

Editor's Notebook

This issue of *Social Education* offers a rich range of creative teaching suggestions for the back-to-school period. Whether teaching about the Constitution or the early colonial period, introducing environmental or international issues, or simply looking for new strategies to engage students, NCSS members will find useful articles and resources in the following pages.

One subject on which students are rarely shy to express an opinion is school lunches, which Missy McNatt turns into a teachable moment for U.S. history classes. Historically, school lunches have played an important role in providing nutrition for low-income students. When reports surfaced in 1945 that the federal government might stop funding them, the president of a Florida Parent-Teachers Association sent a letter in support of the program to her senator, which is the featured document in this issue's Teaching with Documents column. The teaching suggestions by McNatt and Lee Ann Potter will help teachers familiarize students with the role of the federal government.

A perennial issue confronting democracies is: When does free speech become punishable for "intent to incite a riot"? Jeanne Polk Barr's Looking at the Law article offers a blueprint for addressing this issue through a class reenactment of the Chicago 8 Trial that resulted from the turmoil of the 1968 Democratic Convention. By introducing students to legal issues relating to free speech, the reenactment offers "a riveting exploration of a pivotal historical moment that students and teachers alike will not soon forget." (206).

Philadelphia's Constitution High School (CHS) is committed both to the theory of education for democracy, and to its practice, as reflected by a school constitution, student elections, town hall meetings, and active student participation in school government. Marc Brasof, lead social studies teacher at CHS, describes how students "learn democracy by living it" (207) at this diverse public high school, and offers tips for other schools interested in similar initiatives.

"History teachers are faced with an impossible dilemma," write Sam Wineburg and Daisy Martin. (212) While "voices from every corner urge them to use primary sources," the language in which primary sources are written often makes them dauntingly difficult for students. The authors advocate using simplified versions of documents, which they consider a legitimate practice provided that students are also shown the original document and that it is clear to them that the simplified document is an adaptation.

Learning about the systems of government of other countries can be challenging for our students, most of whom only have direct experience of the U.S. system and its three branches of government. In this month's Internet column, C. Frederick Risinger identifies websites that assist the study of comparative government, covering the range from other forms of democracy to oligarchies and outright dictatorships.

One of the most difficult foreign policy challenges is that of dealing with Iran and its development of nuclear power. There are major

disagreements about both the diagnosis of the problem and recommendations for policy toward Iran. Is Iran intent on developing nuclear weapons? If so, how urgent is the problem? Should force be used or is this a situation that favors the kind of diplomacy that, in the 1970s, put U.S. relations with China on a better footing? A lesson plan developed by the Choices program of Brown University allows students to debate four different options (and come up with a fifth of their own) for dealing with the situation.

As we look toward the Copenhagen conference on climate change later this year, one idea that has gained ground is a plan to compensate developing countries for conserving tropical forests instead of developing them in ways that increase greenhouse gas emissions. Harold Beedle and Bruce Calhoun examine the possibility that tropical forest conservation can be incorporated into the framework of cap-and-trade markets, presenting background information on the markets and identifying engaging ways of teaching about the role they can play in protecting the environment.

Steven S. Lapham investigates the enthusiasm of Americans for bottled water, pointing out that a number of bottled brands are basically tap water, and that bottled water is expensive and creates problems for the environment. He suggests that a discussion of both kinds of drinking water can be a good means of introducing young people to the environmental impact of their decisions.

By studying the history of their own school, students can improve their understanding of what life was like in the United States in past decades. John J. DeRose advocates the use of a scrapbook format in which students construct parallel sets of pages on important school events and national events for each of the decades studied, and then compare the different sets. Whether investigating the impact of the New Deal or World War II, or simply comparing the fashions and grades of yesteryear to those of today, the activity gives students a valuable sense of life in earlier times.

Ann Claunch points out that the American economy and culture of the seventeenth century reflected extensive Dutch influence, but that "the Dutch are missing" (248) from most textbooks and state history curricula. She suggests suitable resources and themes for studying the Dutch contribution this year, which marks the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's Dutch-sponsored voyage that culminated in the European discovery of the land that is now New York City.

In our Elementary section, Gary Fertig and Rick Silverman explore the use of biography webs to examine the personal development of historically significant individuals. The five activities they recommend enable young learners to use timelines, biographies and other information to construct visually appealing displays that examine the formative impact of different people and events on important individuals.

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