

Editor's Notebook

NCSS has always been a strong advocate of creative teaching in the social studies. Most of the features in this issue of *Social Education* focus on the benefits of literature, the arts and cultural activities for the social studies classroom. I know that our readers will appreciate the many engaging teaching suggestions that our contributors offer.

One of the problems of law-related education is that students can have difficulty mastering the more abstract legal concepts. Mark S. Weiner's Looking at the Law column proposes teaching about famous trials to add drama to lessons and enhance student comprehension of the complex issues involved. Weiner recommends a number of trials that have "a proper dash of drama and detail," (125) ranging from the *Amistad* trial to that of the Chicago Seven in 1969.

Michael Hussey and Elizabeth K. Eder make a persuasive case for the use of art in history classes in their article featuring Winslow Homer's painting, *A Visit from the Old Mistress*. Their analysis of the interaction in the painting between three former slaves and their one-time mistress highlights the impact of the abolition of slavery. Their teaching suggestions and accompanying letter from a slave in Maryland to Abraham Lincoln allow teachers to bring that important historical era to their history classrooms.

Our students "will see or visit monuments throughout their adult lives," write Alan S. Marcus and Thomas H. Levine (131). If field trips can teach them how to get the most from monuments and memorials, a lifelong love of history can result. Marcus and Levine present an activity that allows students to design a monument relating to a historical development of their choice.

Are your students getting bored? Mark L. Daniels' advice is "put on a strange hat, bring an object into your class or have your students dress up." (136) Daniels extols the value of re-enactments, and offers advice and resources for those interested in putting his recommendations into practice.

For teachers avidly seeking new ideas for field trips, C. Frederick Risinger's Internet column introduces sites that offer virtual tours. The recommended list presents historical locations as far apart as ancient Egypt and the Wild West. Risinger highlights sites that offer good education as well as a good excursion.

The 16-page center pullout brings our readers the latest selection of Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People published in 2009. A committee of NCSS members, in conjunction with the Children's Book Council, has selected these books because of their outstanding social studies value, as well as their exceptional literary qualities. The right social studies literature can promote the literacy goals that are so important to schools while at the same time advancing social studies education.

This issue also presents reviews of the books that received Carter G. Woodson book awards in 2009. These books have been selected by the Carter G. Woodson book awards subcommittee for their excellence in educating young people on race and ethnicity in the United States. This year's selections offer rich insights into African

American history, the lives of migrant worker families, and the historical problems faced by Native Americans.

After the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti this January, the Ushahidi interactive mapping project sprang into action to help humanitarian workers identify the areas of greatest need. Basing themselves mainly on text messages from persons in disaster zones in Haiti, the project's volunteers were able to create a disaster map that served as an instant reference for rescue workers. Associate Editor Jennifer Bauduy describes the project and its resourceful technology, which can be used to present data on a wide variety of major ongoing events.

The innovative use of technology in another context—the economics classroom—is advocated by Kathy Swan, Mark Hofer, Gerry Swan and Joan Mazur, who point out that it is relatively easy for teachers to produce podcasts. They present three successful instances of teacher-developed podcasts on topics ranging from basic economic concepts to the economies of foreign countries and the current recession. The authors have developed a website (www.econocast.org) to serve as a clearinghouse for economics podcasts.

In our Research and Practice column, Beth C. Rubin presents an innovative approach to teaching U.S. history that had significant effects when it was introduced in a high school course. Based on four design principles drawn from recent civic education research, it encourages students to approach history with essential, civics-based guiding questions in mind. These questions structure their studies of government, economics, the movement of people, and social change, as well as conflict and conflict resolution.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was one of history's great moments. Pointing out that "simulations stimulate interest, and, as a result, students gain a greater understanding and appreciation for the content," (154) William B. Russell III suggests an activity to bring the historical reality of the Wall home to today's students, who have grown up in the world that took shape after the Cold War ended.

Reviewing the recent controversy in Texas, Don Bragaw emphasizes the need for history standards to be based on scholarship rather than driven by a political agenda. His Point of View article reiterates the importance of strengthening social studies education in general nationwide.

This issue also includes an NCSS statement on the best practice for developing state social studies standards.

Educational historian Diane Ravitch has had a significant influence on educational policy, and has served in public office in both Republican and Democratic administrations. Her recent book criticizing the direction that school reform has taken has received great publicity, and is the subject of a review by Walter Parker for our readers.

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