

## Editor's Notebook

The sound and imaginative teaching of social studies is an essential part of our students' education for citizenship. This issue of *Social Education* presents some outstanding teaching activities and research that our members can use to engage their students and widen their horizons.

An opinion pollster asking people how much members of Congress should be paid could expect a wide (and often pithy) range of responses. That question can also be a good point of departure for the study of the legislature. In our Teaching with Documents column, Michael Hussey and Stephanie Greenhut look back at the debate by the Constitutional Convention and the First Congress on how much members should be paid and whether the federal government or the states should pay them. The teaching suggestions by Michael Hussey and Lee Ann Potter focus on the subject of appropriate compensation for those in public service.

In a number of countries, citizens are required by law to vote in elections. Our Looking at the Law column investigates whether this would be a reasonable solution to the problem of low voter turnout in the United States. Norman Ornstein makes the case in favor of mandatory voting, while Vassia Stoilov expresses strong opposition to the idea. Ornstein maintains that an important reason for the current polarization of U.S. politics is that party leaders try to appeal to their bases rather than the political center, and that compulsory voting would force the parties to move toward the center. Stoilov opposes mandatory voting on the grounds that it encroaches on individual liberty, and that individuals should have the right not to vote if they so choose.

Veronica M. Zagora focuses on how social studies teachers can help develop the writing skills of their students—a topic that is very timely because the Common Core Standards initiative of 2010 designated literacy standards to be attained in history/social studies subjects (see [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)). Drawing on her experience with a 10th grade U.S. government and politics class, she shows how the use of a language arts rubric, combined with short and effective in-class assessments, enabled her to develop her students' skills and self-confidence in writing.

The realities of racial segregation in the United States in the 1950s can be hard for students to grasp today. Richard Hughes recommends the use of excerpts from the famous memoir by John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me*, as a means of introducing students to that era. Griffin, a white novelist, darkened his complexion with oral medicine, stain, and exposure to ultra-violet rays, and attempted to experience life as an African American during a six-week journey through the South. Reading his memoir can give students an eye-opening view of life in the age of segregation.

Ron Woolley describes how he uses homework passes as a means of preparing students to examine historical conflicts over the distribution of resources. The number of passes he offers is set at half the number of students in his classroom, which stimulates student discussion of how the passes should be distributed. The resulting debate about merit-based and needs-based distribution introduces

his world history students to issues that arise in their study of revolutions and the rise and fall of Soviet communism.

Cynthia Williams Resor highlights the value of using community cookbooks as primary sources for teaching about different periods of U.S. history. The ingredients and cooking technologies required by different recipes reflect the changing American diet, as well as the historical development of the U.S. food industry. In particular, the cookbooks offer fascinating insights into the lives of women at different periods of American history.

In his Internet column, C. Frederick Risinger identifies strategies that he has found effective in promoting the kind of teaching that generates student interest and participation, and leads to improved test scores. Teachers using his recommended sites can find useful information ranging from the results of research into teaching methods that increase student achievement to powerful lesson plans and instructional strategies.

Kathy Bickmore examines different approaches adopted by schools to managing problems like bullying or tensions between different social groups, noting that each of these approaches represents a “hidden curriculum” that transmits social values to students. Her Research and Practice column points out that approaches which focus on *peacekeeping* often “restrict opportunities for democratic agency among students,” while those that emphasize *peacebuilding* can provide a “way of democratizing the school climate while provoking learning.” (40)

During the past few years, the American political scene has been marked by such incivility that the authors of an article on the Reagan era start with the words “These days, the concept of civility in politics seems antiquated.” (45) Janet Tran, Tony Pennay and Krista Kohlhausen present primary documents and a class activity examining the political civility that characterized the Reagan presidency. This year is the centennial of Reagan's birth, and the authors highlight the educational opportunities linked to the centennial.

The articles in this issue showcase the contribution that an excellent social studies education can make. Yet, as NCSS President Steve Goldberg warns, social studies “has become a marginalized discipline in many parts of the nation.” (5) This issue opens with an article based on his presidential address, delivered at the NCSS annual meeting in Denver last November. Goldberg emphasizes the need to redefine the vistas of social studies and enable students to gain “the requisite knowledge, skills and habits of mind to ‘do social studies’ every day.” He urges that we all make 2011 “the year of the social studies professional by encouraging others to join us in improving ourselves, our social studies programs, and our organizational and advocacy strength” (6)—an important challenge for us all in the opening months of this new year.

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). 