

Editor's Notebook

Young people are fascinated by technology, and teachers who find ways to convert their students' favorite devices into vehicles of instruction can look for exciting results. In this issue of *Social Education*, our Technology Department editors, Michael Berson and Meghan McGlinn Manfra, have organized a special section on thinking, connecting and creating with technology that offers engaging and creative teaching suggestions.

Lee Ann Potter opens the issue by reporting on a recent initiative by the National Archives, which has partnered with amazon.com, Google and the Generations Network to digitize more than 100 million pages of archival documents. The collection includes rich, student-friendly materials, such as streaming videos of historic value. The digitized documents featured in her article deal with the French Revolution, the trial of Mary Surratt, and the ratification of the 19th Amendment enfranchising women.

Andrew J. Milson and Mary D. Curtis offer tips for teaching with Geographic Information Systems (GIS), including some helpful advice for teachers who are not techno-wizards. In a variant of the theme "it's all about location," their article highlights a stimulating, GIS-based project that involves students in the different stages of selecting the right location for a new restaurant.

Thomas C. Hammond and Alec M. Bodzin observe that schools have been slower to adopt GIS than businesses, the government, and institutions of higher education. They emphasize the versatility that makes GIS a useful tool across the range of social studies subjects, from studying the history of human migration and the decline of bison in the Great Plains region to the planning of contemporary sewage systems.

Ilene R. Berson and Michael J. Berson highlight the potential of visualization tools like word clouds, which monitor texts and speeches to generate images that present higher frequency words in larger print. Word clouds can be used for instant identification of the themes that a speaker or writer considers most important, and the authors illustrate their value for class projects such as comparing the themes of Barack Obama's speech accepting the Democratic nomination for president in 2008 with the speech by John McCain accepting the Republican nomination, as well as the analysis of the inaugural addresses of different presidents.

Online class discussion forums made a great contribution to Whitney Blankenship's high school International Baccalaureate class on the History of the Americas. After providing students with a list of almost 40 topics that had been the most popular discussion threads of the previous year, she was able to involve students in discussions of important questions on the meaning of being American and on America's place in the world that provoked intense online exchanges.

Meghan McGlinn Manfra introduces a new archive at Old Dominion University on an important development in the history

of school desegregation—the enrollment of African Americans in schools in Norfolk, VA, by court order in 1959 after an attempt by the governor and the Virginia General Assembly to prevent integration by closing down public high and middle schools. The archive presents the story of the 17 African American students who enrolled in the Norfolk schools in the face of the bitter adversity of white segregationists.

At a time when economic recession is on everybody's mind, students will be interested in the kind of project described by Justin Reich and Thomas Daccord, whose class conducted a multi-day investigation into teenage homelessness during the Great Depression. Using information from the PBS American Experience website "Riding the Rails," and taking full advantage of search engines, blogs and podcasts, the students projected themselves into the lives of teenage hobos and learned a great deal about the social history of the period.

Many teachers believe in the use of art to capture the imagination of students; B. Scott Crawford, David Hicks and Nicole Doherty point out that art interpretation can also be a useful way of developing students' analytical skills. Using the Taubman Museum of Art website, they identify works of art that have especial value for social studies, ranging from paintings by Jacob Lawrence and Childe Hassam to a woodblock print by Yoshifuji. One painting they found of particular interest for studying the history of the 1930s was Robert Riggs's depiction of the African American heavyweight boxer Joe Louis knocking out the German Max Schmeling in their world title bout in 1938.

Two of our regular columns complement the special section on technology with topics of general interest to our readers. C. Frederick Risinger's Internet column updates readers on the latest resources by reviewing the websites of organizations whose exhibits he found especially impressive at last year's NCSS meeting in Houston. The websites cover the range of social studies subjects, though as he points out, a selection of this kind does not do justice to the high quality of many other exhibits. (To be sure to see them all this year, make a note of our upcoming annual meeting dates: November 13-15 in Atlanta, GA!)

In our Looking at the Law column, John Paul Ryan goes beyond Supreme Court decisions to investigate the upbringing and personalities of three Supreme Court justices who left their mark on history, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., Thurgood Marshall and Sandra Day O'Connor. His interviews with their biographers highlight their formative life experiences and offers insights into the factors that distinguish judges whose careers are ground-breaking from others.

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