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Editor's Notebook

An excellent social studies education enables young people to learn about past events and present issues in a way that will help them to build a better future. This issue of *Social Education* covers the range of social studies disciplines with imaginative teaching suggestions and engaging topics that can help students become better informed citizens.

We live at one of those historical moments when there is a vigorous debate about the role of government in the economy. Our Teaching with Documents feature takes us back to another such juncture, the period of the New Deal. David L. Rosenbaum presents Franklin D. Roosevelt's speech at the dedication of the Triborough Bridge in New York City in 1936, in which the president took the opportunity to advance his ideas of establishing "up-to-date government in place of old-fashioned or antiquated government." (310) Teaching suggestions by Rosenbaum and Lee Ann Potter suggest ways of introducing students to an examination of the government's role in the nation's infrastructure.

What should schools teach students about patriotism and how should they teach it? In a review of these questions, Joel Westheimer distinguishes between the authoritarian and democratic approaches to this issue, and warns that attempts to use the American school system to promote patriotism often reflect authoritarian rather than democratic values. He urges schools to encourage students to develop a commitment to democratic ideals and a willingness to engage in civic action and critical thinking about contemporary problems.

In our Looking at the Law column, Kathleen Bruhn examines the challenges facing Mexico, where a legacy of authoritarian rule has impeded the development of a strong court system at a time when the country is in the throes of enormous social change. Major challenges to the country as it seeks to consolidate its democracy include the establishment of the rule of law so that criminal prosecution is effective and business contracts can be enforced swiftly and impartially, as well as the need to deal with the problems of extreme poverty and inequality.

For those impressed by the ease with which YouTube captures the rapt attention of students, Wayne Journell has found a way to teach about presidential election campaigns by using videos available on YouTube. He identifies 12 well-known campaign commercials from the annals of election campaigns that are available on YouTube, ranging from Lyndon Johnson's "Daisy" advertisement against Barry Goldwater in 1964 to the "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth" series of ads attacking John Kerry in 2004. His article includes teaching suggestions, as well as tips to minimize the risks of using YouTube in the classroom.

Training students to be effective citizens "is not a goal of education, it's *the* goal of education," affirms C. Frederick Risinger. (330) His Internet column points out that educational initiatives like No Child Left Behind have ignored this goal in favor of mathematics and reading, so that social studies teachers need to

be advocates for the importance of their disciplines to students, parents and policymakers. He recommends websites that help support advocacy for the social studies.


Mira Cohen takes us behind the scenes to view the process by which the third Monday in January became a federal holiday in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Drawing on the resources of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, she traces the process by which the bill establishing the holiday was reviewed by White House staff and signed by President Reagan in 1983. The teaching suggestions, documents and remarks delivered by Reagan on signing the bill will help teachers present the background to the Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday in the classroom.

There are many benefits from making learning enjoyable, as Mike Koren points out in his description of an annual bike trip that has taught students at his school in Wisconsin valuable map skills, and introduced them to the issue of how different kinds of transportation affect the environment. Koren shows how to organize this kind of field trip effectively, and presents details of the interdisciplinary skills that students can develop as a result.

Also in the spirit of making learning enjoyable, Adam Knaresborough has a creative solution for teachers frustrated at the inability of their students to remember the different constitutional amendments: put summaries of the amendments into rap lyrics and "invite your students to bring the Constitution to life by creating their own rap." (342) He presents a rap song on the 27 amendments to the Constitution that three students interested in hip-hop music and he composed, with accompanying suggestions for teachers interested in doing the same with their classes.

"Democracies," writes Diana Hess, "cannot function well if we fear public discourse about our most challenging issues." (349) One issue that many teachers find difficult to address in class is same-sex marriage. Hess maintains that this is a manageable topic in the classroom, but that it will be most effectively addressed if it is discussed either as a policy issue or as a constitutional issue, or as both combined. She suggests guidelines for structuring class deliberations that develop students' skills in dealing with controversial issues.

The war in Afghanistan looms large as an issue of destiny facing the United States. Bayard Faithfull presents a lesson plan on U.S. options in the war for the high school classroom. His article provides basic information and a timeline, as well as step-by-step recommendations for teaching about the main points of this complex situation in the classroom. He recommends resources that are likely to engage students and help them to evaluate four alternative policy positions for the U.S. to follow.

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



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