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Lookout Point

Preparing Young People for Longer Lives in an Aging Society

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Social studies can prepare students for the possibility of living longer and with a population that is growing older. It can address the omissions, stereotypes, and misleading information about later life. It can provide key facts about aging that can help young people now and in the future.

How can appropriate intergenerational activities enrich instruction? Social studies can come alive when teachers tap into the experiences of older community and family members. In addition to being aides, readers, tutors, and mentors, older adults can participate as experts or co-learners, such as writers, travelers, oral history resources, demonstrators of crafts and skills, and participants in discussions on contemporary topics. The following points can be considered when developing school-based, intergenerational activities.

- ▶ *Curriculum-based.* The purpose of intergenerational programs is to address curricular goals, not to “get the generations together.” When later life issues are integrated within social studies objectives, intergenerational activities are a complement to, not a substitute for, instruction.
- ▶ *Emphasis on similarities.* Instead of focusing on the differences between young and old, teachers can help students move from an attitude of “us versus them” to appreciating shared commonalities of all people. “Aging in America” on page M16 lists some beliefs and attitudes about lifespan and aging that teachers can address early on in any lesson that relates to the topic.
- ▶ *Diverse.* Intergenerational activities that use older adults with a range of experiences, interests, and abilities offer students broader perspectives of aging that are more representative of the diverse older population
- ▶ *Balanced and accurate.* Intergenerational activities that accurately reflect later life would include mostly active older adults and rarely frail, home-bound, or institutionalized older adults. Limiting intergenerational activities to nursing home visits would be as inappropriate as using regular class visits to prisons or ghettos for interracial experiences. For a host of reasons, these are unacceptable, but one reason is that stu-

dents often conclude that they are seeing the big picture rather than a small section of life.

- ▶ *Reciprocal.* Imbalanced relationships often exist between “givers” and “receivers”—the “givers” feeling pity and helpful and the “receivers” feeling needy. Teachers should aim for a more reciprocal relationship between students and older adults. The difference in intergeneration programs can be as simple as a school group singing with an older group (as opposed to singing “to” them). A life writing activity such as the one featured in the accompanying article by Alison Parker is a good example of reciprocal learning. “Drive-by” activities such as Halloween parades and token holiday visits generally do not build reciprocal relationships.
- ▶ *People first, “old” second.* The most effective intergenerational activities are often not about age per se where older people become “specimens,” but with people who happen to be of different ages sharing interests and expertise.

When presented with a healthier, balanced vision of what the future can hold, students may be more inclined to adopt attitudes and habits that promote wellness into later life. Quality instruction and experiences about lifespan aging can be a key ingredient in creating a better social environment in which today’s young people can grow up and grow old. 📖

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Visiting and Interviewing Older Adults: Service-Learning in the Sixth Grade



Corporation for National and Community Service

Alison Parker

Students in Learn and Serve America, and older adults in Senior Corps, build strong relationships between the generations. She records his oral history and he helps her to improve her history and language skills.

I teach social studies in the sixth grade at Christa McAuliffe Elementary School in Bakersfield, California. Like teachers in many states, I have critically assessed my lesson plans in relation to the state's curriculum standards, which in California are contained in the *History/Social Science Framework for California Public Schools*. I discovered four areas in which I might strengthen my lessons: (1) civic values, (2) rights and responsibilities, (3) social participation, and (4) ethical literacy.

According to the "Goals of Democratic Understanding and Civic Values" in the *Framework*, civic competence means being "willing to participate actively in government, think critically and creatively about issues, confront unresolved problems of the society, and work through democratic processes toward the fuller realization of its highest ideals in the lives and opportunities for all of its citizens."¹ I observed that my students were grasping the curriculum's historical content, but they certainly did not consider themselves active participants in their community or in history. Neither were they equipped to confront social questions creatively or to take advantage of the democratic process that provides opportunities for each citizen to be involved in the life of the community. "Americans who came of age during the Depression and World War II have been far more deeply engaged in the life of their community than generations that have followed."² My students understood the concept of self (and self-gratification), but to them the

thought that they had the potential to influence their world seemed lofty and abstract. They needed an experience that could help them contribute to society in a meaningful, productive way.

My students lacked a sense of being included. The "Goals of Skills Attainment and Social Participation" in the *Framework* state that students "must participate utilizing their personal skills, group interaction skills, and their social and political participation skills" in order to promote the "learning skills that lead to civic competence."³ My students were developing a cognitive scaffolding of the past, but they were missing the personal connection that would have encouraged the development of a full sense of civic obligation.

Finally, the challenging category of ethical literacy needed to be addressed. As defined in the *Framework*, ethical literacy is "The recognition of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the individual."⁴ The conflict in Kosovo, ongoing at the time, evoked some discussion among students who expressed pity for others, but this example still lacked relevance to the students' own lives because it was so distant.

What could be done to strengthen these areas of weakness in the development of my young students? How could I provide some kind of personal connection to history and to community, integrate these activities into the sixth grade curriculum, and attain the goals of the *Framework*? Here was my social studies challenge for the year.

Opportunity Close at Hand

Fortunately my principal, Dee Whitley, who was aware of my goals, suggested that I investigate Laurel Springs, the new assisted living center, located just two blocks away from our school. Administrators at the center were open to the idea of students visiting with residents, so I investigated the possibility of doing a service-learning project with the whole class.

I discovered many areas of the curriculum that could be covered in a service-learning project involving students and older adults.⁵ Laurel Springs could be used as a community-based resource to teach social studies (history, social service, and good citizenship), science (the life cycle and aging), and language arts (vocabulary, reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Some of the residents that the students would meet were in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, so I also taught a little about some forms of dementia that are more prevalent among the aged.⁶

As it turned out, the performing arts and video journalism also became part of the project. Some of the students in my class were involved in a video production program at school. They responded enthusiastically when I suggested making a mini-documentary about working with older adults. They would create a video representing the learning experience that the students and the residents had together. Students became actively involved in organizing the production, including getting permission to film, scheduling, set up, lighting, filming, editing, and audio dubbing.

Preparation

Early in the school year, three classroom officers and I met with the activities director at Laurel Springs. We discussed the purpose of the proposed visits and what we might accomplish. We talked about how to prepare students for the first visit by describing what they might observe in the various areas of the facility and how they could interact with various residents. We agreed that bi-monthly, one-hour visits would work best. The first visit with twenty-eight

students would be considered a “warm-up” period during which residents and students could simply chat about their lives.

Back in the classroom, we devoted about an hour a week to preparing for our visits to the center. We dedicated one class period to learning and practicing how to approach the residents and how to recognize and respond to specific Alzheimer's disease-related behaviors. Although this might seem a mature task for children, they rose to the challenge. Students rehearsed their responses with each other before our first trip to the center. It was important for the students to be prepared to

1. Speak directly to the resident, and introduce yourself clearly.
2. Be calm and reassuring. People with dementia are often affected by body language. No matter what happens around you, maintain a matter-of-fact manner.
3. Be non-demanding: Try gentle humor and cheerfulness as a way to reach the patients.
4. Touch the residents as you speak to them. Touch is reassuring.
5. Allow plenty of time for the resident to understand what you have said. Do not ask many questions if you see them getting tired or frustrated.
6. Give residents choices whenever possible. (For example, “Would you like to sit down or keep walking?”) Don't argue with, give orders to, or try to limit a person's behavior (“You should sit down.”)
7. Be aware that some of the people who live at Laurel Springs display behaviors that might be disconcerting. They might wander, scream, try to go “home,” become angry, or see things that don't exist. Nurses and your teacher will be close by to help any resident who becomes agitated.

I passed out permission slips for parents to sign that included information about this service-learning project and my educational goals for it.



Allison Parker



Dan Dillman/Generations United

The Visits

Our first visit occurred on Halloween. As a gesture of friendship, my twenty-eight students wrote Halloween stories to read and discuss with the residents. We walked to the facility with the expectation that we would be enriching the lives of the residents. Little did we know that they had their own surprises ready for us! The plan was for students to go door-to-door within one section of the facility, sharing their stories with any residents who were interested in listening to them. At the first room, however, the resident surprised us with candy and warm greetings. Other residents had made special preparations for our visit. One woman was dressed up as a pumpkin. The students were elated. Laughter and conversation prevailed for the rest of the afternoon. (Clearly, the activities director had been working with the residence to prepare for our visit.)

After we returned to the classroom, many stories were exchanged about the behavior of some of the residents. “I didn’t know old people could act so young!” “She wanted me to kiss her on the cheek! I don’t even kiss my mom on the cheek!” “Did you see those two old people who had been married for sixty-three years?” “Mrs. Parker, I thought we were the ones who were supposed to help these people, but they gave us stuff!” Conversation flew throughout the room, as the students reacted to what they had just witnessed.

On that first visit, many of the residents had asked students to sing for them, so we invited our new friends to our school’s winter concert in December. Many residents arrived dressed in holiday finery, and we sang Christmas carols and other songs of the season together. During the concert, which was held in the school cafeteria, a few of the residents who were known to be showing signs of Alzheimer’s disease wanted to leave—they were not sure where they were going, but they thought it was “time to go somewhere else.” My students remembered that they were to remain calm and not argue with their new friends. The students helped the residents settle down in a dignified manner and then tried to respond to their need by moving with them, as a small group, into the hallway outside the cafeteria, where they enjoyed singing a few more songs together.

Listening and Writing

For each subsequent visit, I prepared a handout that suggested questions for students to ask residents (see sidebar A), with space for writing down responses. These questions often involved the season or an upcoming holiday and had a historical tone. (For example, “When you were a child, what did you do to celebrate Valentine’s Day?”) I also asked students to write about their experiences at the center in their journals. I asked students to

compare the life experiences of these senior citizens with those of their own grandparents or parents. “How had society and people’s attitudes changed over the years?” I asked.

In the New Year, students interviewed some of the residents and wrote short biographies (see sidebar B). Students were guided by eight brief interview questions on a handout, listening respectfully to whatever was said. Residents talked about what life was like when they had gone to school over a half-century ago. Some had lived on farms, which was very different from the life experience of my students. Students questioned residents about their personal recollections of a few historical events that we had studied, such as the sinking of the *Titanic* and World War II. Residents’ long-term memory often appeared to be quite good, but more recent memories were often missing. (For example, one woman could not

Sidebar A

Sample Questions for the First Interview

In the first interview, questions might focus on the childhood of the older adult. A later interview might be about their adult years: work, recreation, and family. A third interview could be about an upcoming holiday (and recollections of celebrations, like birthdays and weddings). A fourth interview might be about the adults’ personal recollections of social, civic, and historic events: voting and politics, war and peace, women entering the workforce, the Civil Rights Movement, transportation, and space flight, for example.

1. Where were you born? In what city?
2. What were the names of your parents and siblings?
3. Where did you grow up? Was it an urban or a rural setting?
4. What was school like when you were young? Favorite subjects? —activities? —teacher?
5. What kinds of games did you like to play on the weekends? —in summer? —in winter?
6. Did you have to do any chores as a child? What were they?
7. Were you paid an allowance?
8. Who was your best friend when you were my age?
9. Where did your mother grow up? Your father?
10. What kind of work did your mother and father do?

Life in the Last Century: Biography Excerpts

After several visits to the Alzheimer's assisted living center, students interviewed some of the elderly residents one-on-one. Working from their notes, the students wrote short biographies, which were bound together as a book and given to the residents at the end of the school year. Excerpts from three of these biographies follow.

While Emma was attending Providence Academy in Vancouver, she was a good student. When she came home from school her neighborhood friends and her would play a sort of high jumping game. While Emma was in the third grade, she came home, and started jumping on her bed and fell through the open window on the second floor of her house! When the doctor came over to check her out, she didn't have a scratch, a bruise, a broken limb, or anything! She was fine. She said, "I must have a guardian angel watching over me." Also when she was about five years old she had been ran over by a car. She suffered a massive break to the leg, but remained alive.

Margaret eventually became a teacher. At first she was a church teacher and then became a regular schoolteacher. She taught every grade in one classroom. In the old days you were in a classroom with kids of all ages, big or small. She believes everyone is God's gift and what is better than to share education with the world.

Anna worked in all kinds of factories but one of them she remembered was working at a sock company. She would have to lie about her age to get a job. She couldn't ask her family for money because they were poor. She would get jealous when watching all her friends wearing nice, expensive dresses, so she would save up her money hoping to be able to buy one of her own. Anna loves ice cream. Just eating it makes her feel good.

remember in what states her three adult children were currently living.) At the end of the year, I made bound copies of these biographies, which the students gave the residents, who greatly appreciated the gift.

Conclusion

Our bimonthly visits continued throughout the year, with my class often begging to return to Laurel Springs more frequently. The relationship between students and residents was a two-way street: the residents helped the students complete each social studies assignment, and the students enhanced the social life of the residents. The end of the school year was fast approaching, as was our time with the residents, so we decided to make colorful vases and fill them with flowers as a good-bye gesture. We entered the dining hall for our final visit. As the children passed out their farewell gifts, one student noticed a woman sitting alone at a table. The boy slowly walked up with flowers in his hand and gave them to her. She was moved to tears and thanked this young man repeatedly. After school that day, the boy told his mother about his experience and wept at the realization that he had made a difference to another person.

Near the end of the year, I gave students a questionnaire about their participation in the project.⁷ Ninety-seven percent of the students indicated that their experience helped them appreciate the elderly more.⁸ One student wrote he had thought that "old people were boring. Now I know that some old people are fun, interesting, experts at looking back, and nice to talk to." Sixty percent of the students felt that it influenced their perception of their peers in a positive way. "Whenever I talk to a classmate, I think differently about them ... I have never seen their sensitive side, and how gentle they are."

As the year progressed, I noticed that students became more empathetic and helpful toward one another in the classroom, but I did not see that these behaviors transferred to their interactions with peers outside of class (in after-school sports, for example). I believe, however, that if the service-learning project were to be continued in future grades, an observer might notice a significant and lasting change in students' attitudes and behaviors toward each other.

As a classroom teacher, I have felt the need to provide my students with experiences where they can apply classroom knowledge and practice civic responsibility. This service-learning project gave my students understanding that extended beyond the standard classroom curriculum—it taught them about the drama and fragility of real life, the passing of time, human dignity, and compassion. Students had the opportunity to experience first hand "social participation and ethical literacy." They could see that what they said and did mattered to other people. I was able to translate the language of the *Framework* into meaningful activities that the students will remember for years to come.⁹ 🌐

Notes

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3. *Framework*, 24
4. *Framework*, 31.
5. Rahima C. Wade, *Building Bridges: Connecting Classroom and Community through Service-Learning in Social Studies* (Washington, DC: National Council for the Social Studies, 2000); M. McCalley, *Service Learning: An Introduction to the Concept* (California State University: Bakersfield, CA: 1999).
6. Obtain free handouts (such as the Alzheimer's Disease Fact Sheet, Caregiver Guide, and Forgetfulness Fact Sheet) from the Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) center at their website (www.alzheimers.org/pubs/pubs.html) or by calling 800-438-4380. The ADEAR Center is a service of the National Institute on Aging, which is one of the National Institutes of Health, under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
7. Alison Parker, "Parker's Prodigies and Laurel Springs: An Experience in Service Learning with Sixth Grade Students and an Assisted Living/Alzheimer's Disease Center," Master's Project, California State University, Bakersfield, CA, April 2000.
8. Donna P. Couper and Fran Pratt, *Learning for Longer Life: A Guide to Aging Education for Developers of K-12 Curriculum and Instructional Materials* (Denton, TX: National Academy for Teaching and Learning about Aging, 1999), 75-87.
9. An earlier version of this article appeared in the summer 2000 issue of the journal of the California Council for the Social Studies, the *Social Studies Review*.

Organizations and Resources

National Academy for Teaching and Learning about Aging

Donna P. Couper and Fran Pratt, *Learning for Longer Life: A Guide to Aging Education for Developers of K-12 Curriculum and Instructional Materials* (2001. \$25.00, 135 pp.). Order from Kathy Dreyer, National Academy for Teaching and Learning about Aging, University of North Texas, PO Box 310919, Denton, TX 76203-0919. Phone: 940-565-3450. Fax: 940-565-3141. E-mail: kdreyer@scs.cmm.unt.edu. Website & catalog: www.unt.edu/natla

Generations Together

Jim M. McCrea, *Caring is the Key: Building a School-Based Intergenerational Service Program* (rev. 1993. #321. \$25.00. 126 pp), Order from Jim McCrea, Executive Director, Generations Together, University of Pittsburgh, 121 University Place, Suite 300. Pittsburgh, PA 15260. Phone 412-648-7150. Fax: 412-648-7446. E-mail: jmccrea@pitt.edu. Website & catalog: www.gt.pitt.edu.

———. *Talking with Children and Teens about Alzheimer's Disease: A Question and Answer Guidebook for Parents, Teachers, and Caregivers* (1992. #138. \$12.50. 73 pp.). Order from Generations Together.

Generations United

Young and Old Serving Together: Meeting Community Needs Through Intergenerational Partnerships. (rev. 2002. \$15, 76 pp.) Order from Sheri Steinig, Program Director, Generations United, 122 C Street, NW, Suite 820, Washington, DC 20001. Phone: 202-638-1263. Fax: 202-638-7555. E-mail: gu@gu.org. Website & catalog: www.gu.org.

Intergenerational Mentoring: A Unique Response to the Challenges of Youth and Benefits of Intergenerational Programs. Free fact sheets from Generations United, available at their website or by request.

Other Materials

Wilson, Linda. *Grandpartners: Intergenerational Learning and Civic Renewal, K-6*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann: 2001 (and resources listed within).



Calligrapher Michel Chammout shows young man how to write his name in Arabic. Dearborn, Michigan, 2000.

© Joan Mandell



Oral histories can be recorded by dictation. Bakersfield, California, 1999.

Alison Parker

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Using Political Cartoons: An Activity for Students of Every Ability

Dwight C. Holliday and Janice A. Grskovic

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)¹ guarantees that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, which is often the general education classroom. There the social studies teacher must consider the needs of students with disabilities in planning and delivering instruction. At the same time, it is also becoming increasingly important that all students develop critical thinking skills and engage in reflective thought.² Critical thinking, the process of determining the authenticity, accuracy, or value of something and developing an opinion based on evidence,³ can enhance academic achievement and is viewed as characteristic of a responsible, employable citizen who can make informed decisions.⁴ The challenge for many teachers is how to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities while teaching higher order thinking. Political cartoons may provide a medium to accomplish this goal.

Many political cartoonists aim to challenge the viewer to think critically about the issue being depicted in the drawing. The cartoonist employs exaggeration, symbolism, and humor to expand our thinking about the topic. Students can develop higher order thinking skills through direct instruction, modeling, and cooperative group work in which cartoons are the items of study. Students are guided to implement the Five W's of comprehension or interpretation (that is, *who* the cartoon is about, *when*, *where*, and *what* is depicted, *which* symbols are used, and *why* the message is important). By breaking down the elements of a drawing, and being familiar with the tools of the cartoonist, students can begin to see the relationships between seemingly diverse concepts.⁵ Students also learn to analyze how cartoonists' use of words (arguments, stories, and slogans) and images often relies on distortions such as stereotypes, and logical argument, such as analogies. Students can



Paul O'Malley

see how symbols and words work together to compress information into one picture.

Some students may not readily learn critical thinking inferentially from political cartoons.⁶ Specifically, students with disabilities may need additional instruction, modeling, and accommodations to learn to think critically about current political events. For example, students with learning disabilities and cognitive impairments have been reported to have a developmental lag in the cognitive structures necessary for understanding humor.⁷ But these students' ability to produce cartoons did not appear to differ from that of their nonhandicapped peers.⁸ In fact, cartoons have been used to remediate learning disabilities⁹ and are a preferred medium among students with emotional disorders.¹⁰

The needs of students with diverse abilities can be accommodated in several ways. Keeping a lecture brief (15 to 20 minutes) will reduce the demand for passive attending and increase opportunities for active participation. The content of the drawing should be broken down and clearly explained. The use of guided questions to organize and analyze content helps students with mild disabilities focus their attention on relevant information and activates their prior knowledge.¹¹

We encourage students to work in mixed ability, cooperative groups, which allows each one to learn from multiple perspectives. Students are asked to explain material to each other; and in doing so, they often use language that differs from that used by the teacher.¹² These groups can also provide appropriate peer models for students with disabilities. (Students are more likely to imitate models who are similar, competent, and have prestige.)¹³

Students should study a variety of cartoons before being asked to try their hands at drawing one. The teacher should model the skills of the lesson before asking students to perform them. When a teacher engages in cognitive modeling or “thinking aloud,” he or she demonstrates how to organize and analyze the content, how to select strategies, and how to think reflectively.¹⁴ The teacher also models the process of translating words into pictures (or vice versa), a mnemonic strategy that facilitates memorization of concepts and relationships. We encourage students to concretize abstract concepts such as justice and liberty with symbolic representations, like scales and the Statue of Liberty.¹⁵ The use of cartoon visuals can reduce the demand for reading, and can also assist in the act of reading by providing clues about meaning, and thus help make the curriculum accessible for students with reading disabilities.

As an alternative form of assessment, the creation of a political cartoon allows students to demonstrate what they know about the content without a lengthy writing assignment, which is a task that many students with disabilities find aversive because of difficulty with fine motor skills.¹⁶ Additionally, once students have learned the skill of creating a cartoon, they may use it to demonstrate understanding of content of other material throughout the semester. Students who are inattentive and hyperactive can meet their needs for increased levels of movement and to interact actively with the content at their own pace. Using cartoons also allows students to engage in evaluative thinking and conversation, assessing the level of success of their peers’ cartoons and clarifying their understanding of the grading criteria.

The educational needs of students with diverse abilities can be met through careful planning and consideration of their unique needs, thus making the general education curriculum accessible to nearly everyone. By providing direct instruction in the tools and elements of political cartoons, modeling and providing practice of skills, using cooperative groupings, and matching the demands of the task to the learning style of the students, a teacher can assure that all students can gain some knowledge of current events and demonstrate their understanding in a way that minimizes their disability and maximizes learning. 

Notes

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6. R. D. Freseman, *Improving Higher Order Thinking of Middle School Geography Students by Teaching Skills Directly* (Ft. Lauderdale, FL: Nova University, 1990); R. J. Herrstein, R. S. Nickerson, M. de Sanchez, and J. A. Swets, “Teaching Thinking Skills,” *American Psychologist* 41 (1986): 1279-1289; P. D. Pearson, *A Context for Instructional Research on Reading Comprehension* (Cambridge, MA: Bolt, Beranek, and Newman, 1982).
7. E. J. Pickering, A. J. Pickering, and M. L. Buchanan, “Learning Disabled and Nonhandicapped Boys’ Comprehension of Cartoon Humor,” *Disability Quarterly* 10 (1987): 45-51.
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9. N. Ellman, “Comics in the Classroom,” *Audiovisual Instruction* 24 (1979): 24-25.
10. R. F. Wagner and L. Duffy, “Differentiating Characteristics of Human Figure Drawings Among Normal and Exceptional Adolescents.” Paper presented at the Southeastern Psychological Association Meeting, Atlanta, GA, 1981 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED213198); B. Y. L. Wong, “Self-questioning Instructional Research: A Review,” *Review of Educational Research* 55 (1985): 227-268.
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12. L. M. Morrow and J. K. Smith, “The Effects of Group Size on Interactive Storybook Reading,” *Reading Research Quarterly* 25 (1990): 213-231. R. E. Slavin, “Synthesis of Research on Cooperative Learning,” *Educational Leadership* 48, no. 5 (1991): 71-82.
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Critical Thinking and Logical Argument

James A. Duplass and Dana L. Ziedler

Critical thinking and logical argument are as crucial to a democratic nation today as they were to the Founding Fathers in 1700s. An analysis of the construction of arguments can be found in any university logic class and appears in various forms in the social sciences based on the work of Stuart Chase. Chase's writing and the publications of the Institute of Propaganda Analysis were an early attempt in the last century to prepare citizens to detect fallacious arguments in public policy issues.¹ While much attention has been paid by educators to critical thinking skills, little attention in social studies education has been given to logical and fallacious arguments that are an essential part of critical thinking.

Social studies classrooms offer opportunities for students to gather and evaluate evidence, analyze and critique other people's assertions, and speak or write in support of or in opposition to an opinion. The social studies teacher may act as an instructor, moderator, questioner, and devil's advocate.

Students bring to the classroom opinions and information that they glean from the popular culture. Content material for a discussion about current issues is readily accessible to students in the form of newspapers, weekly magazines, and television documentaries and newscasts. Students may feel like experts already, or

they may feel overwhelmed by the available information on a topic. Either way, the teacher can help students select sources and then evaluate information through discussions with others who are also seeking accurate information and reliable sources.

Barry Beyer offers one of the clearest conceptualizations of critical thinking. Beyer's operations were derived from the literature of science, language arts, and social studies instruction and are presented here in order (roughly) from simple to complex:²

- ▶ distinguishing between verifiable facts and value statements;
- ▶ distinguishing relevant from irrelevant observations or reasons;
- ▶ determining the factual accuracy of a statement;
- ▶ determining the credibility of a source;
- ▶ identifying ambiguous statements;
- ▶ identifying unstated assumptions;
- ▶ detecting bias;
- ▶ identifying logical fallacies;
- ▶ recognizing logical inconsistencies in a line of reasoning;
- ▶ determining the overall strength of an argument or conclusion.



The photos in this article and on the cover of this issue were taken at the UNA-USA Model UN Conference held May 3rd and 4th, 2002 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. All photos for this article courtesy of the United Nations Association of the USA (UNA-USA), www.unausa.org.

Critical thinking operations are perhaps best exemplified in the area of argumentation.³ When students are engaged in making assertions, supporting and defending those claims through a well-developed line of reasoning, and judging the efficiency of counter arguments during discussions of social issues, they will be making use of the operations identified above. Failure to use these operations during discourse results in fallacious reasoning and flawed construction of ideas and opinions.

Common Fallacies

While fallacies contained in arguments have always been of concern to philosophers, social studies educators might do more to recognize and analyze the fallacious arguments of their students, making such errors an occasion for discussion. A few of the more-frequently encountered fallacies follow.

Ad hominem

Attacking a person's character rather than the accuracy of his or her statements constitutes an ad hominem argument (argument to the man). Specifically, one commits this fallacy by either: (a) criticizing some personal aspect of the speaker unrelated to the topic, for example, how they look or where they grew up; or (b) pointing out some special circumstance or relationship that might exist between the speaker and the topic at hand, but which is not relevant to the validity of their statements. Examples: (a) "David's objection to the new standardized tests should be dismissed entirely, since he never knows what he is talking about." (b) "I can not take your argument about abortion too seriously. After all, you are a girl, and it's only natural that you are going to be biased."



Appeal to authority

Students commit this fallacy when they rely upon a person who has expertise in one field for advice in a field in which that person has no particular expertise. Example: "I just saw an actor speaking before the Senate about funding for Parkinson's disease. He has the disease, you know, and he said that a cure was right around the corner. Scientists just need more funding." The actor has intimate personal experience with the disease, but has no formal medical training, has not performed scientific research on the disease, and thus may have little knowledge on which to predict the rate of progress in that research.

Appeal to popularity

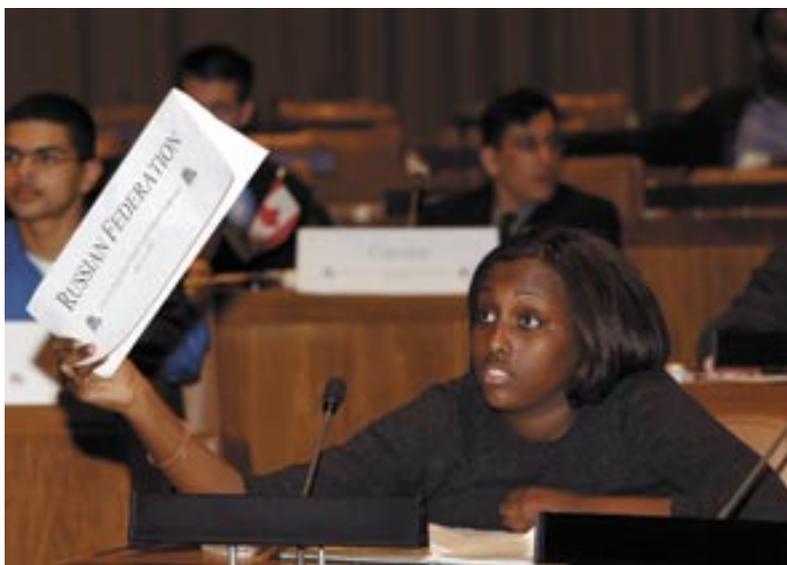
People commit this fallacy whenever they deem acceptable or true a particular claim because they believe that most other people deem it acceptable or true. Examples: "Everybody in the sixties took drugs, of course." "Welfare recipients? They are all cheats and lazy! Everyone knows that."

Begging the question (circular reasoning)

Students commit this fallacy whenever they include in the premises of an argument some form of the very same claim for which they are arguing. Example: "Black people are inferior to whites. Their average income is less." Another example: "Terrorists attack innocent people because they are evil-doers."

False dilemma

A speaker may assume that there are only two possible options, when, in fact, there are more than two. Example: "Well Bush's economics didn't work, so the Democrat's approach must be right."



Equivocation

The fallacy of equivocation occurs when there is a shift in the meaning of a word as it appears in different places within an argument. Example: “People are different in many ways. For example, people are not equal in height and physical strength. Some people act wisely, and some act stupidly. So the phrase, ‘All men are created equal’ is just idealistic hogwash.”

Superficially, this might sound like a plausible argument, but the speaker uses the word “equal” twice, and the astute listener could point out that in its initial occurrence, “equal” must mean something like “identical,” while in its second occurrence it means something like “being entitled to the same rights.” (Thomas Jefferson, of course, defines what he means by “equal” in the sentences following that phrase.)

Inadequate sampling
Students commit this fallacy whenever they make or accept a generalization on the basis of a sample that is too small or not randomly selected. Example: “I don’t think we should be spending tax dollars for AIDS research. The newspaper reported that there were only two cases of AIDS in our town last year. These numbers do not justify us spending money when much more money is needed for other health issues.” Another example: “Asian Americans are great in math, like in my algebra class.”

Drawing conclusions from a small set of measurements (or experiences) is a danger even for researchers, because what qualifies as acceptable evidence often differs across academic disciplines.⁴ Students, therefore, become unclear about what constitutes sufficient or appropriate evidence. Higher education often produces graduates who think only within the framework of their chosen discipline. What is considered to be legitimate support for a thesis is different in various disciplines. Compare, for example, the

discipline of archaeology with public opinion polling, or with public health. What level of confidence is needed before one makes a hypothesis about an ancient civilization? Predicts the winner of an election? Injects a healthy infant with a new vaccine?

Students may seek too little information to warrant a firm conclusion. Conversely, students may acquire voluminous amounts of information, but then unwittingly give equal weight to all statements without pausing to evaluate the quality of the data or the reliability of each source.

Students also tend to overemphasize the frequency of rare

events that contain inherent shock value, but underestimate the occurrences of more common events. Another example of inadequate sampling is failure to attend to new evidence or revisit an opinion already held.

Finally, many students (and adults) lack a functional understanding of probabilistic and statistical information. There is a strong tendency for students to disregard base-rate information in favor of intuitive causal reasoning or anecdotal experience.⁵

Classroom Considerations

There are many other rhetorical fallacies that could be discussed: “two wrongs make a right,” “the straw man,” “the slippery slope,” as well as illegitimate appeals to emotions such as pity, fear, hate, greed, and pride. Students may be able to give examples of erroneous and

deceptive statements that the class can then label and categorize. Peer pressure, for example, might be defined as a threat of exclusion from the group, and thus it is an attempt to manipulate others out of fear.

Typically, many students (particularly adolescents) exhibit forms of provincialism and are egocentric and ethnocentric in their reasoning. The ability to objectively evaluate statements is limited by their own group or societal viewpoint.⁶ People of all ages have vested interests, and young people are no different.

A Global Forum: Model UN

In Model U.N., students step into the shoes of ambassadors from U.N. members states to debate current issues on the organization’s vast agenda. Student “delegates” in Model U.N. prepare draft resolutions, plot strategy, negotiate with supporters and adversaries, resolve conflicts, and navigate the U.N.’s procedural rules—all in the interest of mobilizing “international cooperation” to resolve problems that affect many nations. In the U.S., 130 middle schools participate in Model U.N., or Global Classrooms, or both.

Before playing out their ambassadorial roles in Model U.N., students research global problems to be addressed, drawn from today’s headlines. Model U.N. participants learn how the international community acts on its concerns about topics including peace and security, human rights, the environment, food and hunger, economic development, and globalization. Model U.N. delegates also look closely at the needs, aspirations, and foreign policy of the countries they will represent at the event. The insights they gain shape their exploration of history, geography, mathematics, culture, economics, and science.

For information about Model U.N. and the Global Classrooms program, contact United Nations Association of the United States of America, 801 Second Avenue, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10017, USA. Tel: 212 907-1300, Fax: 212 682-9185, e-mail: info@unausa.org, website: www.unausa.org

Before analysis and criticism of another person's point of view, one has to listen carefully to what that person is saying.

Open-mindedness is a virtue that is held in high regard by many, but it is difficult to practice, just as it is difficult for a human to account for an object that falls within the "blind spot" of the eye. Why are discussions with people who hold views that are different from one's own so valuable? Not only can we test the strength of their (and our own) reasoning and opinions, but we can keep watch for insights that we might never obtain on our own.

Among the more common instructional approaches used to help students make decisions concerning societal issues are values clarification, decision-making, and inquiry. Students are expected to construct logical arguments when participating in classroom discussions, when composing written assignments, and when participating in society as citizens. In courses that deal with science, technology, and society (STS) issues or current events, students are often asked to discuss a topic that is of direct concern to them, and maybe to simulate a difficult decision and explain the reasoning behind their decision.

The ultimate success of such instructional approaches is at least partially dependent on students' logical reasoning and argumentation skills.⁷ But the skills needed for participation in reasoned debate are not innate in students.⁸ Thus, it appears that students (and social studies teachers) could benefit from learning about argumentation, its strategies, and its pitfalls. 📖

Notes

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9. A longer version of this article appeared in the spring/summer 2000 issue of the International Journal of Social Education, published by the Indiana Council for the Social Studies.

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Use with Caution

Debate using formalized, grade-appropriate rules and forums can be implemented at the elementary school level, but with a caution! While debating offers skills in preparation, argument, counter argument, logical thinking, and questioning, it can also foment competitiveness while losing site of the importance for the search for truth by reason and collaboration.

Two websites at the University of Vermont offer articles, streaming video, topics, and techniques for both presentations and debates: Debate Central at debate.uvm.edu/watchnovicepolicyvideo.html, and The National Forensic League at debate.uvm.edu/NFL/rostrumlib.html. Also, check out The Philosophy Pages at www.philosophypages.com/lg/.

From James A. Duplass, *Teaching Elementary Social Studies: What Every Teacher Should Know* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, in press).

THE THANKSGIVING VISITOR

Written by Truman Capote. In the collection

A CHRISTMAS MEMORY, ONE CHRISTMAS, AND THE THANKSGIVING VISITOR

New York: Modern Library, 2001. 107 pp. \$10.46 paperback.

Reviewed by Lisa L. Owens

In Truman Capote's evocative sketch of seven-year-old Buddy's relationship with the school bully, the adult Buddy reflects on his experience.

Talk about mean! Odd Henderson was the meanest human creature in my experience.

And I'm speaking of a 12-year-old boy, not some grown-up who has had the time to ripen a naturally evil disposition. At least, Odd was 12 in 1932, when we were both second-graders attending a small-town school in rural Alabama.

Capote wrote *The Thanksgiving Visitor* for adults, but it is a wonderful read-aloud for third- and fourth-graders and a great read for grades five and up.¹ Of course, older students benefit from being read to as well, and this rich, lyrical text is perfect for audiences of all ages. Furthermore, the story's events, relationships, and flawed characters are guaranteed to spark lively discussions about such issues as bullying and bystander behavior, anger management, empathy, and friendship.²

The Story in Brief

The kids at school fear Odd, but no one's fear is as constant as Buddy's—he is Odd's favorite target. The bullying occurs daily, before school and after, as Buddy prays that the harassment will stop. Some mornings, Buddy is so frightened of what might happen that he begs to stay home from school.

Buddy's teacher, Miss Armstrong, suspects what is happening but doesn't intervene. One day, Buddy takes the time to clean up after his morning run-in with Odd. He is late for class, and Miss Armstrong berates him in front of the other students. Buddy reports Odd's actions, calling him a "sonofabitch" in a moment of fury; he is then severely punished for his outburst.

At home, Buddy repeatedly tells his elderly cousin and best friend, Miss Sook, about Odd's actions. Instead of rising to Buddy's defense, however, Miss Sook makes excuses for Odd's behavior because of the hard life his family leads. Miss Sook says, "The

thing to keep in mind, Buddy, is that this boy can't help acting ugly; he doesn't know any different."

Miss Sook invites Odd to the family's Thanksgiving celebration. She believes that the boys will be able to resolve their differences if they get to know one another.

To Buddy's considerable dismay, Odd shows up for the holiday. Later, Buddy witnesses Odd stealing Miss Sook's beloved cameo. When everyone is seated at the dinner table, he exposes Odd's crime. Miss Sook reluctantly checks her jewelry box, then lies to protect Odd in front of the guests. But Odd confesses to the theft and leaves after paying his respects to Miss Sook.

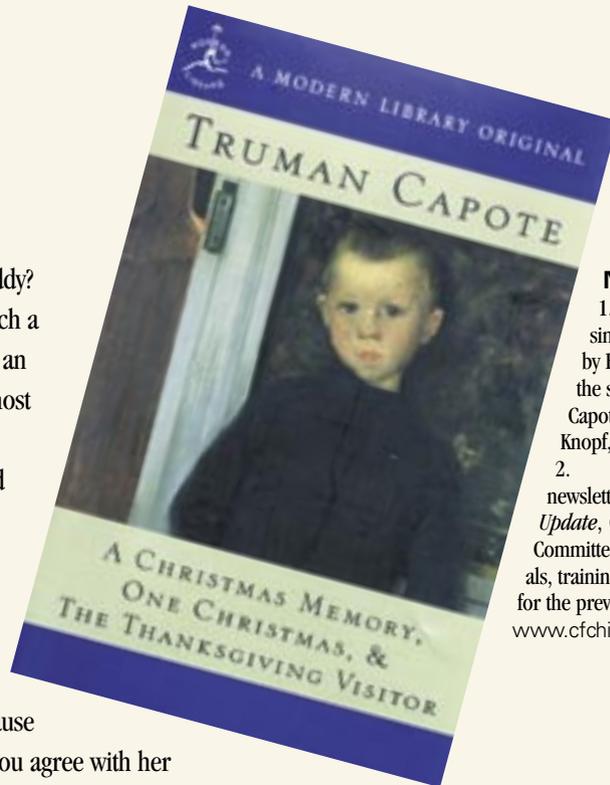
Buddy is scolded for deliberately disgracing Odd in front of the others. Miss Sook explains that while Odd was wrong to take the cameo, Buddy doesn't really know Odd's intentions and should have no reason to think he meant to harm anyone. Buddy's actions, on the other hand, were far more serious in Miss Sook's eyes. She calls what he did "deliberate cruelty" and says, "All else can be forgiven. That, never."

Buddy listens to Miss Sook. Although his first reaction is to wish he had come up with a better plan of revenge, eventually Miss Sook's message sinks in.

As the story closes, Buddy and Miss Sook reaffirm their friendship. Odd stops bothering Buddy for good; no reason is given for this, but the reader can infer that Odd is ashamed of—and that he possibly learned from—the events of that Thanksgiving Day.

Discussion Questions

- Consider Buddy's description of how some kids watched as he was bullied: "Usually a circle of kids ganged around to titter, or pretend to; they didn't really think it funny; but Odd made them nervous and ready to please." Why do you think that nobody stepped in to help Buddy? List some ways you could help if you were a bystander in a similar situation.
- Miss Armstrong punished Buddy for his outburst and use of inappropriate language. Why do you suppose she did not



punish Odd for harassing Buddy? Brainstorm other ways in which a child could report bullying to an adult. Which ways might be most effective?

- Buddy explained that he hated school—but only because of Odd Henderson. How might Buddy’s situation affect his schoolwork?
- Miss Sook was willing to overlook Odd’s behavior because of his difficult home life. Do you agree with her that Odd couldn’t help acting “ugly”? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Odd accepted Miss Sook’s invitation to Thanksgiving dinner?
- Imagine that you are Odd, and you’ve just noticed the cameo in the cigar box. What thoughts are running through your mind as you reach in and take it? Why do you want it? What is it worth to you? Now imagine that you are Miss Sook. What is the cameo worth to you? Why?
- Miss Sook lied to protect Odd, and Buddy felt that she had betrayed their friendship. Did she? Explain your thinking.
- By the end of Thanksgiving, Buddy thought, “Odd Henderson had emerged—how? why?—as someone superior to me, even more honest.” In your opinion, was Odd more honest than Buddy? Explain your response.
- Why do you think Odd stopped bullying Buddy? Do you think it was a realistic outcome? Why or why not?
- Are there signs that Buddy and Miss Sook are still good friends at the end of the story? 📖

Lisa L. Owens is currently senior editor at the Committee for Children in Seattle. She has been working in educational publishing for a decade and has authored more than 20 books for children.

Notes

1. *The Thanksgiving Visitor* was published singly in an earlier edition with lovely illustrations by Beth Peck. Your library may have a copy of it on the shelf, although it is not currently in print. Truman Capote, *The Thanksgiving Visitor* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).
2. This article first appeared in the spring 1999 newsletter of the Committee for Children, *Prevention Update*, (pp. 4-5). Reprinted by permission ©1999 Committee for Children. CFC provides educational materials, training, community education, and original research for the prevention of child abuse and youth violence. Visit www.cfchildren.org or call 800-634-4449.

Prevent Bullying

“For some schools, violence may be a minor issue; for others, it may be a daily presence. Though the most extreme forms of violence are rare, the threat of all kinds of violence can keep students away from school, prevent them from going to after-school events, and leave them in fear every day.

“To make our schools safer, everyone can and must pitch in—teachers, parents, students, policy makers, law enforcement officers, business managers, faith leaders, civic leaders, youth workers, and other concerned community residents. Each of us can do something to help solve the problem. And it’s a problem we all must solve.”

Ideas and resources are available from the National Crime Prevention Council, 1000 Connecticut Avenue, NW, 13th Floor Washington, DC 20036. Phone: 202-466-6272. Fax: 202-296-1356. E-mail: mcgruff@ncpc.org. Websites: www.mcgruff.org and www.ncpc.org.

Aging in America

Donna P. Couper and Steven S. Lapham

Compare the twelve commonly held misconceptions about aging that are listed in the left-hand column with the corresponding statements in the right-hand column that are more accurate—and more optimistic. Older adults are a resource that young students of the social studies should use to the fullest. “Grow old along with me. The best is yet to be!”

Misconception	Fact
Only older people need to learn about aging.	Young people today will make more decisions, at earlier years, about work and family issues related to aging than any previous generation in history.
Aging causes disease and disability.	People of all ages get sick and become disabled. Although disease and disability are more prevalent in later life, these happen in time, not because of time.
Aging is about dying. It is the end stage of life, just before death.	Aging is about living. The alternative to aging is death.
“Old” people are lonely and depressing.	Most older adults are sociable and lively. Some are not, but then some young people are not.
Older people are all alike.	The older the population, the more diverse it is. With each year of life, a person develops an even more unique combination of qualities and experiences.
Chronological age tells a lot about a person.	Chronological age alone is a poor explanation for abilities or behavior.
Later life is a downhill course, involving mostly losses.	Although later life is associated with decline, it can also be a period of continued growth and development.
Physical decline starts during middle age.	Health habits developed in youth and practiced over a lifetime are the foundation for health status in later life.
An aging population creates social and economic problems.	An aging population demands informed decisions by individuals and society that can improve the quality of life for all generations.
Most older adults live in nursing homes.	Today, about 4 out of 100 adults who are 65 years old or older live in nursing homes.
Life expectancy in the United States has increased from 48 years in 1900 to 83 years in 2000 only because of better care for older adults.	Reduced death rates for children and young adults (largely because of better public health systems like clean water, better nutrition, and better medicines like antibiotics) are the main factor behind increasing life expectancy over the last century.

Sources

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