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Historical Letters: Integrating History and Language Arts

Kay A. Chick

Introduction

In 1948 a woman named Lucile in Newark, Delaware wrote to her family in Blairsville, Pennsylvania, about the presidential election of 1948. The letter is an interesting example of one person's opinion about a historic event (**Figure 1**). In this article, I discuss some of the benefits and challenges of using personal, historical letters as tools for teaching and suggest how such a lesson can serve the purpose of curriculum integration. I help students analyze and comprehend a significant event in history with the use of this lesson.¹ At the end of the article, I list extension activities that emphasize the six language arts, so that teachers might provide students with experiences to improve their literacy skills while also fostering historical knowledge and inquiry.

"I Was There"

Primary sources are materials such as diaries, oral histories, letters, photographs, drawings, and maps that were created by people who experienced or witnessed a historical event. They represent moments in history that can provide insight into historical events, time periods, people, and places.²

As teaching tools, primary sources offer significant enhancements to the usual secondary sources, such as textbooks or instructional films. First, a primary source can stimulate curiosity, promote historical inquiry, and foster critical thinking. Original historical sources encourage students to observe, make inferences, and ask questions, just as historians do. Second, they humanize history, which provides human interest and allows students to analyze the experiences, behavior, thoughts, and feelings of people from the past. Once students have acquired background information on historical events and time periods, a deeper understanding comes from examining documents that foster comprehension of

how people participated in and reacted to events as they happened.³

Finally, original documents assist students as they become skilled in reading, writing, and research. Primary sources often contain vocabulary and spelling that is challenging, and content that is not easily comprehended. Locating documents, even with document facsimiles easily available on the Internet, requires patience and diligence. These types of reading, writing, and research skills are often new to students, but are necessary for them to make meaning from the document in front of them.

Rough Drafts of History

The nature of primary sources is very different from secondary sources such as most textbooks or children's literature, where authors usually provide their own analysis of history. Primary sources challenge students to begin creating their own views of the past.

Using primary sources can foster critical thinking. Because primary sources carry the perspective of the writers, two

descriptions of the same event, written by two different people, may contradict one another. For example, letters, newspaper editorials, and oral histories of the Truman v. Dewey election could contain very different points of view from that of the author of the letter in Figure 1. Therefore, no single source can be considered unquestionably true and accurate. It is the teacher's responsibility to assist students as they consider various viewpoints and make inferences about the meaning of different passages. Thus, the analysis of primary sources can be quite complex, but introducing middle school students to the challenge is valuable for many reasons.

A Unique Contribution

Historical letters are a primary source that is available in abundance in some communities. Especially (but not exclusively) among the well-educated, earlier generations were prolific letter writers, with correspondence often passing between writers on a daily basis. Some writers would begin a letter at the beginning of a week, adding new information for several days before mailing it. In the estate of one elderly woman, over 400 letters were found.⁴ Composed from the early 1900s through the 1950s, the letters tell of her brother's participation in World War II, the Pennsylvania flood of 1936, Hitler's invasion of Austria, and her experiences in college. Letters of this time period often detailed the daily life of individuals, highlighting events such as clothes and hair washing, cleaning,

and meal preparation. They not only provide insight into historical events, but allow students to compare and contrast earlier generations with their own. Students must be reminded, however, that letters provide only a snapshot of an event in history, and do not grant us the complete story. Students must fill in the gaps, just as historians do.

At the local level, many historical societies acquire letters and file or store them by topic or time period. Such acquisitions are often available to schools for historical studies. Collections can be found in books such as *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression*⁵ and articles such as *Eli Landers: Letters of a Confederate Soldier*,⁶ which provides teachers with discussion questions, teaching ideas, and extension activities.

Letters Online

For teachers who are not able to easily find letters in their community, the internet is a valuable source for document retrieval. I've provided a small sample of online citations to letters from select periods in our nation's history, which teachers may wish to integrate into social studies classrooms (**Figure 2**). For example, in the History Matters collection at George Mason University, teachers can select a topic such as women, military history, or contemporary United States, and then select letters and diaries as the primary source.⁷ Collections appear with links and a description of each resource. For example, by selecting "Contemporary United States," teachers can access the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. By typing "Jackie Robinson letters" in the search box, readers can retrieve a letter written by Senator John F. Kennedy to Jackie Robinson in 1960, concerning the senator's desire for "first class citizenship for all Americans."⁸

Letters can also be located at the Learning Connections webpages of the American Memories collections at the Library of Congress (**Figure 2**). This website, designed specifically for teachers, contains alphabetized collections of primary source documents, including

letters. For example, by clicking on the collection, "California As I Saw It: First-Person Narratives of California's Early Years, 1849-1900," teachers can access the letters of Franklin A. Buck, a Yankee trader in the gold rush.⁹

Dewey v. Truman

Historical letters are one type of primary source that is easily integrated with language arts instruction. Some educators state that a primary document is best presented after students have background knowledge of the time period, or of a specific historical event, or both.¹⁰ However, letters can also be used as an anticipatory set to invite student attention, curiosity, and engagement, and set the stage for what is to come as the lesson progresses.

Consider again the letter written by Lucile, describing her reactions to the presidential election of 1948 (**Figure 1**). I distribute this letter to students and we read it aloud. (I ask four students to each read aloud one paragraph.) I ask the class to consider key phrases and discuss their meaning. For example, students might discuss why people in 1948 would be listening to election results over the radio, and how that experience might be different from watching the results on television, as we often do today.

I ask students what this phrase means: "Maybe he has ability never seen, at least let us hope for it..." Do students understand that "he" refers to Harry S. Truman? Can they explain that, although Truman is now considered to be one of our great presidents, his potential for leadership was not evident to many Americans in 1948?

Students can discuss what they already know about Truman and how he first came to be in office. Ensure that students

understand that the circumstances of his first term (he became president upon the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt) affected how the public perceived his legitimacy as president, until he won an election for that high office.

To further study this (or any) letter, students can use a Letter Analysis Form (**Figure 3**).¹¹ After they have completed their forms individually, they can compare responses with a partner, and then dyads can discuss their analyses with the class. Questions on the Letter Analysis Form can be used to initiate discussion, which is an important component of social studies and language arts lessons. Students need opportunities for free-flowing discussion and reflection, and letters such as this are crucial elements in such conversations. As students begin to ask their own questions and gain experience in historical inquiry, teachers may act as facilitators.¹² They guide the process by asking students to consider what else they might like to know about the 1948 election and this period in history, or how they might demonstrate what they have learned.

Extension Activities

As students gain knowledge about this historical event, they can demonstrate what they have learned through a quiz, but teachers should also consider using extension activities, which are designed to provide choice and promote creativity. Extension activities can also provide students with experience in all six of the language arts, listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing. Moreover, extension activities are performance-based, so students demonstrate and apply their knowledge rather than reiterate information on an exam.

ON THE COVER: "Cannon to Right of Them, Cannon to Left of Them." (Published in the *Washington Post* on February 23, 1948. Library of Congress collection). During the 1948 presidential election, Southern Democrats (led by Strom Thurmond) rebelled, protesting President Harry Truman's civil rights program. Left-leaning Democrats split off to form the Progressive Party (led by Henry A. Wallace). This prompted cartoonist Herb Block to invoke the heroic, if ill-fated warrior in Alfred Tennyson's poem "The Charge of the Light Brigade." Truman surprised almost everyone, and proved pollsters' predictions wrong, by winning the election in November.

November 8, 1948.

Dear Mother and All,

With the big upset last week, I am disgusted with myself for not having gotten a letter off to you before this. Last week just went before I realized it!

People are still talking, and no doubt will for a long time to come still be talking about the presidential election of 1948. It was the most amazing and startling turn of events. I, for one, was not even going to listen to the election returns, but when I heard that Truman was leading in electoral both ~~electoral~~ and popular votes at 10:00 election night I began listening. It was so exciting as reported over the radio that neither Mrs. Reed nor I could go to bed. I have never heard anything like it! In fact, it became more exciting as the returns came in between 1:00 and 3:00 a.m. Wed., that we could not tear ourselves away from the radio. At five o'clock I could not stay up any longer, and since Truman was leading with 291 electoral votes I went to bed, of course it was not even certain then.

All the poll takers and reporters have tried to explain "why." The reasons are many-fold but quite obvious. First, as to the poll takers, they did not take into consideration the undecided vote which as statisticians they should have considered in their statistical analysis. Dewey made no definite statements on anything, Truman did. Truman talked to

the farm groups and they were told what a Republican administration would do. The Republicans were smug and confident and sat on their heels while Truman alone went out and campaigned even without his party backing him. I talked with people just the evening before the election and found that most were confused and truthfully did not know who they would vote for the next day. Clearly this was one time in history when no candidate was a worthy one! No wonder people were confused and undecided. A good many potential Wallace voters evidently swung over for Truman too and that made some difference.

Well, it is over, except for the talking. Maybe the people are right. After what could have been accomplished by a Rep. president and a Dem. congress? No one believed the man could do it. Maybe he has ability never seen, at least let us hope for it; or at least that a young Congress with good men will lead us right.

You know, in the years of my life that I have been old enough to know and realize things, there have been two events outstanding. The attack on Pearl Harbor (which if it be true, a few knew would happen before the event did) and this election results (which no one could foresee) are the two amazing ones.

Had a letter from Arthur last wed., I guess it was, and am forwarding the snapshot of him that he sent in it.

Language arts activities can be completed individually or in small groups. Extension activities for middle school students completing a study of the 1948 election are not hard to imagine (Figure 4). Students choose from among eleven options, or create their own activity with teacher input and approval.

In addition to sharing with classmates, students might benefit from sharing extension activities and expertise with a larger audience. Give students the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge gained from their work by giving a presentation to parents, the elderly, or children in a younger grade. Such a culminating event elevates the status of students' research and helps them internalize their knowledge and discoveries.

Conclusion

A lesson using historical letters can make a unique contribution to the integration of history and the language arts. This primary source, providing a snapshot of history, challenges students to develop their own insights about historical

events and people. Whether used at the beginning or the end of a unit of study, the work of analyzing a historical letter invites curiosity, engagement, critical thinking, and research. Personal, historical letters can rarely serve as a stand-alone, authoritative source; they are rather a catalyst, energizing students to extend their historical thinking and pursue an active understanding of their social world. 🌐

Notes

1. The letter, excerpted in this article, is in the private collection of the author.
2. Carol Fuhler, Pamela Farris, and Pamela Nelson, "Building Literacy Skills Across the Curriculum: Forging Connections with the Past Through Artifacts," *The Reading Teacher* 59, no. 7 (April 2006); Susan Veccia, *Uncovering Our History* (Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 2004), 3.
3. Keith Barton, "Primary Sources in History: Breaking Through the Myths," *Phi Delta Kappan* 86, no. 10 (June 2005); Monica Edinger, *Seeking History: Teaching with Primary Sources in Grades 4-6* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000); Veccia, 3.
4. These letters are in the private collection of the author.

5. Robert Cohen, ed., *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2002); Mary Mason Royal, "Maybe You Could Help?" *Middle Level Learning* 22 (January/February, 2005): 2-8.
6. Stephanie Wasta and Carolyn Lott, "Eli Landers: Letters of a Confederate Soldier," *Social Education* 66, no. 2 (2002).
7. American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning (CUNY) and the Center for History and New Media (George Mason University), "History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web" (2006), historymatters.gmu.edu/.
8. National Baseball Hall of Fame. "Primary Sources-Jackie Robinson" (Cooperstown, NY: NBHF, 1999), at www.baseballhalloffame.org/education/.
9. Library of Congress. "American Memory Collections" (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2006), memory.loc.gov/learn/.
10. Theresa McCormick, "Letters from Trenton, 1776: Teaching with Primary Sources," *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 17, no. 2 (November/December 2004): 5-12.
11. The Letter Analysis Form was modified from a Written Document Analysis Worksheet created by the National Archives and Records Administration, www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/document.html. Let students know that it is okay to write "Unknown" where appropriate on this form.
12. Laurel Singleton and Carolyn Pereira. "Civil Conversations Using Primary Documents," *Social Education* 69, no. 7 (November/December 2005).

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Figure 2. Examples of Historical Letters Available Online

Letter Writer and Recipient	Historical Period	Website	Online Publisher
Sarah Bagley to Angelique Martin	Women's Rights, 1846–1848	historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/sia/letters.htm	History Matters, George Mason University
Absolom A. Harrison to His Wife	Civil War, August 2, 1862	www.civilwarhome.com/letter15.html	Civil War Home, located through Louisiana State University, www.cwc.lsu.edu/links/links6.htm
Franklin A. Buck narrative	California's Early Years, 1849–1900	memory.loc.gov/ammem/cbhtml/calbkibAuthors01.html	Learning Connections, American Memory, Library of Congress
Capt. Robert Hanes to His Wife	World War I, 1914–1916	docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/hanesletters/hanesletters.html	Documenting the South, University of North Carolina
A fifteen-year-old girl to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt	The Great Depression, 1929–1935	newdeal.feri.org/eleanor/mi0136.htm	The New Deal Network

Figure 3. **Letter Analysis Form**

Date of letter:	Location from which letter was mailed:
Author of the letter:	Position (Title) or information known about this author:
Recipient of the letter:	Position (Title) or information known about this individual:
Location where this letter was received:	

Unique physical characteristics of the letter (check one or more):

- Interesting letterhead
- Handwritten
- Typed
- Seals
- "Received" stamp
- Other

Analysis of the Content

A. Why do you think this letter was written?

B. List three things the author said that you think are important or interesting and explain why.

C. List two things the letter tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written.

D. What perspectives, viewpoints, or bias does the author communicate?

E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the letter.

Source: This worksheet is based on materials from "Teaching with Documents: Lesson Plans" at www.archives.gov/education/lessons/.

Figure 4. **Extension Activities for the Presidential Election of 1948**

Research the campaigns of Harry S. Truman, Thomas Dewey, Strom Thurmond, and Henry A. Wallace for the presidential elections of 1948. Then choose one of activities below as your culminating project for this unit of study. Your work will be graded, and it is due _____.

1. Create interview questions and interview an elderly person who remembers the election of 1948. Videotape your interview and share it with the class.
2. Perform a newscast from the past by interviewing Truman or Dewey the day before the election, the day after, or both.
3. Design posters for the campaigns of Truman and Dewey that state the position of each candidate on what you believe to be the significant issues in that election.
4. Draw a political cartoon based on newspaper accounts of the 1948 presidential election.
5. Write and perform a speech supporting one of the two major candidates.
6. Write a news editorial for publication on the day after the election of 1948.
7. Research ways that technology has changed campaigning and elections since 1948. Display your results as a poster or PowerPoint presentation.
8. Compose and perform a musical composition that reflects the events of the 1948 election and citizens' reactions to it in the musical style of that era.
9. Write a creative essay describing how American history might have been different if either Dewey, Wallace, or Thurmond had been elected.
10. Write and illustrate an acrostic poem, a biopoem, or a concrete poem that represents your understanding of the 1948 election or one of the candidates.
11. Perform a skit representing reactions to the newspaper headlines following the 1948 election.
12. (Student's idea for a project) I would like to:

I will work individually, or I would like to work with:

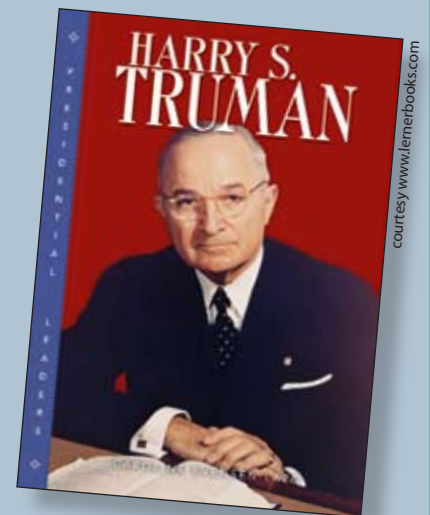
Online Resources for Students

American President (Univ. of Virginia), "Harry S. Truman: Campaign and Elections,"
www.millercenter.virginia.edu/Ampres/essays/truman/biography/3.

The Internet Public Library, "Harry S. Truman,"
www.ipl.org/div/potus/hstruman.html.

Truman Presidential Museum and Library, "Truman Biographical Sketch,"
www.trumanlibrary.org/kids/index.html.

Books for Students



Cannarella, Deborah. *Harry S. Truman (Profiles of the Presidents)*. Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books, 2002.

Lazo, Caroline E. *Harry S. Truman (Presidential Leaders)*. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner, 2002.

Morris, Jeffrey B. *The Truman Way (Great Presidential Decisions)*. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner, 1994.

Otfinoski, Steven. *Harry S. Truman: America's 33rd President (Encyclopedia of Presidents)*. Danbury, CT: Children's Press, 2005.

'Toonin' into History: Online Collections of Political Cartoons

James M. Duran

With the advent of the Internet, a free and extensive collection of editorial cartoons covering various periods throughout American history has been placed at the fingertips of every social studies teacher who has access to the web. As is often the case, however, teachers have too little time to locate and review these educational resources. I have reviewed five sites that contain a variety of editorial cartoons and provide practical ideas about how to incorporate these images into lesson plans for the classroom.¹

When Benjamin Franklin created his 1754 “Join or Die” cartoon in an attempt to persuade colonists to unite in the coming war against France, he could hardly have imagined the impact cartoons would go on to have in today’s media. The sites described here are large collections of drawings, but they also provide resources about how such images can be interpreted as powerful, but partial and imperfect, samples of the historical record. Such critical analysis is a skill every teacher must include as part of any lesson that introduces cartoons into the classroom (**Handout**, page 11).

Harper’s Weekly: The Presidential Elections 1860–1912

elections.harperweek.com/

There exist few more appropriate windows into the soul of America’s past than its presidential elections. From the issues addressed by the candidates to the campaign methods utilized by the political parties of the day, an exploration of these elections allows students of history to place their fingers firmly on the pulse of the nation at that time. To facilitate

such an exploration, the publishers of *Harper’s* have compiled digital versions of editorial cartoons covering the fourteen presidential elections from 1860 to 1912. The site draws upon *Harper’s Weekly*, a well-known publication of that period, as well as a variety of other electronic collections, averaging fifty cartoons, campaign banners, and political prints from each election.



Particularly useful at the *Harper’s* site is the fact that each cartoon is paired with an explanation of the image (as well as the sometimes-cryptic symbolism within it) that places it in its proper historical context. Take for example the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. The images found on this site do a superb job of

relaying the multitude of perspectives that existed at the time on the issues of slavery and the Kansas Territory, John Brown’s raid on the armory at Harper’s Ferry, and events leading up to the split of the Democratic Party into Northern and Southern factions.

Herblock’s History: Political Cartoons from the Crash to the Millennium

www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/herblock/intro-jhb.html

Herbert Lawrence Block (1909–2001), better known as “Herblock,” is viewed by many to be the preeminent editorial cartoonist of the twentieth century. This Library of Congress website chronicles



his work from his early days as a 19-year-old staff cartoonist at the *Chicago Daily News* (his first cartoon was a 1929 piece advocating the preservation of our national forests) to his final days at the *Washington Post*. The site includes Herblock’s illustrated essay about his profession and its usefulness in a free

society, which would be quite readable for most middle school students. “The political cartoon is not a news story and not an oil portrait. It’s essentially a means for poking fun, for puncturing pomposity,” says Herblock. “If the prime role of a free press is to serve as critic of government, cartooning is often the cutting edge of that criticism.”

Over his seventy plus years as a cartoonist, Herblock witnessed first hand and commented on the twentieth century’s most memorable people and events. His drawings capture the era of the Great Depression, the Nazi menace, World War II, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Viet Nam War. He seemed to fear no reprisals in the 1950s during Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy’s hunt for communists (Herblock coined the term “McCarthyism”) or during the Watergate scandal of the early 1970s that ended Richard Nixon’s presidency. In recognition of his work during that period, Herblock was mentioned alongside Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein when the *Washington Post* was awarded the 1973 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service.

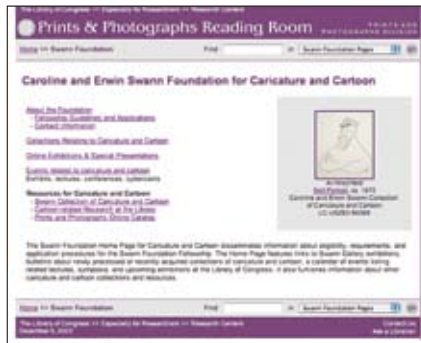
Herblock also received the Pulitzer Prize on three separate occasions (1942, 1956, and 1979). For his lifetime contributions, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian award, in 1994. In conferring the award, then President Bill Clinton acknowledged Herblock’s “service to our democracy and to humanity... [advancing] the common interest of freedom-loving people, not only here at home but throughout the world.”

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Reading Room, Caroline and Erwin Swann Foundation for Caricature and Cartoon.

www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/
As impressive as the works of Herbert Block undoubtedly are, they represent only a small piece of the enormous pie that is the cartoon collection of the U.S. Library of Congress. This site contains numerous on-line exhibits, each one containing images capable of serving as an invaluable teaching resource on

their own (one exhibit alone, “Cartoon America: The James Arthur Wood, Jr. Collection,” contains over 36,000 original drawings).

One of the exhibits worthy of emphasis here is “Bill Mauldin: Beyond Willie and Joe,” which chronicles the military



and civilian career of the two-time Pulitzer Prize winner (www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/mauldin/). Although best known for the cartoons and wartime observations created while a member of the U.S. Army’s 45th Infantry Division, Mauldin was equally adept in capturing American society in the post war era. His work during the Civil Rights Movement while working at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, including the memorable image of Abraham Lincoln sobbing at the news of John Kennedy’s assassination, remain some of his most enduring images.

The webpage “American Cartoon Prints,” while not much to look at, is a main crossroads from which one can access many collections (lcweb2.

loc.gov/pp/apphtml/appabt.html). Although the search function can be somewhat cumbersome (using precise and descriptive key words helps), once you have mastered it, you can be assured of finding an image from virtually any time period in American History. Some of the drawings are not the best quality (it seems that 18th century artists believed “more is better”

and, thus, created works that are often very cluttered), but the explanations and background information provided with images make it possible to understand and use them effectively in your classroom.

The Library of Congress also provides tools to assist teachers in using these images to create an effective educational environment. The section “It’s No Laughing Matter” has background information and practice activities to assist the reader in taking apart a cartoon and deciphering its message (memory.loc.gov/learn/features/political_cartoon/index.html).

“What makes funny cartoons seriously persuasive? Cartoonists’ persuasive techniques do. All cartoonists have access to a collection of tools that help them get their point across.” The activities on this site, along with the additional links found under “Resources for Teachers” provide teachers and students alike with tools to effectively analyze political cartoons.

Association of American Editorial Cartoonists

editorialcartoonist.com/index.cfm
If the ultimate goal of a social studies



teacher is the creation of an informed citizenry, as it should be, then current events must be included into the curriculum. As John W. Gardner so eloquently put it, “History never looks like history when you are living through it.” Thus, the usefulness of editorial cartoons once again surfaces as a tool of instruction in the history classroom.

Websites of Interest to Teachers

Apple Learning Interchange, "Political Cartoons in the Classroom." A lesson for students to gain experience with analyzing political cartoons.
ali.apple.com/ali_sites/deli/exhibits/1000810/The_Lesson.html

Library of Congress, "It's No Laughing Matter: Analyzing Political Cartoons." This site offers resources for teachers, lesson ideas, and a learning activity (that requires Flash plug in).
memory.loc.gov/learn/features/political_cartoon/index.html

Newsweek, "Analyzing Political Cartoons." This Newsweek Education Program activity walks students through the process of analyzing political cartoons.
www.newsweekeducation.com/extras/polcartoons.php

PBS, "Cartoon Commentary." This lesson from the PBS Art in the 21st Century Lesson Library focuses on the history and analysis of political cartoons.
www.pbs.org/art21/education/abstraction/lesson2.html

Truman Library and Museum, "Cartoons and Lesson Plans." A collection of teaching materials and cartoons of the era.
www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/cartoons/cartoon_central.htm

Additional Collections

FDR Cartoon Collection Database,
www.nisk.k12.ny.us/fdr/index.html

The Impeachment of Andrew Johnson,
www.impeach-andrewjohnson.com/

Political Cartoons of the Lilly Library (1765-1865),
www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/cartoon/cartoons.html

Olipphant's Anthem,
www.loc.gov/exhibits/oliphant/

Political Cartoon Primary Sources,
nhs.needham.k12.ma.us/nhs_media/cartoonspolitical.html

World War I Cartoons,
rutlandhs.k12.vt.us/jpeterso/uboaatcar.htm

The Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC) website is a place where anyone can gather countless images that inform and comment on the major stories of the day. Combining works from the artists of more than fifty magazines and newspapers across the United States, this website, which is updated daily, provides a single location for students and teachers view a variety of perspectives.

Of particular use to teachers are "Cartoons for the Classroom" lesson plans, which are based on specific editorial cartoons (nieonline.com/aaec/cftc.cfm).² A biweekly two-page lesson plan is posted to the site for teachers to download and print out for their individual classrooms. The first page is the lesson based on a particular hot topic from current events. The second page is a blank cartoon on the same event, where students can try out their own captions/dialogue in an effort to demonstrate their knowledge of the event while placing an emphasis on critical thinking. Teachers can access an archive of lessons that dates back to September 2003. As most issues are not entirely resolved within a day, this archive allows teachers to follow an event as it over the weeks, as reflected in a series of editorial cartoons.



Daryl Cagle's Professional Cartoonists Index

cagle.msnbc.com/

Much like the AAEC site, Daryl Cagle's Professional Cartoonists Index provides a plethora of editorial cartoons, covering a wide variety of perspectives on countless topics. (Cagle is the daily editorial cartoonist for MSNBC.com and a former president of the National Cartoonists

Society.) In addition to current images, an archive of past cartoons, organized by topic, provides detailed information and points of view from events as far back as 2001. What sets Cagle's site apart is its decidedly international flavor. In addition to a large number of cartoons updated regularly from American sources, the Cagle site includes links to artists from more than thirty countries around the world. These cartoons convey points of view that students might not otherwise receive from their local news sources. These international images, when viewed alongside cartoons from U.S. publications, provide ample opportunities to compare and contrast local and international perspectives.

The Cagle site contains lesson plans, five each for the elementary, middle, and high school levels, which contain detailed instructions on methods for using the cartoon in the classroom (cagle.msnbc.com/teacher/). In addition to these grade-specific lessons, generic "Current Events" lessons, regularly updated on the site, provide five current cartoons and a series of specific topic-related questions for each. The questions, along with teacher notes designed to aid in guiding a discussion on the cartoon and the event, allow even a novice teacher to acquire the prerequisite knowledge necessary to use the political cartoons in the classroom in responsible and interesting ways. 🌐

Notes

1. William Ray Heitzmann, "Teaching with Cartoons: Looking at Elections through the Cartoonist's Eye," *Social Education* 64, no. 5 (September 2000), 314-319; Dwight C. Holliday and Janice A. Grskovic, "Using Political Cartoons: An Activity for Students of Every Ability," *Middle Level Learning* 15, (2002), 8-9.
2. "Cartoons in the Classroom" is a project of The AAEC, the Newspaper in Education program, and the Nieman Foundation for Journalism.

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Cartoon Analysis Guide

Use this guide to identify the persuasive techniques used in political cartoons.

Symbolism

Cartoonists use simple objects, or symbols, to stand for larger concepts or ideas.

After you identify the symbols in a cartoon, think about what the cartoonist intends each symbol to stand for.

Exaggeration

Sometimes cartoonists overdo, or exaggerate, the physical characteristics of people or things in order to make a point.

When you study a cartoon, look for any characteristics that seem overdone or overblown. (Facial characteristics and clothing are some of the most commonly exaggerated characteristics.) Then, try to decide what point the cartoonist was trying to make through exaggeration.

Labeling

Cartoonists often label objects or people to make it clear exactly what they stand for.

Watch out for the different labels that appear in a cartoon, and ask yourself why the cartoonist chose to label that particular person or object. Does the label make the meaning of the object more clear?

Analogy

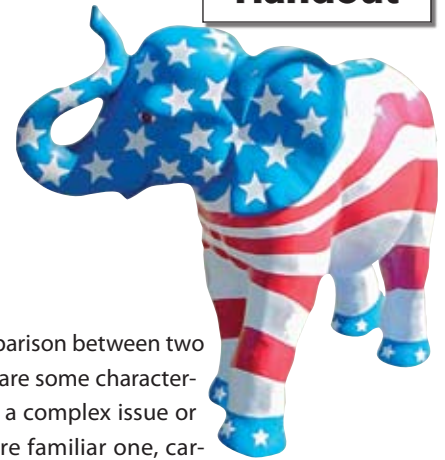
An analogy is a comparison between two unlike things that share some characteristics. By comparing a complex issue or situation with a more familiar one, cartoonists can help their readers see it in a different light.

After you've studied a cartoon for a while, try to decide what the cartoon's main analogy is. What two situations does the cartoon compare? Once you understand the main analogy, decide if this comparison makes the cartoonist's point more clear to you.

Irony

Irony is the difference between the ways things are and the way things should be, or the way things are expected to be. Cartoonists often use irony to express their opinion on an issue.

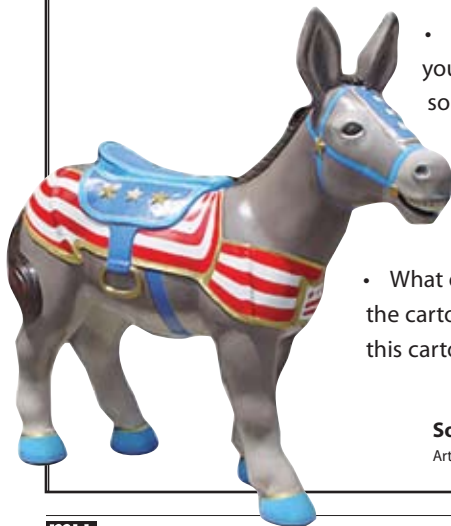
When you look at a cartoon, see if you can find any irony in the situation the cartoon depicts. If you can, think about what point the irony might be intended to emphasize. Does the irony help the cartoonist express his or her opinion more effectively?



Discussion Questions

Once you've identified the persuasive techniques that the cartoonist used, ask yourself:

- What issue is this political cartoon about?
- What is the cartoonist's opinion on this issue?
- What other opinion can you imagine another person having on this issue?
- Did you find this cartoon persuasive? Why or why not?
- What other techniques could the cartoonist have used to make this cartoon more persuasive?



Finally, a complex but important question to ask about a cartoon is this:

- Is the cartoonist being fair and accurate in his or her portrayal of people and events?

For example, history shows that cartoonists can use exaggeration to promote an ugly ethnic stereotype; or draw an analogy only by ignoring key facts; or poke fun at the victims of oppression, rather than the powerful. Naturally, we do not like cartoons that lampoon our own favorite candidate or reveal the weak side of an opinion that we hold. But we do not have a right to not be offended in the civic forum. So when does a cartoon go beyond fair criticism? Discuss this question with your peers using editorial cartoons that have been recently published in the newspapers.

Sources: Library of Congress, "It's No Laughing Matter: Analyzing Political Cartoons," memory.loc.gov/learn/features/political_cartoon/
Art Spiegelman, "Drawing Blood: Outrageous Cartoons and the Art of Outrage," *Harper's* (June, 2006).

Weaving a Map

Making Global Connections Visible

Teresa Secules and Rhodis Thompson

Teaching in a school with numerous immigrant students gave Rhodis some advantages for teaching world geography. Some students in each of her seventh grade classes had been born in a foreign country, while others were born in the United States, but had family members who had immigrated. She'd made use of this knowledge base in previous years, asking students to bring in artifacts from other places and talk about their families' countries of origin.

On the other hand, learning about other places, much less teaching concepts like "economic interdependence" did not seem easy for Rhodis's seventh graders. Her school is located in a working class, inner-city neighborhood. Some of the students had never been outside of the city. Most of the native-born students understood little of the rest of the world and seemed to care less. Even the new immigrants had a tendency to see the United States as all-powerful and independent both culturally and economically. Rhodis decided to confront this misconception right from the start of the school year. The following description is given from her point of view.

The Evidence

On the first day of school, I asked students to look at their own shoes, jackets, and backpacks to find out where these items were made. Students were surprised to discover that they had never heard of many of the countries whose names appeared on things they use every day. Students located each country on a world map and talked about their purchase and use of these items. I left most of the

questions that came up unanswered, but challenged students to seek the answers over the next few days:

- How does our purchasing goods from other countries provide jobs to people in those countries?
- How do nations support (or conflict with) one another by purchasing things from each other?
- How are things we "need" different from things we "want"?
- Why couldn't we just make these items here?
- Why have many U.S. companies moved their manufacturing plants to other countries?
- What kinds of jobs can we have in this country now, if manufacturing jobs are declining?

For homework, I asked students to chose a room in their home and list the origin of every item in that room if that information could be identified. The next day their list of manufacturing countries increased tremendously. I made a list on the board of items and their origins, locating countries on the map. Students notice that some countries appeared on our list more frequently than others. By

this time students were starting to wonder about these places, and asking more questions about people, manufacturing, and trade.

I led students in creating a huge wall map of the world, using an opaque projector to enlarge each continent to the appropriate scale. Students summarized some of the trends they noticed emerging from the data that they were collecting, such as "sneakers from South Asia," by stringing a piece of yarn from that area of the world to the United States. A small paper arrow labeled "sneakers" marked the U.S. endpoint. Then, as we progressed in our study of world geography, students noticed other connections and added more "connections" to the map.

The first region we investigated was North America—the United States and Canada. Then we moved on to the neighboring regions to the south, Central and South America. Although some of the students with family members from a region were very knowledgeable about it, they discovered they had much more to learn about economic connections between nations.

Two-Way Exchange

At first students noticed obvious imports, such as cars from Japan and clothes from China. They read in their textbook about agricultural products (cheese, fruit) and raw materials (petroleum, zinc) other countries exported to the United States.

Students were also excited to discover the origins of various foods and recipes. Latino students informed native-born students that the tacos they loved originated in Mexico. Students whose families came from the Middle East brought in hummus, made with ground garbanzo beans and mild spices, which was new to many of their classmates. The textbook also listed major imports for each country, and students discovered some of the major goods and materials that come from the United States (such as lumber sold to Japan and grain sold to Saudi Arabia). Students learned that today, Russians can visit a McDonald's "drive through" and order a Big Mac. Soon arrows on our big map began to appear in the other direction as well, leaving the United States and going to other countries.

Culture and Communication

With guidance from the teacher, students were beginning to think more broadly. They realized that not all imports were material goods—that ideas, philosophies, and cultural trends also moved from country to country. We began to investigate how these exchanges had been going on for quite a long time.

Students learned that, although our language had come from England with the colonists, many currently used expressions came from other languages: Italian, Yiddish, and Spanish, for example. When they started to trace the roots of their favorite music they found African influences, as well as British. They learned that our Founding Fathers had been inspired by French philosophers, and that the political ideals stated in the opening of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution have, in turn, inspired people in many other parts of the world. Talking with the immigrant students in their own classes, native-born students learned that American culture now reaches around the world instantaneously through television and the internet. By this time the map was full of yarn connections between continents.

As the year went on, students developed an appreciation of the enormity of



Robin Romano/International Labor Rights Fund

A young boy raking cocoa beans on drying rack at family compound in the Soubré region of Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). Much of the cocoa in the chocolate that U.S. consumers enjoy is farmed by children in West Africa. Visit www.ilrf.org to learn more.

global interdependence and its ramifications, both personal and political.

I saw signs that immigrant and native-born students were practicing increased cooperation and tolerance for one another. For example, some of the native students would remind me that certain immigrant students were absent from school for religious observances. This behavior may have been a result of sharing of ethnic artifacts, working in cooperative groups, participating in open discussions about cultures. Whatever the reason, students seemed to be developing a greater awareness and respect for the different traditions represented in their own community.

Students' understanding of the importance of interdependence in a global society grew over the school year. They often asked "what if" this or that could be done in various situations. They came to understand that natural disasters such as earthquakes and tornadoes could interrupt global interdependence. They knew that war could alter trade, taxes, migration, and communication within and between countries. As the year progressed, students began to express a feeling that it is

best to maintain peaceful relationships with global neighbors.

How Students Learn

Understanding of important underlying concepts—big ideas—is vital for students to develop proficiency in a subject. We know from studies of how experts think that their rich knowledge bases appear to be organized by the big ideas of the domain.¹ A person's ability to retrieve information, analyze a situation, and solve problems appears to.²

Global interdependence is certainly one of the big ideas in world geography. The National Council for Social Studies lists, among the ten thematic strands, **GLOBAL CONNECTIONS**.³ Several of the eighteen National Geography standards relate to global interdependence, including those on economic interdependence, migration of human populations, and Earth's cultural mosaics.⁴

My students developed a rich understanding of the big idea of global interdependence because their learning experience continued over the entire school year. I started by helping them discover some of their own personal

connection to the interdependent global economy, establishing relevance through their own sneakers and backpacks. This thread was strengthened throughout the year as they found that more and more things of personal importance—not just food and clothing, but also non-material things like music and youth culture—had global connections. Developing students' interest is the first step in scaffolding their learning.⁵

Discover for Yourself

Rather than being told their sneakers were made in Asia, students took them off and looked at the evidence, experiencing the discovery themselves. For years teachers have been told that some children are experiential learners. It can be hard to figure out how to help children experience social studies, but this simple act of looking inside their shoes led them to experience a global connection.

Furthermore, this discovery flew in the face of their prior assumptions that the rest of the world was irrelevant. Their “all-important” sneakers had come from other countries. Psychologist Jean Piaget described this conflict between our expectations and a new experience as “disequilibrium.”⁶ Students had previously been content (in equilibrium) with their conception of the world, but new information raised questions that their old belief could not explain. Science educators carefully develop similar dramatic demonstrations and experiments, called “discrepant events,” to confront students' misconceptions head-on.⁷ Once challenged, students work to replace mistaken ideas with scientifically accurate understandings of physical phenomena, such as gravity or electricity.

The student-created map covered a whole wall of our classroom, a visual representation of the connections that students were finding as their studies progressed. This graphic organizer was not just a list or a bubble chart. It modeled the understanding that we were working toward; the yarn and arrows showed interdependence between specific countries. Actually putting the yarn and arrows on the map, as we did in this

class, provided some new information as well. Students began to see patterns of economic interdependence between countries and regions throughout the world. The map grew more complex as we added information about economic development and culture.

Repetition

The repetition of the same important concept in a variety of contexts was itself helpful. The fact that the work of previous units was constantly in front of them helped students recognize repeating patterns of connection, as well as to see differences between regions. In this way, the wall map acted like a scaffold to hold together students' thinking processes, making it possible for them to perceive visually some of the patterns that economists read from numerical data. The map also helped them keep track of the understanding they were constructing, fact by fact, over the school year.

By the end of the year, students had a deeper understanding of the concept of global interdependence and its importance to their personal wellbeing. They had not simply memorized a term with a few examples from a book. They had experienced it personally, visually, and repeatedly, thus constructing their own understanding piece by piece.

Variations on a Theme

A wall map is a scaffold particularly suited to geography and the effects of geography on history. This map of connections could certainly be used in other units of study that call for an understanding of interdependence. For example, a study of the interdependence of rural and urban areas within one country could be taught with a similar map. A somewhat similar map could be constructed to show the flow of culture, language, and ideas that accompanied historical migrations, such as the Columbian Exchange or the Silk Road from the Middle East to China.

Several aspects were vital to the success of this exercise. First, relevance was established by having students discover for themselves a personal connection to the topic of the lesson. Discovering

the origin of their own sneakers was a discrepant event that confronted their prior misconceptions about U.S. self-sufficiency. Second, the wall map was a graphic organizer that visually motivated students to achieve. Finally, the repetition of the pattern with variations reinforced both the overall concept and the complexity that deepened the students' understanding. This was a lesson that extended students' understanding beyond the walls of the classroom, and beyond the 50 minutes each day that we had to begin exploring our connections with the world. 🌐

Notes

1. James F. Voss, Terry R. Greene, Timothy A. Post, and Barbara C. Penner, “Problem Solving Skills in the Social Sciences,” in Gordon W. Bower ed., *The Psychology of Learning and Motivation: Advances in Research Theory*, vol. 17 (New York: Academic Press, 1984), 165-213.
2. Michelene Chi, P. J. Feltovich, and Robert Glaser, “Categorization and Representation of Physics Problems by Experts and Novices,” *Cognitive Science* 5 (1981): 121-152.
3. National Council for the Social Studies, *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: Executive Summary* (Washington, DC: NCSS, 1994), summarized at www.socialstudies.org/standards/execsummary/
4. Geography Education Standards Project, *Geography for Life: National Geography Standards* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Research and Exploration, 1994).
5. David Wood, Jerome Bruner, and Gail Ross, “The Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving,” *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* 17 (1976): 89-100; Linda S. Levstik and Keith C. Barton, *Doing History* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000), 15.
6. Jean Piaget, “Piaget's Theory,” in Paul H. Mussen, ed., *Carmichael's Manual of Child Psychology*, vol. 1 (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1970), 703-732.
7. Cathy L. Thompson, “Discrepant Events: What Happens to Those Who Watch?” *School Science and Mathematics* 89, no.1 (January 1989): 26-29.

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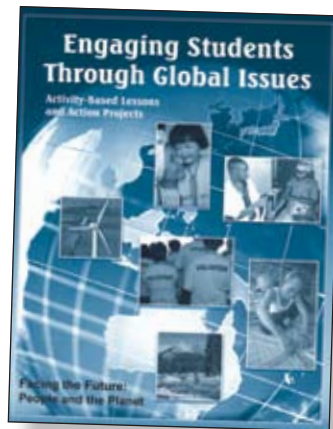
THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

Wheeler, Gilda et al., *Engaging Students Through Global Issues: Activity Based Lessons and Action Projects*. Seattle, WA: Facing the Future, 2006. 261 pages. Free online as PDFs at www.FacingTheFuture.org. Available as a booklet, \$25.00, online or by calling 206-264-1503.

This curriculum guide features “classroom activities for teaching about global issues and solutions.” It is filled with handouts and overheads, including gray-scale graphics designed to look sharp after photocopying. Charts and graphs are clearly presented. Each of the 40 lessons begins with an overview for the teacher and lists the range of grade levels (upper elementary through grade 12) at which the lesson might be taught. Each lesson plan provides inquiry/critical thinking questions, objectives, preparation, introductory discussion, classroom activity, reflection, and action ideas that include suggestions for service-learning projects. Lessons are aligned with subject area standards (including those of NCSS).

A companion intermediate-level student textbook *Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions: Population, Poverty, Consumption, Conflict, and the Environment*, as well as an advanced textbook, *It’s All Connected*, are available from Facing the Future.

In a pinch, this guide could serve as a compendium of stand-alone classroom activities that could be applied in all sorts of subject areas. On the other hand, the authors outline a “scope and sequence” for a multiweek, quarter, or semester unit of study on global issues.



those who live here. It offers an extensive collection of readings and source material on critical global issues, plus teaching ideas, lesson plans, and rich collections of resources for classroom teachers. It includes numerous political cartoons, handouts, and black and white photos of working people from around the world that photocopy well.

Teachers should be aware that the point of view of most of the material is generally critical of globalization: chapter titles include “Kids for Sale: Child Labor in the Global Economy” and “Colonialism without Colonies.”

Selected articles are available online in Spanish. “Poverty and World Wealth,” a classroom exercise that uses chocolate chip cookies to teach students about the inequitable distribution of wealth among nations, was reported on by CNN and in *USA Today*.

Benegar, John et al., *Global Issues for the Middle School*. Denver, CO: Center for Teaching International Relations, 1994. 206 pages. \$24.95. www.du.edu.ctir. 800-967-2847.

This book, for teachers of grades 5 through 8, contains 27 activities, including, “The Global Kid,” “The Trees of Life,” “Sharing Our Global Environment,” “Biodiversity,” and “The Family Tree of a Language.”

The book opens with three activities designed to stimulate student thinking about the importance of learning about other parts of the world and their own relationship to these. The remaining four sections focus on human values, global systems, global issues and problems, and global history. Each lesson plan describes objectives, the time required, materials needed, and step-by-step procedures. Some of the entries include suggested extension activities, related resources, and background information.

There are numerous handouts in the book. The font and graphics are a bit clunky, but clear for photocopying and carefully edited. Although this third edition was published some time ago, the information in the book is perfectly relevant for today’s classroom. CITR, the Center for Teaching International Relations, is at the Graduate School of International Studies at the University of Denver. 🌐

Bigelow, Bill and Bob Peterson, eds., *Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, 2002. 394 pages. www.rethinkingschools.org. \$18.95. 800-669-4192.

This paperback book, the largest of the three described here, helps teachers raise critical issues with students in grades 4–12 about the increasing globalization of the world’s economies and infrastructures, and the many different impacts this trend has on our planet and



Great Zeus!

Creating Cards of Greek Mythological Characters

John Marshall Carter

This activity is based on youthful fads such as collecting Yugioh and Pokemon trading cards. I introduce Greek mythological characters to my sixth grade students with this activity. I also hand out a writing rubric, which I give to students for almost any project involving writing.¹ I give students nine weeks to create as many as 40 cards (for a grade of A), but the scope of the project could be adjusted to fit a teacher's needs and the available time.

Notes

1. Writing Rubric - Middle School. A rubric from the state of Georgia for assessing expository compositions, including a six point scoring guide with well-defined criteria. www.middleweb.com/ReadWrkshp/RWdownload/MvaleRubric.pdf.

JOHN MARSHALL CARTER teaches sixth grade at G.W. Northcutt Elementary in College Park, Georgia.

DIRECTIONS FOR STUDENTS

You have _____ weeks to make your personal set of Greek mythology character trading cards. Due date is _____. Our school librarian can provide books that will tell you about all sorts of Greek myths. Each of your 3x5-inch cards should include the following:

1. Name of one Greek mythological character (a god, goddess, hero, creature, or mythic force) origin, possessions, symbol, realm or habitat, and any other pertinent information.
2. Picture of the character
3. Written description of the character, which may include what it does (its role and purpose), powers, vulnerabilities, story of

Grade: You may help to determine your own grade by how many cards you make: **A** = 25 or more cards, **B** = 15 to 24 cards, **C** = 5 to 14 cards, **D** = 1 to 4 cards, **F** = zero cards

- | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|
| 1. Gaea | 17. Atlas | 33. Dionysius | 49. Centaur |
| 2. Uranus | 18. Metis | 34. Eros | 50. Pegasus |
| 3. Cronus | 19. Zeus | 35. Hebe | 51. Sphinx |
| 4. Rhea | 20. Poseidon | 36. Eris | 52. Unicorn |
| 5. Oceanus | 21. Hades | 37. Helios | 53. Minotaur |
| 6. Tethys | 22. Hestia | 38. Thanatos | 54. Satyr |
| 7. Hyperion | 23. Hera | 39. Pan | 55. Medusa |
| 8. Mnemosyne | 24. Ares | 40. Nemesis | 56. Gorgons |
| 9. Themis | 25. Athena | 41. The Graces | 57. Nymphs |
| 10. Iapetus | 26. Aphrodite | 42. The Muses | 58. Hydra |
| 11. Coeus | 27. Apollo | 43. The Erinnyes | |
| 12. Crius | 28. Hermes | 44. The Fates | |
| 13. Phoebe | 29. Artemis | 45. Cyclopes | |
| 14. Thea | 30. Hephaestus | 46. Circe | |
| 15. Prometheus | 31. Demeter | 47. Calypso | |
| 16. Epimetheus | 32. Persephone | 48. Charybdis | |

This is a partial list! There are many more characters to choose from!

Middle Level Learning

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Richard Palmer ART DIRECTOR
Michael Simpson DIRECTOR OF PUBLICATIONS

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Supplement to National Council for the Social Studies Publications

Number 29, May/June 2007
www.socialstudies.org