

Editor's Notebook

This back-to-school issue of *Social Education* offers a distinctive set of articles and lesson plans whose topics range from the 10th anniversary of the September 11 attacks to the challenges of developing higher order thinking skills among students and the need to prevent the erosion of citizenship education from the curriculum.

In our Teaching with Documents column, Christine Blackerby compares the congressional investigation into the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor with that which followed the attacks of September 11. Both investigations identified critical communications breakdowns that impeded the U.S. capability to respond to the attacks, and recommended reforms that would prevent similar problems in the future. Suggested teaching activities examine both investigations, and explore the role of congressional inquiries.

This September, the National September 11 Memorial and Museum will be officially dedicated at the site of the former World Trade Center complex. An article by *Social Education* staff introduces readers to the Memorial, and describes lesson plans and resources that the Museum and Memorial have made available to teachers at www.911memorial.org

In the years since September 11, the Taliban have been ousted from power, but not vanquished, and there are currently more than 90,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. A special feature by the Choices Program of Brown University goes beyond the headlines to present the historical background to the attacks of September 11. The feature presents the evolution of the Taliban and its association with Al Qaeda, and describes the Taliban's social and cultural roots, and its role in Afghan politics.

In our Elementary column, Robert A. Waterson and Mary E. Haas discuss September 11 by addressing the question: "How can teachers introduce young students to the events of that tragic day?" (191) They present a lesson plan based on the Notable Trade Book *14 Cows for America*, written by Carmen Agra Deedy in collaboration with Wilson Kimeli Naiyomah, and illustrated by Thomas Gonzalez. The book tells the story of the gift by Kenya's Maasai people of 14 cows to the American people in sympathy after the attacks of September 11. The teaching suggestions are based on five themes of the national social studies standards.

Alan Marcus addresses the issue of the right to a fair trial in a review of the American Film Company's historical film, *The Conspirator* (of which an exclusive advance screening was shown at the 2010 NCSS annual meeting in Denver). The film focuses on Mary Surratt's trial by a military tribunal and her subsequent execution for involvement in the conspiracy to assassinate Abraham Lincoln. It highlights dilemmas in a democracy when individual rights are pitted against national security concerns.

Is it unconstitutional for a state to ban the sale or rental of violent video games to minors? When California enacted a ban in 2005, it was sued by video game trade groups. The case finally reached the

Supreme Court, which has ruled the California Act unconstitutional. In our Looking at the Law column, Steven D. Schwinn examines the legal context of that decision, which weighed the right of free expression against the need to protect the public against possible incitement to violence. Using this article, teachers will be able to organize some lively class discussions on the First Amendment.

Emily Rose examines the findings of a recent survey commissioned by the International Red Cross, which showed that 59% of American youth (compared to 51% of adults) believe that torturing the enemy is always or sometimes acceptable. Rose points out that the responses show a lack of understanding of the Geneva Conventions, to which the U. S. is a signatory, and advances suggestions for better education about international humanitarian law.

In his Internet column, Fred Risinger laments the current threat to citizenship education as schools focus on student achievement in reading and math. Telling readers that "it's time for me to ask YOU what you are going to do" (208), Risinger urges greater activism by social studies educators to protect and advance citizenship education, and identifies key websites that teachers can use to help advocate the value of the social studies subjects that they teach.

How many dates does a student of history really need to know? In the past, many of our authors have emphasized the importance of developing higher level thinking skills rather than encouraging rote memorization among students. Dave Neumann points out, however, that it is a problem if students cannot "recall whether Texas became independent before or after the Mexican-American war." (210) He offers some guidelines on periodization that will ensure that students are well enough grounded for the in-depth exploration of historical issues to be possible.

In January this year, a historic referendum was held in Sudan after many years of recurring civil conflict. Southerners voted overwhelmingly for independence from the North, and in early July the independent nation of South Sudan came into existence. Samuel Totten, who has monitored the Sudanese situation closely, writes about the birth of this new nation, but warns of the problems that remain unsettled.

In our Research and Practice column, Hilary G. Conklin urges the teaching of intellectually challenging social studies topics in middle school. She points out that middle school students are at a "time in their lives when they are developing values and gaining new ways of thinking, making it a particularly rich time to explore complex issues with them." (223) By introducing them to a range of social, environmental, and political issues, teachers can engage their interest and develop their problem-solving skills.

This issue also includes a list of articles, lesson plans and websites that teachers will find useful on Constitution Day.

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