

## Editor's Notebook

At the dawn of a new and historically important presidency, two of our opening articles evoke the times of inspiring past presidents, John F. Kennedy and Abraham Lincoln. The rest of the issue touches on historical and contemporary subjects that range from the Golden Age of the city of Baghdad to long-term environmental dangers, and from the Civil War to the challenges of providing our students with the best experiences a social studies education can offer.

A letter to President John F. Kennedy from a nine-year-old boy describing his plans for staying fit evokes the vigorous attempts of the Kennedy Administration to improve the fitness of American youth. In our Teaching with Documents column, Missy McNatt examines the background to Kennedy's initiative, as well as the public response it stimulated, which included many letters from schoolchildren. The accompanying teaching suggestions of McNatt and Lee Ann Potter show how teachers can use the initiative as a means of introducing students to the balance between federal, state and local powers, and of studying the issue of gender inequality.

February 12 is the bicentennial anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln. In our Looking at the Law column, Brian Dirck examines a formative stage of Lincoln's life that has received less attention than his career in politics—his work as “the most experienced trial lawyer Americans have ever placed in the White House.” (23) Lincoln litigated 3,800 cases at the Illinois bar, and was actively involved in civil cases involving debt collection, contract law and suits for negligence, as well as a range of criminal cases. Tiffany Willey's teaching suggestions examine the effect of Lincoln's experience as a lawyer on the development of the skills he showed as a politician.

Joan Brodsky Schur looks back through the centuries to Baghdad's golden age as a hub of civilization under Abbasid rule, when learning, medicine and urban planning flourished, and trade connecting different corners of the world passed through the four city gates. She presents some primary sources that are especially suitable for teaching about Baghdad in that era, accompanied by teaching suggestions that offer students a profound understanding of how a great metropolis of that time functioned.

Under the ominous title “Apocalypse When?” C. Frederick Risinger's Internet column discusses the long-term dangers of soil degradation, climate change, global warming, and water quality. Risinger identifies sites that help teachers present these subjects in classes from the elementary to the high school level and that provide resources ranging from detailed scientific assessments to fact sheets that teachers can provide skeptical parents.

In the late 1960's, teachers of social studies were energized by the sense that they were at the center of a discipline that could develop an “ever renewing society.” (40) Charles F. Mitsakos

and Ann T. Ackerman recall the experience of being young social studies educators at that time, and lament the diminished importance of social studies in the Age of No Child Left Behind, when our mission of educating students for democracy faces serious obstacles and challenges from current educational policies.

After the decision was made to move her school to a new location, Abigail S. Chill seized the opportunity to turn the impending move into a community service activity carried out by her history class at the Walworth Barbour American International School in Israel. After getting her students to identify their feelings about the move, which were often apathetic or negative, she describes how they researched the move so profoundly that they changed their minds and became an important school resource of information about it, thereby helping to alleviate the malaise that often accompanies such moves.

Kay A. Chick writes about a little known Civil War battle that took place in what is now West Virginia before the Battle of Bull Run (often the first battle to be cited in textbook accounts of the war). In the battle of Philippi, Union forces were able to push Confederate troops out of the area, ensuring control by the North of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad. Chick describes the confusing and unpredictable course of the military action, and suggests that studying the battle offers useful opportunities for students to evaluate the historical significance of an event and trace its connection to other important historical developments.

This issue's Research and Practice column presents a scholarly study of the “authentic intellectual work” that results from instruction and assessments that stimulate students to construct knowledge, engage in disciplined inquiry, and acquire learning that has value beyond school. M. Bruce King, Fred M. Newmann, and Dana L. Carmichael cite the advantages of authentic instruction that promotes these outcomes. They report that research in the United States and Australia has shown “that students who experienced higher levels of authentic instruction and assessment showed higher achievement than students who experienced lower levels of authentic instruction and assessment.” (47)

As is our custom, the opening feature in this January-February issue of *Social Education* consists of highlights from the address of the NCSS president at the recent annual meeting in Houston, Texas. Michael Yell shares his view of how to embrace the future through social studies. He emphasizes the need to develop students' minds by rejecting the concept of knowledge as something they receive passively, and by developing their skills and understanding of social studies through “a continually growing repertoire of active, engaging, thoughtful teaching strategies.” (9)

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). 