teaching about Tragedy

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We Are Living History

REFLECTIONS OF A NEW YORK CITY SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER

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Prelude

Fall is the most beautiful season of all in New York City. Spring gives merely a fleeting taste of mild weather before the city bakes in too much heat; rare is the New Yorker who endures the long winter without complaint. Having lived in New York City all my life, first as a student and then as a teacher, the fall had always meant “back to school.” Only on a sabbatical year off did I finally learn to appreciate the joys of autumn when New York City is in all its glory—day after day you can move from inside to outside in whatever you are wearing while savoring the deep blue skies against which the New York City skyline is so stunning. But this fall, our Indian summer feels utterly cruel; so much tragedy while the weather beckons us to enjoy life.

I live in Greenwich Village and walk to work by heading west. The Village Community School, an independent K-8 school, is on 10th Street just a few blocks from the Hudson River. For twenty years, on my fifteen-minute walk to work, the Empire State Building has appeared on my right, the World Trade Center (visible anywhere in low-lying Greenwich Village) on my left. These buildings marked the boundary of my world and seemed as fixed and steadfast as the axis of a compass.

This fall, I was especially excited to return to school. Last year, I had developed a full year’s course for seventh graders entitled *The Islamic World*. This year, I was eager to repeat and develop it further. Just mention “Islam” or “Muslims” and many well-educated adults will ask, “Why teach about Islam? Their values are so different from ours. What about their treatment of women? Of terrorism?” I grew up during the Cold War and one thing I know from the experience is that a wall of silence enveloped our schools in the 1950s and 1960s. We

were to learn nothing about Russia or its people, as if by design. It is an easy—and effective—way to dehumanize “the other.”

Aware of my own ignorance about the world’s second largest religion, and about the centuries during which the Islamic world far surpassed the West in both material and intellectual accomplishments, I was determined to fill in the gaps of my own education. My school, deeply committed to diversity, supported my efforts. The summer of 1998, I studied at the Dar al Islam Teachers’ Institute; last summer, I received a Fulbright grant to study in Turkey with fourteen other educators from around the United States (under the auspices of Dr. Manoucher Khosrowshahi of Tyler Jr. College in Texas). Before school opened, I posted on a bulletin board the fascinating photographs I had taken along the borders that Turkey shares with Iraq, Iran, and Syria. I had been so afraid to go to this part of the world; I had returned with so much to share.

Tuesday, September 11: Ground Zero

Today, during my first free period, I sit comparing notes with our other seventh grade homeroom teacher, Andy Robinson. We review the events of yesterday, our first day of school. My new seventh graders had returned fresh from summer and eager to learn; my eighth grade classes include many children who studied about the Islamic world with me last year. Around 9:15 a.m., someone pops into the teachers’ room to tell us that our opening-of-school assembly has been called off. A small plane has accidentally crashed into the World Trade Center. To get to the assembly, our students would need to walk around the block in clear view of the accident. To protect our students from the upsetting sight, we will keep them inside.

Curious, Andy and I leave the teachers’ room and head outside to the corner. A small group of adults is standing in the sun facing south. We look up. It takes a while for what we see to sink in. Not one, but two of the towers are ablaze. Black craters pockmark their upper stories. We are silent; we are helpless. Someone tells us that she saw a big American Airlines jet ram into one of the buildings. She avows that it was close enough to read the letters, even though we are located several miles north of the towers. This was no accident, we slowly realize. Suddenly, I feel sick all over. I turn to Andy: “The people inside, Andy, the people inside!” In my mind’s eye, I understand that the people above the gaping craters will



Several articles which had been scheduled for publication in this issue of *Social Education* have been rescheduled for publication in later issues. The upcoming November/December issues of *Social Education* and *The Social Studies Professional* will feature articles on how teachers can help students cope with the events of September 11, 2001.

As a companion to these special focus articles, our website features lists of classroom tips and other resources at www.socialstudies.org/resources.

have little chance, those below at least some hope. At first I think, "I don't know people in the financial world; I won't know anyone in those buildings."

I rush inside to phone my husband to tell him not to head downtown to jury duty. Instead of hearing his voice, my twenty-three-year-old daughter, who now lives uptown, answers the phone, crying hysterically. She has come downtown to vote in the primaries and has witnessed one of the strikes. She is weeping for her boyfriend, an artist who supports himself with a conventional job in the World Trade Center. I am amazed that I have momentarily forgotten.

Suddenly, the situation is intensely personal. Any adult who has seen his or her child struggle through adolescence and then finally find happiness will know what this moment feels like. Any teacher who has had to make those excruciating choices between those children we care so much about at work and those we love at home will also understand the dilemma I face. I race back to the teachers' room, where I find Linda Russo, our math coordinator, shaking, red-faced and repeating, "If you had seen what I saw. If you had seen it! It was like a science fiction movie, but it was real! I saw a plane crash into the World Trade Center." Yet Linda pulls herself together when she hears about my situation and pledges, along with Andy, to oversee the dismissal of my class; many parents have already come to get their children, and the rest of the parents are being called by the administration.

I check out with the administrators and run home, careful not to put myself in the way of the many ambulances racing south. Everywhere along the route, adults are silently facing downtown. I am reminded of November 22nd, 1963. I was fifteen, shopping in a department store, when I learned that John F. Kennedy had been shot. I had walked up Fifth Avenue toward home, looking into all the faces. Some people, you could tell, already knew their world would never be the same, but others did not yet know. Today in Greenwich Village, we all know. But my mother, who lives uptown, cannot see past the midtown skyscrapers and will learn of these events only when my sister in Washington telephones her later in the day. New York City has its own strange geography.

I lie on the bed with my daughter and prepare for the longest wait of our lives. We hear a surge of human voices expressing awe and terror on the streets below. One of the towers has crumbled to the ground. I don't know what to say, so instead I comfort her by listening. At 11:30 a.m., our doorbell rings. It is her boyfriend; it seems like a miracle. He had been a few minutes late to work; he had emerged from the subway but never entered the World Trade Center. Instead he headed north with a veritable parade of people escaping hell. Later, we would learn that almost all of the employees in his office on the sixtieth floor had escaped. No matter how horrible the casualties, over the next few days, we gradually realize that an astonishing number of people were saved, many more than we could have dreamed of while we gazed up at those buildings while they stood.

With things secure at home, I head back to school. During this trip, there is no more World Trade Center on my left—

only masses of gray smoke on the horizon. Some students are still waiting for their parents and guardians to arrive, and I resume my role as teacher. I learn later that our director, Eve Kleger, made the decision soon after the second air strike to evacuate the building, with or without the explanations that students will later need to understand. Their safety is all that matters. A teachers' meeting is called after the students have been picked up. Am I the only teacher who remembers nothing from this meeting? But I leave for the day feeling that our director and other members of our administration have been fully in charge.

We later learn that some uptown schools remained opened all day, even preparing for children to spend the night until their guardians could reach them. Among the heroes of the tragedy, according to *The New York Times* (September 18, 2001), were scores of public school teachers who "evacuated several schools that were dangerously near the collapsing towers and moved a total of 8,000 children to safety without a single injury."

Wednesday, September 12: Respite and Reflection

The New York City schools are all closed today, but my school is below 14th Street, and it will remain shut longer than most. This is because Lower Manhattan has been closed to all but emergency traffic. Some people report having to show IDs to policemen to cross the barriers at 14th Street; once, I see a tank-like vehicle stationed there. My family and I go out only for short walks or to pick something up at the corner deli. The absence of sound becomes a sound in itself. Occasionally, a strange burning smell wafts up from the death and destruction south of us, and some people wear breathing masks. In the evening, people hold impromptu candlelight vigils. Flowers are left at the fire stations; some units have been entirely wiped out. We see policemen in strange uniforms, up from Miami to reinforce our troops. College students set up volunteer efforts. The blood banks are flooded with donors. But New Yorkers remain calm; no one seems afraid. After all, aren't we famous for coping with danger every day? Life goes on in a quieter vein, like watching a silent movie.

Today I begin to understand the enormity of what has happened to New York City, to the United States, and, I fear, to the world itself. I am ashamed that I experienced the first day as "something that happened to me."

I spend the next days answering my e-mail, and it is here that I find solace and also food for thought. Claire Schnell, a teacher who lives in New Zealand and whose classes have corresponded with mine in former years, writes first: "It's as if our Mountain (Ngongotaha) had been leveled, that solid anchor that sets our skyline in Rotorua." She sends me e-mails from her students who want to connect with mine:

Dear Friend,

I woke up this morning with not a care in the world. But then I heard the shocking news about the World Trade Center. My name is Jason Te Huia and I am twelve years old. I now know because of the Internet and TV that it was some cruel hijackers that caused this event. I am very saddened that this disastrous thing

has happened. I feel sorry for the innocent victims. I hope you, your friends, and family are safe. Here in New Zealand we are thinking of you and your home town.

Your Friend, Jason

In an e-mail to Claire, I describe events, and she writes back:

I took your e-mail to my school and read it to my class. . . . They were so silent and respectful of your family experience; other teachers also shared it. It has meant so much to everyone here, a clear voice coming from the U.S.A.

Then comes a flurry of e-mails from the American teachers on my Fulbright trip to Turkey. Douglas Darracott, a high school art teacher in Dallas, writes:

My heart goes out to everyone there and my thoughts are very much of you....Our trip was life-altering and I miss all of the members of our extended family.

Lallitha John, who teaches high school history in Maryland, e-mails:

Our school closed an hour-and-a-half early. I was scared leaving school, not knowing what was going to happen next. I felt this urgent need to see my parents and drove home. I don't want to see the terrorists win by getting the best of our fears... I think what is even more crucial for us as educators is to fight against the impending anti-Arab and anti-Muslim propaganda that is bound to follow this tragedy. We know what happened to Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor. ... We are all Americans and share in this sorrow.

From Aaron Becker, a history teacher in the Chicago public schools with whom I shared many discussions about Islam, comes this message:

My classes were packed yesterday, and students' responses to the catastrophe were so varied...my students brought out more interesting and sophisticated points than the pundits on TV. ... I truly empathize today with Arab Americans and Muslim Americans who must be feeling the wrath and vengefulness in their neighbors' eyes.

David Manson, a composer and professor of the humanities in Florida, writes, "Several Turks that I met this summer have e-mailed to express condolences. I feel a certain responsibility to encourage temperance with this situation."

Oya Yerin Guneri, an education professor at Middle East Technical University whom I met in Turkey (and who is helping me find a class in Turkey to form a partnership with mine), writes:

I am very sad about the things that happened in your country. I hope you are fine, your family is fine. I'll pray for the innocent people who lost their lives and pray

for the families who lost their loved ones.

Lynn Brink, a professor of government in Texas who is about to teach in a study-abroad program in Rome, writes, "I plan to show a good straightforward film on Islam. Then we will have a long discussion and try and alleviate their fears. I learned a lot in Turkey to help me."

Answering these e-mails, and many more like them, provides a kind of therapy for me. It also teaches me several lessons.

People across the country and the world have an urgent need to contact someone close to events as they unfold. At first, I cannot understand this. Haven't they seen it all on TV? No. There is no substitute for person-to-person communication. It provides the link that truly brings us together. This new understanding reinforces my belief that it is important for students in America to connect on a person-to-person basis with students living across the United States and around the world. Teachers can find many ways to facilitate these connections.¹

Much can be gained by bringing teachers across the United States together for summer course work or travel. As one professor on the Fulbright trip said, after getting to know American teachers from around the country, "We may not have learned to speak Turkish, but we all learned to speak Texan." We know less than we think we do about parts of our own country. I am always inspired by the other educators I meet from everywhere in this nation. In our news coverage and other media, they often remain underestimated and unacknowledged.

Our Fulbright project achieved its mission of educating Americans about cultures not their own. By helping us make personal contacts with people in our host country, it has enabled us to foster a better understanding of international relations in our classrooms. Never has this been more important than right now.

Thursday, September 13: The School Staff Reconvenes

City schools south of 14th Street remain officially closed. To help us help our students when they return, Eve Kleger calls a meeting of the staff, who arrive from all over the metropolitan area, despite sporadic transportation service. The meeting is led by our two school psychologists, Melissa Gordon and Rickie Schuster (both of whom have had training with disaster expert Elizabeth Carll), as well as by psychologists Richard Bock and Betsy Klein. While we have been away, a dedicated group of administrators has been planning ahead, phoning all members of our community and trying to foresee the ways in which our parents, children, and faculty will need extra support in the months ahead.

Kleger reviews the decision-making process that led to the evacuation of the school, including our phone calls to local police and fire stations, to help us sort out rumors from fact and to make decisions about safety. She expresses gratitude to all of us. Many teachers have a story to share, like mine, about another staff member who spontaneously filled in and gave extra support when needed. We thereby reinforce the meaning of our middle name, the Village Community School.



From a mural of New York City painted by students at the Village Community School, 2000.

NATHAN BLANEY

We learn that, miraculously, none of our 312 students appears to have suffered the loss of a parent or guardian in the tragedy. The psychologists distribute handouts for us on ways to help children in psychological crisis (see the accompanying list of useful websites).

Melissa Gordon points out that what we are all experiencing will not find a quick or easy resolution; too many grave uncertainties lie ahead. Unlike a natural disaster, fire, or school shooting spree, this disaster as yet knows no conclusion; the professionals trying to help us, and the teachers and parents trying to help children, are also in an ongoing state of heightened stress. In this sense, the situation is unprecedented. Dealing with our own reactions will be important as we try to help students cope with theirs. We—perhaps fifty of us—begin by sharing our concerns as an entire group.

- ▶ Some young children may return knowing very little, whereas others may have been exposed to too much information. How will we balance what we do in the classroom with what parents want their children to know or not to know?
- ▶ How can we empower our students to help in community efforts throughout the city?
- ▶ How can we help students resist the pervasive tendency to stereotype entire groups of people (e.g., Arabs, Muslims)?
- ▶ How can we harness the power of nonverbal expression (art, music) as a means to help students heal?
- ▶ How can we improve our own safety procedures? For example, late medical and emergency forms often come in shortly after school opens.
- ▶ The cityscape mural painted on our playground wall in 2000 by the entire school includes the proudly standing Twin Towers (see the photo above). How can we find a way to

express the school's remembrance of the tragedy in a positive way?

- ▶ How should we balance taking class time to discuss and acknowledge this tragedy and returning to normal routines? (The psychologists reassure us that routines are important and comforting; students must see that life is proceeding normally.)
- ▶ Many teachers pose "What if?" questions. What if a younger student wants to build towers and knock them down? What if an older student makes cruel jokes?

Richard Bock cautions us against reacting with disapproval to the variety of ways students express their anxieties, as these can be effective coping strategies. If students are upset by how their peers respond, it is best first to acknowledge that people have different ways of conveying similar feelings, and then to separate the students. If behaviors persist and seem to slow down a student's progress in recovering, try to move the student on to a different focus or get outside help from a member of the counseling team. Our psychologists stress that students be given the option of joining (or not joining) in whole-class discussions of the tragedy, of visiting (or not visiting) our support staff for small group discussions. For some students, revisiting the crisis can impede their recovery, whereas for others, it helps. Sometimes panic or crying attacks can be infectious, especially among adolescents. If a small group reacts this way, send the individuals out of the class for extra counseling.

We break up into four teams, each led by one of the psychologists. These small groups allow us to share personal stories. We learn that some staff members cannot yet return to their homes near the World Trade Center; others are racked

by guilt because they did not call home to desperate parents, living far away, until the end of the day. Another teacher's husband had just opened a business in the WTC. He and all his employees are safe, but the trauma for her and her family has been intense. These sessions are cathartic for many staff members, and we support one another better now. We are encouraged to view these sessions as a model for our classrooms; it is important, we realize, to give each student a voice.

Kleger tells us her criteria for reopening the school:

- ▶ The city must reopen Manhattan below 14th Street.
- ▶ The staff must be able to travel to school.
- ▶ The air quality must be safe.
- ▶ Emergency help must be available in the city should we need it.

We review the special procedures that will be in place on the first day we reopen. Then, after gauging how our students have fared, we will reassess strategies and plan for the future.

A small group of us walks to our local police precinct. "How can our students help you?" we ask. "Bring socks and sweatpants for the men who are sifting the ruins," we are told. A few blocks away, we ask the same question at our local firehouse. Seven firemen are missing from the unit. Flowers and letters of thanks line the red doors.



Suggested Websites

For articles from *The New York Times*: www.nytimes.com
For lessons based on articles in *The New York Times*, go to *The New York Times Learning Network*:
www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers

For resources on disaster counseling:

- ▶ **The American Psychological Association**
www.apa.org/psychnet/coverage.html
- ▶ **Bank Street College of Education**
www.bnkst.edu
- ▶ **National Association for the Education of Young Children**
www.naeyc.org
- ▶ **National Association of School Psychologists**
www.nasponline.org/neat/terrorism.html
- ▶ **National Education Association**
www.nea.org/crisis/americaunited/01crisis.html
- ▶ **National Institute of Mental Health**
www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/violence.cfm
- ▶ **New York University Child Study Center**
www.aboutourkids.org/articles/war.html

For further online resources, visit
www.socialstudies.org/resources/moments

Friday, September 14 and the Weekend: Waiting

I am frustrated that my school is still not open. I begin to write this article, which sometimes eases my pain and sometimes increases it. I leave off clothing for New York University students who have not been allowed to return to their downtown dorms. I walk and do errands. When I pass an ad with a picture of the Trade Center, I mourn and can only envision it as I saw it last, an inferno about to crumble. Buildings all over downtown have become makeshift bulletin boards on which flyers appear with photographs of the missing. There are grandfathers proudly holding up new grandchildren, young men smiling with the vigor of youth. (One, I think painfully, looks like my daughter's boyfriend.) There are photos of office cleaners, secretaries, and financiers, posted side by side. Their names and faces reflect New York City's ethnic diversity, the reason I love it so.

New Yorkers are no longer in a hurry; every chance meeting with a neighbor or an acquaintance engenders a twenty-minute conversation. I encounter a student, weeping, with her mother. I see other Village Community students at the candlelight vigils that are now held every evening in the parks. The parks are filled with candles, photographs, and flags. Two men play *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* on fifes, and it comforts me; our nation has survived other dark days. Two women are putting up flyers, which read "Please join the Muslim and Arab American Community for a candlelight vigil on September 16... We condemn this horrible crime and join our fellow Americans in this hour of grief and loss." I ask the two young women posting them if non-Muslims are welcome; they embrace me, and I promise I will go. Children's drawings sent to comfort New Yorkers line the fences—some come from as far away as Hawaii. I e-mail Claire in New Zealand to say that if her students want to fax messages to New Yorkers, my students will post them. I walk home. The sky is a clear and gently darkening indigo. Hovering over the southern horizon is a faint swath of smoke. I enter my apartment building and say to a tenant, "It is unbearable to be outside." "Yes," she answers, "but it is unbearable to be inside."

Monday, September 17: School Reopens

Teachers are anxious this morning, even though we are prepared for all scenarios. Young students who are not ready to separate from their parents (and vice versa) can go sit together in the library. All students will be able to meet in small groups with psychologists. Throughout the school, classes will convene for forty minutes in homeroom for those children who want to discuss the tragedy, after which a normal day will resume.

I feel immediately relieved when my seventh graders arrive, backpacks in tow, to begin the year where we left off. I assign them seats first thing so they feel they have a "place." All but one proudly turns in the homework I had assigned on September 10th. I am not sure how they feel about studying the Islamic world this year, given recent events—some seem eager but others nervous at the prospect. All regard it as a strange coincidence.

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We go around the room and share how we have spent our time since we last met. Several students pass on the opportunity; one boy is teary. I treat this discussion as I would a sex education class for young children; I do not give them more information than they ask for, and I let them lead the way. But I do tell them that all of us, including adults, react in different ways under stress. I encourage them to read about events rather than to watch too much TV. I tell them that I want information, I want to know what I can do to help, rather than hear many tragic stories about which I can do nothing. They seem relieved to hear this, and many nod their heads. I distribute three articles from *The New York Times*: “The Suspect Bin Laden” (September 14, 2001); “The Weak at War with the Strong” (September 14, 2001), which conveys why many countries both envy and hate the United States; and “After the Attacks: Retaliation, Attacks and Harassment of Arab Americans Increase” (September 14, 2001). I tell them to read these now only if they are interested and to save them for discussions at a later date.

The staff reconvenes after school so we can assess the day. The eighth graders wanted discussions of politics; some sixth graders talked about the impending war. Many elementary-age children chose to hear a story rather than participate in discussions of events. Very few students opted to go for counseling. This is not to say they were not deeply upset or even traumatized, but that their overriding means of coping was to get on with their lives—to be kids.

We set up an ongoing system with our school psychologists to report any student who exhibits worrisome behavior in the classroom. Directions: Fill in an index card with your name, the student’s name, and a description of what worries you, and place the card in the drop-off box.

We conclude that our students’ parents (some of whom were panic-stricken on September 11th) have done an excellent job of calming down their children. At crucial moments in our lives, we need our families; perhaps the many days off from school unintentionally

served to fulfill this need. Many teachers express relief. We had been prepared to help our students get through their day; instead, we find their indomitable spirit has helped us get through ours.

Other schools have not been as lucky as ours. New Jersey and Long Island schools have been hard hit by the deaths of parents. At the Willard Elementary School in Ridgewood, New Jersey, where six children have lost their fathers, fellow classmates are being counseled “on how to approach their grieving peers.”² One uptown private school reported that their PTA has arranged for homemade dinners to be prepared for their two grieving families on a nightly basis. The head of school speaks with the surviving spouses daily. Their overwhelming desire is that their children’s lives at school return to normal.

According to Principal Sonnet Takahisa, with whom I spoke, the Museum School (a public 6-12 school in Manhattan) has arranged to host students and teachers from Intermediate School 89, which has been forced to close because of its proximity to ground zero. They are just one of many schools that will absorb the nearly 9,000 children whose schools have shut.³ The Museum School’s students have made welcome banners for the newcomers. The school cafeteria has a space for reflection and a “tree of hope,” on which students can write. High schoolers and their teachers are holding “teach-ins,” which address a variety of political issues, while younger students also have an opportunity to express their hopes and fears. A room on each floor of the school building is staffed by guidance counselors and psychologists. Many of those in private practice around the city have volunteered their services to the public schools.

What is apparent in all these stories is the outpouring of help that New Yorkers are providing one another in these days of crisis.

Tuesday, September 18

New York City public schools and most independent private schools close for Rosh Hashanah, as they do every year.

Wednesday, September 19:

Faculty Decisions

Today I do not feel as confident or relieved as I did the first day that we resumed classes. There are more stories of families and children in distress; they cannot return to their homes or have lost close family friends. A boy in my class returns for the first day today and looks tired and fragile. I reach out to him and learn that his father, a doctor, was on the frontlines giving medical aid at the disaster site. Another doctor who worked with his father never returned. My student does not wish to share these things with the group, but I tell him that his father is a hero, and he smiles.

We hold our weekly staff meeting, where we make plans for the relief efforts that each class will undertake. We postpone discussing a permanent school memorial until students have recovered emotionally from the trauma. But like our cityscape mural on our yard wall, each student will contribute to its creation.

An emotional debate ensues about the agenda of our long-delayed opening-of-school assembly for our K-8 community. Should it be a business-as-usual affair, or should we directly acknowledge and commemorate recent events? Some teachers (including myself) at first feel strongly that it would be ethically wrong to proceed without direct acknowledgment of the tragedy. But our psychologists advise otherwise: Some students are too fragile; they are just managing to hold themselves together and come to school at all. They need the comfort of our seasonal routines and rituals; otherwise, we risk an outbreak of hysteria or mass crying. So we look for ways to indirectly express our grief and hopes for the future at the assembly through music.

Thursday, September 21:

School Assembly

Our school convenes in the basement of a church. We have rented this space just for this year because our old gym-cum-auditorium has been torn down to make way for a new six-story building. Laura Koulish and Sheri Gottlieb, our music teachers, lead us in the songs they have carefully chosen: “This Land Is

Your Land,” “If I Had a Hammer,” “We Shall Overcome,” and “He Has the Whole World in His Hands.” For students who are ready to see the connection between recent events and these songs, they bring solace and hope.

Later today, we learn that the space we have rented in a nearby community center for our gym classes is no longer available. The Red Cross needs it as a grief counseling center. It is our school’s turn to help facilitate the relief effort in New York City.

Friday, September 22: The Week Concludes

To my surprise, my classes have gone well this week. In addition to geography classes about the Middle East, I have given my seventh graders a good dose of pure fun as we have read and written “riddle poems.” My eighth grade English students have enjoyed reading and discussing the opening passages of five autobiographies whose authors I keep a mystery until next week. Andy and I prepare our first classes for seventh graders on current events, focusing on President


Bush’s speech of September 20th. But as my students ride the waves of events, I am forced to concede that we are all fighting a strong undertow of grief, anger, bewilderment, and fear. It will be an unexpected struggle to teach my course on the Islamic world in such emotionally charged times, but I receive encouragement from colleagues, my fellow Fulbright colleagues, and many parents whose children studied Islam with me last year.

Much at school will be done to help us. We will reconvene in our original four groups of teachers, each led by the same psychologist. An expert will present a workshop on stress management. Our ongoing support systems are already well in place. In the meantime, I am determined to lead my life in New York City as always; to do otherwise, I feel, is to give in to the fear on which terrorists feed. But I am afraid to think of the events that may supersede those I describe here by the time this article appears in print. My eighth grade student Denise Fernandez writes a poem that expresses my thoughts:

*All around me without a sound I hear
the burning questions:
Why? Why like this? Why now?
Why us?
And without answers,
we all must admit
We are living history.* 📖

Notes

1. Clair Schnell and Joan Brodsky Schur, “Learning Across Cultures: From New York City to Rotorua,” *Social Education* 63, no. 2 (March 1999): 75-79.
2. Amy Waldman, “Anguish for the Toll of Youngsters Left Behind,” *The New York Times* (September 23, 2001).
3. Abby Goodnough, “Doubling Up in a Quest For Ongoing Education,” *The New York Times* (September 21, 2001).

Joan Brodsky Schur teaches social studies and English at the Village Community School in New York City. She has been a frequent contributor over the years to *Social Education*. She wishes to express her thanks to Melissa Gordon, school psychologist, for her guidance and support. 

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