

Editor's Notebook

In the fall of a presidential election year, social studies comes into its own, and this issue of *Social Education* provides many engaging suggestions for the classroom. Teaching about elections is, of course, only one dimension of education for citizenship, and we hope that our readers will find the extensive range of topics in this current issue to be a rich resource for developing the wider civic awareness of students.

This month marks the 225th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution. The featured primary source of our Teaching with Documents column is the first page of the Official Journal of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Lee Ann Potter's article and teaching activities put students in the historic place of those entrusted to draft a document that would last through the ages.

As this year's election draws closer, our Looking at the Law column demystifies the role of the Electoral College. Tiffany Middleton poses and answers 12 frequently asked questions, and brings the process of being an elector to life through the reflections of four members of the Electoral College of 2008.

Amid the intense hostility between the rival parties, illustrated by an unrivaled spate of polemical attack ads, Kathleen Hall Jamieson invites us to imagine the problems that Abraham Lincoln would have faced, had he run for election in similar circumstances to those that confront candidates today. For classes interested in checking the claims made by political ads, Jamieson introduces our readers to Flackcheck.org, the political literacy website that has been established by the Annenberg Public Policy Center, which she directs.

The accusation of flipflopping is a common term of political abuse. Like Jamieson, Dave Neumann revisits the age of Lincoln to question the current vogue for the epithet. Neumann argues that political leaders facing complex issues have the right to evolve their positions as their understanding increases and circumstances change. As an example, he cites the evolution of Lincoln's position on slavery, and urges us to be clear "that what looks like inconsistency might also, after a closer look, deserve respect." (181)

In order to engage students in the electoral process, David Wolfford outlines the benefits of using documentary films about political campaigns in the classroom. He draws on his classroom experiences to offer detailed recommendations and step-by-step procedures for making the most of the films, some of which have become "artifacts of modern American political history." (182)

In his Internet column, C. Frederick Risinger expresses his belief that "the future of democracy in the United States is going to be shaped by this election" (187) and identifies five favorite sites that can help teachers bring the election to their classroom, reiterating that social studies educators play a crucial role in communicating the issues underlying the electoral contests.

Endorsing Risinger's belief in the power of social studies, Andrea S. Libresco and Jeanette Balantic list 10 top websites that can help teachers and students to analyze controversial issues likely to be prominent in the election season. Teachers interested in extensive

use of these resources will benefit from the detailed questions and activities the authors offer for use with each website.

In a Point of View piece, Lee Hamilton addresses some glaring inefficiencies in our voter registration system, highlighting a Pew survey that found that "about 51 million eligible citizens aren't registered at all, and roughly one in eight voter registrations in the U.S.—that's 24 million—are either no longer valid or are inaccurate." (193) Voter ID laws could exacerbate this problem by increasing the number of eligible citizens denied the right to vote, unless states take the essential step of making photo ID's easily available free of charge to all eligible voters.

Robert A. Waterson points out that children begin to develop thinking skills at a very young age, and there are many useful resources and strategies "for early elementary teachers to help students to think democratically and develop a philosophic method of thinking." (197) He recommends children's literature that teachers will find useful in encouraging students to "think civics," and offers suggestions for developing the civic awareness of young children.

Social inequalities in the United States—as evidenced in disparities of income, wealth, housing, and health care—have heightened political differences in this country. H. Michael Hartoonian and Richard D. Van Scotter identify four major sets of value tensions in American culture that trigger intense disagreements—law and ethics, private and common wealth, freedom and equality, and unity and diversity. They urge a revived commitment to the public education system and its vital role of education for citizenship as part of an initiative to improve civic debate.

The Tappan Zee Bridge in New York State was constructed at one of the widest points of the Hudson River, and Jerry T. Mitchell, Jeremy Cantrill, and Justin Kears suggest a lesson plan that addresses the fascinating question of why the bridge was located there. They present teachers and students with the different options for constructing a bridge of this kind in an article that gives the concept of "political geography" real meaning.

Many students enjoy *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. H. James Garrett and Mardi Schmeichel offer strategies for teachers to incorporate analysis of the show (and others like it) into their classroom through methods based on the NCSS position statement on media literacy.

In an investigation of the right of privacy in our Internet age, Odette Edbrooke and Meg Leta Ambrose raise the fascinating question of whether the Constitution and its amendments would have been different if the framers had been aware of the issues raised by the Internet. Could the Fourth Amendment's protections of "papers" against unreasonable searches and seizures have been written to include digital versions of papers and copies of intellectual properties? The authors suggest a framework for investigation of these issues in classes on the Constitution and its amendments.

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