

Editor's Notebook

The use of primary sources is one of the most effective ways of teaching history; it transports students into the past, putting them in the place of people whose lives were touched by major events and historical processes.

Lee Ann Potter, guest editor of this special issue, who directs Educational and Volunteer programs at the National Archives, points out that teachers can also use primary sources to teach about topics that make people emotionally uncomfortable because they evoke deep tragedy or display humanity at its worst—topics such as racism, genocide, hatred, terrorism, war, disease, suffering, and other ills. She observes that, if teachers address difficult subjects like these “in the safety of a classroom through carefully constructed lessons,” (284) rich discussions can result from primary sources that “provide us with evidence that each generation confronts issues similar to those faced by preceding generations.” (290)

History's most troubled times have often generated rich music, and Stacie Moats and Stephanie Poxon suggest ways of using this music to promote student inquiry and thought. They highlight the possibilities created by the recent launch of the National Jukebox, a joint endeavor between the Library of Congress and Sony Music Entertainment, and recommend songs that can enliven classroom discussions of topics ranging from the World Wars to alcohol addiction and substance abuse in the Prohibition era.

An event etched in the collective memory of Americans is the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. Elizabeth K. Eder suggests ways in which teachers can use art to teach about the event, including the *Kennedy Caisson* sculpture by Marshall B. Fleming and other artwork currently on view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. The Museum offers teachers web-accessible guidelines for lessons using the visual arts.

One of the milestones in the history of civil rights was the federal government's intervention to enforce the integration of Little Rock's Central High School in 1957. Drawing on two letters sent to President Eisenhower at the time, one in favor of his action and one opposed, Kim E. Barbieri suggests a strategy for using the documents in the classroom to teach about the struggle against racial injustice in the 1950's. She presents a graphic organizer that is suitable for structuring student discussions of this and other historical issues.

Carol Buswell deals with the challenge of confronting stereotypes by examining two documents relating to the dispossession of Native Americans. These primary sources are an affidavit by a resident of the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon protesting the dispossession of the fishing rights of the residents, and an excerpt from a letter from an Assistant Commissioner in the Office of Indian Affairs quoting a report by a nineteenth-century official claiming that the Native Americans would be better off if they did not have access to the fisheries. By reflecting on the affidavit and the letter, students will obtain a better understanding of the problems faced by Native Americans and the mindset of the officials who governed their affairs.

A letter written by two young Californians to President Theodore Roosevelt in 1909 provides a good starting point for teachers

discussing natural disasters and relief efforts. The couple offered to volunteer to help Italians affected by the earthquake that had struck Sicily and southern Italy in 1908. The Californians knew of the devastating impact of this kind of disaster because they had worked in relief efforts after the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. Their willingness to help human beings far away, with whom they had no direct connection, serves as an example of the value of reaching out to people who are in distress.

Primary documents can be especially helpful in teaching about the westward expansion of the United States. Stephanie Greenhut discusses an 1894 petition of the Hopi people of the Moqui Villages in Arizona, asking the federal government to give the Hopi collective title to their lands “instead of individually allotting each tribal member a plot, as had been prescribed by the Dawes Act of 1887.” (317) The document highlights both the conflict over land and the cultural clash between a society with collectivist traditions and one driven by individualistic ideals. Greenhut suggests using the document in conjunction with the Weighing the Evidence tool at the National Archives DocsTeach.org website to evaluate the impact of the westward expansion.

Megan Jones investigates an act of political terrorism that occurred within the United States—the murder of the executive secretary of the Florida chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and his wife in December 1951. Although the perpetrators were never brought to trial, the incident provoked many expressions of outrage and concern, including a letter to President Truman from a college student that is the featured document of this article.

James Percoco provides a poignant account of the legacy of Andersonville, the southern military prison for Union troops captured during the Civil War. He recommends primary and other sources that he uses with his students prior to a field trip in which they visit the prison and experience the sense of “standing on and in the presence of the past.” (329)

Apart from the above articles on the use of primary sources to teach difficult subjects, this issue has two concluding articles that also deal with challenging topics. In our Looking at the Law column, Tiffany Middleton discusses the lawsuit *Bush v Orleans Parish School Board* which resulted in the first desegregation order issued by a judge in the Deep South. A focal point of the article is a Norman Rockwell painting of Ruby Bridges going to school in New Orleans under federal escort.

In his Internet column, C. Frederick Risinger identifies websites that offer guidance and support for teachers seeking to put an end to bullying and cyberbullying of different kinds—personal, racial, religious, and gender-related.

Michael M. Yell rounds off this issue with a review of a collection of articles published in this journal's Research and Practice column that help teachers implement the findings of educational research.

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