

## Editor's Notebook

The guiding light of social studies is education for citizenship. By keeping this objective firmly in view, we can design social studies programs in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and which educate students in the knowledge and abilities required for active citizenship. With the upcoming release of revised national social studies standards (described below), and our regular coverage of the range of social studies disciplines, we are looking forward to the educational contribution NCSS will make during the coming school year.

The National Archives has performed an invaluable service to the study of history in this country by making primary documents accessible online. Lee Ann Potter and Stephanie Greenhut of the National Archives open this issue by presenting a new online tool with exciting interactive features, [www.DocsTeach.org](http://www.DocsTeach.org), which has more than 2,500 documents. It enables teachers to customize lessons that use historical documents, and provides tools for purposes such as connecting primary sources to locations on maps, placing them in the context of historical events, and identifying the key details of a document.

Several articles in this issue assist teaching about the upcoming congressional and state elections. In our Looking at the Law column, Charles F. Williams examines the implications of this year's Supreme Court decision that struck down restrictions on financial contributions to political campaigns by corporations and unions. Williams reviews the arguments of both sides, as well as the rationales provided by the Supreme Court majority and minority in a close but far-reaching 5-4 decision.

Sally Broughton of Project Vote Smart presents three lesson plans designed to engage students of different grade levels in the upcoming elections. High school students examine the impact of special interest groups on the political campaigns and votes of members of Congress. A middle school lesson plan introduces students to the responsibilities of senators and familiarizes them with the viewpoints of their own senators. An elementary lesson plan contributed by Deanna Collins introduces younger learners to the role of a state governor, and shows them how to obtain information about the personal backgrounds and policies of their own state governors.

Historical simulations are often a favored activity in the middle grades. Andy Robinson and Joan Brodsky Schur point out that teachers often have misgivings about these simulations because "students often feel uncomfortable advocating for causes they find deeply offensive, such as

the rights of monarchy or slave holders." (178) Robinson and Schur devised a pre-Civil War simulation that avoids this problem: an Abolitionist Society Convention in the mid-1850's. Students debate the range of options considered by the abolitionists and acquire an understanding of the strategic dilemmas confronting the movement.

Teaching history effectively means balancing competing intellectual challenges. Dave Neumann draws on his teaching experiences to examine three of these challenges: making history relevant versus adopting the mindset of the present when viewing the past; examining events in detail versus contextualizing them in the wider sweep of history; and balancing between studying unique events and teaching general patterns. The successful handling of these challenges can give students "a rich, sophisticated understanding of the past." (188)

The NCSS annual meeting will be held this year in Denver from November 12 until November 14. One of the highlights for many attendees is the opportunity to keep up-to-date on the latest trends in education by attending the different sessions and presentations. In his Internet column, C. Frederick Risinger recalls some of his memorable experiences of the annual meeting last year as he kept abreast of the different applications of Web 2.0 in the classroom.

Earlier this year, the Texas State Board of Education created a major controversy when it enacted new social studies standards that reflected conservative and fundamentalist critiques of the existing Texas standards. Sue Blanchette, the NCSS president elect and a teacher in the Dallas Independent School District, criticized the new standards in a public meeting of the Board of Education in Austin in May. In this issue, she shares her experiences as a witness with the readers of *Social Education*, and reviews key elements of the Texas standards.

Ancient Egypt has a secure place in the social studies curriculum, but, as Janie Hubbard points out, "there is another layer of fascinating topics awaiting investigation in modern Egypt." (226) In this month's Elementary column, she offers information and suggestions for teaching about modern Egypt using the themes of the social studies standards dealing with Culture, the relationship between People, Places, and Environments, and the study of Production, Distribution, and Consumption.

### Revised Social Studies Standards


In 1994, NCSS published social studies standards in the volume *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards*

for *Social Studies*. This set of curriculum standards has been widely used for the last 16 years. Shortly after this issue of *Social Education* is published, NCSS will publish revised standards in a book entitled *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment*. Like the earlier standards, the revised volume focuses on the ten themes of social studies. It offers a sharper focus on purposes, questions, processes and assessment. Many new class activities (vignettes), have been added, and a number of time-tested activities from the original volume have been retained. The NCSS website, [www.socialstudies.org](http://www.socialstudies.org), will provide full information about the release. Details about how to order the standards are included in this issue, which features some excerpts from the standards.

Two articles in this issue advise readers on how to implement the standards. Syd Golston shows how the standards can be used by teachers to add depth to their lesson plans.

She uses as an example a lesson on the Civil War period and the post-Civil War struggles of African Americans and women for civil rights, and demonstrates the value of the standards for investigating important historical questions and establishing links between the past and present.

The curriculum of many schools is aligned to state standards, and Michelle M. Herczog suggests ways in which curriculum designers and teachers can use the national standards to meet state standards. She presents a series of steps, starting with the essential question “Why Teach Social Studies?” that will facilitate the use of the national standards as a resource for designing instruction and assessment, and that can align state standards, instruction, and assessment with the questions, knowledge, processes, and products suggested by the NCSS standards.

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). 

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