

**Students learn most** when they are interested and enthusiastic. Achieving this student involvement can be a daunting challenge for teachers who are under pressure to have their students acquire as much information from their voluminous textbooks as possible. The contributors to this issue offer some welcome suggestions for dealing with this problem in the form of lesson plans and class projects that can truly engage students and launch them on a voyage of discovery that expands their knowledge as they study subjects that are part of the curriculum.

In our opening article, C. Frederick Risinger asks whether the 2008 election could transform the American landscape with a political realignment. He suggests that the election may be similar to past elections in U.S. history that have transformed the political scene, and recommends a class activity in which students investigate historical political shifts and monitor the 2008 presidential campaign for possible indicators of another realignment. His column identifies Internet sites that can serve as anchors for the study of realigning elections.

This issue's Looking at the Law column reviews major cases decided by the Supreme Court in its last term (which, as Charles F. Williams points out, witnessed "the highest percentage of 5-4 decisions in a decade" [296]), and looks ahead to the upcoming 2007-08 roster of cases, which raise many key legal issues, such as the rights of Guantanamo Bay detainees. James S. Landman's accompanying teaching activity notes that the Guantanamo cases have attracted many amicus briefs, and explains what these are and how their examination can deepen students' understanding of the law.

Important Supreme Court cases are a standard part of the history and government curriculum. Although textbook accounts of the cases can be very dry, every one of them is a drama in itself, and Charles F. Howlett realized that students would be more interested in studying them and could learn more if they treated the cases as dramas. Working in groups, his students have written plays based on cases ranging from *Dred Scott* and *Plessy v. Ferguson* to *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Tinker v. Des Moines*. Howlett provides tips on the preparations, procedures and assessments that can maximize the benefits of this kind of project.

Lisa A. Lark describes the positive effects of connecting U.S. history students with members of the older generation who lived through the events that are part of their history books. When her eleventh-grade students met residents of a senior living facility, aged between 76 and 96, they learned a great deal about life in the U.S. in the period between the wars, the effects of the Great Depression and the drama of World War II. Many of her students are from immigrant families, and the encounters gave them a unique first-hand view of American history.

Paul LaRue's classes have been actively engaged in the Veterans History Project that was established by Congress in 2000 with

the objective of collecting and preserving the stories of living veterans; so far his class has sent 32 completed transcripts of interviews to the Library of Congress. LaRue describes the challenges and accomplishments of his project, in which students have been able to develop detailed knowledge of past conditions both in the U.S. in general and in the services in particular as a result of meeting with veterans of World War II, and the Korean and Vietnam wars.

David H. Lindquist looks at the Danish Rescue of Jews during the Holocaust, and identifies the distinctive set of circumstances that allowed it to happen. Although he reminds us of the need to present the Rescue in the bleak context of the Holocaust (in which rescue was rare), it remains a fascinating example of "humanity encircled by the greatest of inhumanities." (318) He recommends the use of the song "Denmark 1943" as a means of gripping the attention of students and engaging their interest in the events that led to the saving of thousands of Danish Jews.

The horrors of World War II helped to bring about the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); yet it is rare for students to be familiar with this pathbreaking international document. Hilary Landorf and Martha Fernanda Pineda recommend an approach to teaching about the UDHR that roots it in the context of World War II, and compares it with other major historical documents supporting individual rights. Students then examine the current implementation (or lack thereof) of its various articles. By learning to regard it as a living document, students attain a greater understanding of its importance and relevance.

When social studies teachers use films in the classroom, the focus is usually on U.S. history or global issues. Kerry Holmes, William B. Russell III and Allison Movitz point out that foreign films can often yield important insights into world history and world cultures—and that their subtitles can also enhance reading skills and vocabulary. The films engage the attention of students and can serve as a gateway to knowledge of the past and present.

In October 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik I, an orbiting satellite that brought attention to great Soviet advances in science and technology. U.S. educational initiatives in science and technology resulted and the space race began. In our Teaching with Documents column, Missy McNatt and David Traill present the record of a top-level conference in which President Eisenhower and top scientific and defense officials discussed the ramifications of Sputnik. The authors provide suggestions for teachers interested in teaching about this important episode 50 years ago. 📖

As always, the editors of *Social Education* welcome the comments of readers on any of the contributions to this issue at [socialed@ncss.org](mailto:socialed@ncss.org).