

# “School to Career” and Social Studies: Making the Connection

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CAROL GALAN’S SECOND GRADE STUDENTS are settling into their morning routines when the phone rings. It is “Steven,” home with a cold, calling to warn the class not to “buy” technology stocks today. He has been watching the “ticker” from his bedside computer, and he says, “The news from the Dow is bad!”

Carol’s class, in Torrance, California, has been involved in a stock market simulation “buying” and “selling” stocks, tracking their progress, and exploring why stocks go up and down.<sup>1</sup> She explains that this real-world project provides a stimulating context for learning new concepts and applying skills across subject areas. For example, math skills are used to record and graph the rise and fall of stocks. Economic concepts such as *inflation*, *supply*, and *demand* are introduced to help students understand why prices fluctuate in the marketplace. To teach these abstract concepts, Carol distributes play money to her students and then supervises an “auction” of toys and small items: If the demand for an item is high, the bid (the price of the item offered) goes up.

Students develop literacy skills as they study articles in the business section of the newspaper, searching for information that may help them decide whether to buy or sell stocks. For example, they might notice that the profits of a company they are tracking have gone down. Newspaper articles that would ordinarily be beyond their reading level become interesting and largely comprehensible to students as they avidly search the page for clues about “their stocks.” They learn about world geography as they track current events that might influence the stock market, locating on a map the places where these events are occurring. Students develop cooperative group skills as they work in small groups to choose which stocks to purchase or sell. And finally, they learn about the work of the stockbroker or investment analyst, who is responsible for making wise investments for his or her clients.

In the past, career education was usually geared toward middle and high school students who were not college-bound. Today, as young people encounter a bewildering array of careers and professions, there is a growing recognition that career education can be for all students from kindergarten through twelfth grade and beyond. In the Goals 2000: Educate America Act,

Congress presented this challenge: “Every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation’s modern economy.”<sup>2</sup>

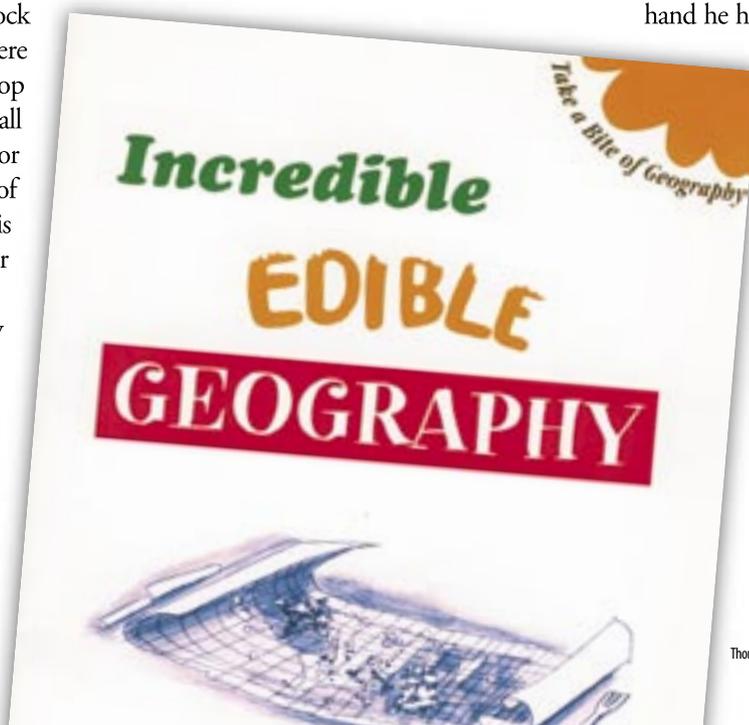
## What is School to Career?

School to Career is part of a national initiative to help students make connections between the content, skills, and concepts they are learning in the classroom and careers in the real world.<sup>3</sup> School-to-career practices add relevance to the elementary school curriculum and promote engagement in learning. A key feature of many school-to-career activities is the application of subject matter, skills, and competencies to real-life situations, as in Carol’s stock exchange simulation.

With School to Career, the line separating the classroom from the outside world frequently becomes easier to cross. Carol reports that her students and their parents often bring in articles from home that they think may be relevant to students’ “investments.” A collection of anecdotes illustrates the home-school connections her students have made. One of her students told her mother that she only wanted one Christmas present, because there was a recession going on, and she didn’t think her mother should spend too much money! Another parent from another family reported that, one Saturday morning, she found her son sitting cross-legged in front of the television, a bowl of cereal on the floor and cartoons on the screen. In one

hand he held a spoon and in the other the *Wall Street Journal!*

School-to-career education takes many forms across grade levels. A team of educators based at California State University, Dominguez Hills, investigated school-to-career activities in the Greater Los



Angeles region. We created a thirty-minute videotape depicting related activities in elementary, middle, and high schools. We found examples of school-based activities, work-based activities, and activities connecting the school and workplace in each of the schools. For example, Carol's second graders learned about the financial world as they engaged in "buying and selling" stocks in the classroom. Middle school students envisioned themselves at age twenty-five, selected an appropriate "career," and learned about it. They conducted interviews with adults working in their fields of choice and presented their findings in class. High school students spent time in volunteer assignments at workplaces such as a marine mammal rescue center.

The videotape we produced, "School to Career; Educators Meet the Challenge," reveals that such activities need not require a lot of time or other resources from the teacher. The opportunity for making connections between the classroom and the world of employment are many, and we would like to present a few suggestions as to how this might be done in elementary grades.

### Connecting School to Career with Social Studies

Here is a set of strategies for incorporating school-to-career skills and concepts into social studies standards-based curricula:

1. Challenge students to apply the skills and content they are learning to an authentic, collaborative activity, such as a simulation, dramatization, performance, hands-on project, service-learning project, problem-solving activity, or short-term business enterprise (for example, a lemonade stand at a football game).
2. Explain how skills that students are learning in a particular unit of study are used in various careers.
3. Help students explore careers associated with the content they are learning. For example, use the book *Incredible Edible Geography*, which lists dozens of careers pertaining to geography, such as cartographer, manager of public lands, and urban planner.<sup>4\*\*\*</sup> Visit the US Department of Labor (DOL) Youth Corner website ([www.doleta.gov/youth\\_services/yocomer](http://www.doleta.gov/youth_services/yocomer)) and *Occupational Outlook Handbook* ([www.bls.gov/oco](http://www.bls.gov/oco)) for information about careers that may relate to a particular topic.
4. Invite guest speakers (who represent these careers) to come to the classroom, talk about their jobs, and answer students' questions.

5. Take a field trip to a place of work, where students can learn more about specific careers. Before the field trips, arrange for students to be able to interview various workers and arrive with their questions prepared.<sup>5</sup>
6. Use a variety of resources, including literature, pictures, and primary source material (such as photos, documents, and oral narratives) to learn about careers. For example, *Women Working A to Z* is an excellent resource.<sup>6</sup>
7. Explore how jobs and working conditions have changed over time. How did these changes come about?

### A Sample Lesson Plan

TITLE OF LESSON: *The Job of the Community Planner*

GRADE LEVEL: Third

TIME REQUIRED: Four 50-minute classes over four days, plus occasional ten-minute "interruptions" (for guest speakers who drop in) over the course of one week.

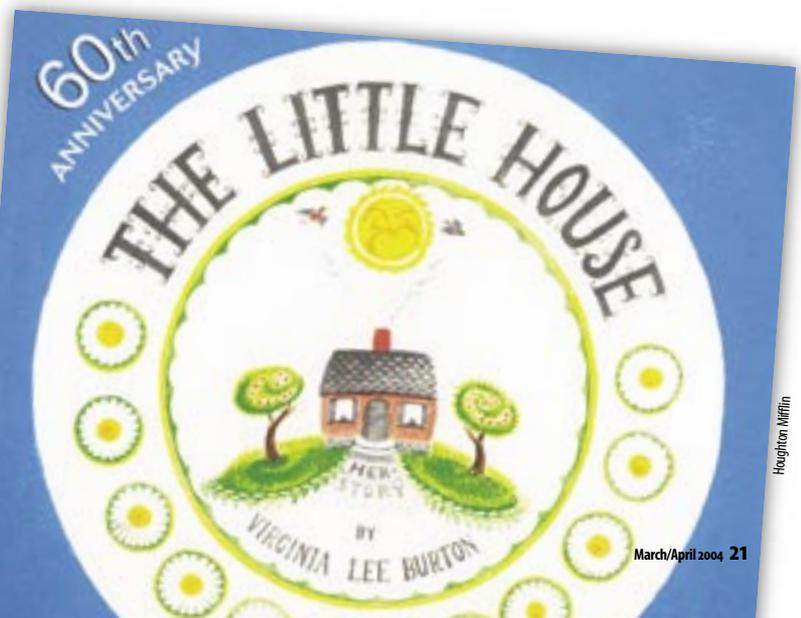
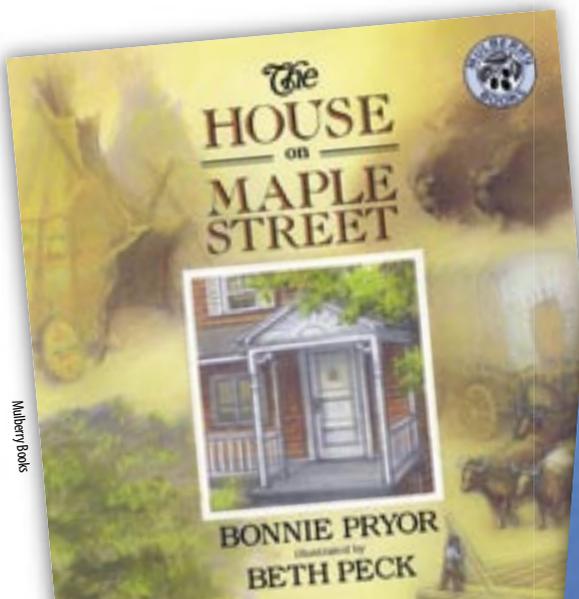
RELATION TO STANDARDS: "Students describe the physical and human geography [of their neighborhood] . . . to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context . . . [They trace] the ways people have used the resources of the local region and modified the physical environment" (See California History/Social Science Standard 3.1).<sup>7</sup>

FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- What are some natural features of our local environment? What are some man-made features?
- How have people used resources and changed the environment in and around the school?
- What are things that people like about the environment now? What changes would people like to see? Is everybody in agreement about such changes, or is there a difference of opinion?
- How can we change parts of our environment? How can we preserve parts of it?

SKILLS:

Observing, sequencing, comparing and contrasting, classifying, formulating questions, interviewing, listening, recording data, speaking, reading, and writing.



# Suggestions for Connecting “School to Career” Activities with the Ten Thematic Strands of Social Studies

(Specific careers are listed in bold letters)

## I CULTURE

- ▷ Invite **artists, authors, story-tellers,** and **musicians** from various cultural backgrounds to speak to the class and share their work. Students create their own art, music, or writing, as expressions of their own cultural heritage.<sup>8</sup>
- ▷ Students can take on the role of news **reporters,** interviewing people in the local community about a current event. Students compare interpretations of the event, and discuss how a person’s cultural perspective and frame of reference may influence interpretations of events.

## II TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE

- ▷ Students can take on the role of **historians** as they investigate family or community history, by interviewing people and analyzing primary sources such as documents, photos, letters, diaries, and maps.<sup>9</sup>
- ▷ Interview long-time residents of the community and visit a local historical society to research local community history. Then, students create a brochure or a mural, depicting change over time in the community.

## III PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS

- ▷ Students can work as **cartographers,** taking a tour of the neighborhood, noting physical characteristics, and making a 3-D map of the neighborhood with clay or PlayDough.
- ▷ Working as **community planners,** students can analyze the way land is used in the school or neighborhood. Students propose an alternative use of land (e.g. play area, garden), and carry out the plan.
- ▷ Acting as **meteorologists,** the class can assemble and operate a simple weather station, using a thermometer and weather vane to measure outdoor temperature and wind direction for a week or two.

## IV INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY

- ▷ Create a dramatic play area in K-2 classrooms, where students may “try out” different careers, using costumes, play tools, and other props.
- ▷ Create a class “Yellow Pages,” highlighting each student’s special talents. Discuss how these talents might relate to different careers.<sup>10</sup>

## V INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS

- ▷ Read biographies, such as *A Picture Book of Jesse Owens*, to discover how diverse people have overcome obstacles (such as discriminatory laws, customs, and beliefs and attitudes of others) to accomplish their goals.<sup>11</sup> Students could generate a list of speakers from diverse backgrounds who might be invited to describe their careers to the class, and explain how they dealt with obstacles on the path to their careers.
- ▷ Investigate groups and institutions in the community that work to promote the common good. Students collaborate with a **social worker** in a community service learning project, such as collecting food for a homeless shelter and delivering it to the staff there.

## VI POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE

- ▷ Create a simulation of the three branches of government. “Citizens” propose a new law, which is debated by “**legislators,**” sent to the “**president,**” and finally reviewed by “**judges.**” (The books in the

“Mouse” series, *House Mouse*, *Senate Mouse*, etc. provide an excellent model.)<sup>12</sup>

- ▷ Check the upcoming agenda of the local city council, then take a field trip to observe part of a council meeting. Finally, debate a current local issue, taking on the role of local **legislators.**

## VII PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND CONSUMPTION

- ▷ Acting as **entrepreneurs,** students can develop a plan to sell a product to raise funds for a class field trip. In cooperative groups, the class plans and carries out the necessary steps, which might include purchasing ingredients (such as lemonade mix), marketing, distribution, and sales.
- ▷ Working as **business executives,** students can create a flow chart illustrating the production, transportation, processing, and distribution of a product, highlighting the jobs that are involved at each stage.
- ▷ Create an “employment agency,” in which students working as **job placement counselors** “hire” other students in positions such as **tutors, computer assistants,** and **story-tellers.**<sup>13</sup>

## VIII SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY

- ▷ Students can “invent a new product,” something that would be fun or useful to own (but may be fanciful). See *Girls and Young Women Inventing: Twenty True Stories about Inventors.*<sup>14</sup>
- ▷ Explore careers in the field of environmental protection.
- ▷ Working as **environmental engineers,** students can identify an environmental problem in the school community, such as the large amount of non-recyclable waste produced from students’ lunches. Students research the issue, brainstorm solutions, and develop a plan to address the problem. For example, students might design an educational pamphlet to be distributed to other classes and to parents about using thermos bottles instead of boxed juice drinks.<sup>15</sup>

## IX GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

- ▷ Explore their family history, gathering artifacts and other primary source material that represent their country (or countries) of origin. The class then plans to display the material in a cultural “museum.” Students visit a local museum and interview a **curator,** to find out about how items are assembled and displayed.<sup>16</sup>
- ▷ Investigate a local angle on a public issue with global implications, such as pollution, endangered species, or energy consumption. For example, an engineer might ask, “Why is fuel efficiency (MPG) information listed on the window stickers of cars, but not on many of the large family vehicles now being sold in dealerships in the United States?”

## X CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES

- ▷ Compile a list of community organizations that promote the common good through service projects and activities of various sorts (Boy and Girl Scouts, adult service clubs, ecumenical groups, citizen committees and task forces, etc). Invite members of these organizations or their **community liaisons** into the classroom and ask them to describe their contributions to the school or community.

## PROCEDURES:

1. Read aloud a book that depicts man-made changes in the environment over time, such as *The Little House*, by Virginia Lee Burton, *The House on Maple Street*, by Bonnie Pryor, and *In My Own Backyard*, by Judi Kurjian.<sup>17</sup> Ask students to imagine all the changes that may have occurred since prehistoric times “in their own backyard” and write about these in their journals. Discuss reasons for the changes, and record them on a chart.
2. Display photos of the local region, from the present and the past. Ask students if they can identify which photos are from “now” and which are from “long ago.”
3. Ask students to generate a list of things in the two photos that have changed over time and a list of things that have remained the same.
4. Provide each student with a clipboard and T-Chart:

Natural Features	Man-Made Features

5. Lead students on a tour of the school environment and the immediate neighborhood.
6. As students tour the school grounds, they record natural features and man-made features of the school environment.
7. On returning to the classroom, ask students to reflect on how the natural environment of the school area has been modified by people.
8. Help the class to prepare interview questions for faculty and staff members about what they like about the school environment, what has changed since they arrived, and what they would like to see changed.
9. Invite a few school faculty, staff, or parents to stop by the classroom at their convenience for brief ten-minute interviews (guided by the teacher) about the school environment, how it has changed in recent years, and how it might be improved, and how such improvements might be planned and paid for. These brief, unscheduled interviews can take place over the course of one week. The sudden appearance of adult guests adds an air of excitement to the project during this time.
10. Students can ask their prepared questions and take notes on the interviewees’ responses.
11. After two or three adults have been interviewed, lead a class discussion about the interviews.
12. Ask students to compare and contrast the responses: Have all of the adults known the school neighborhood for a long time? Do all of the adults agree on what changes in the environment are desirable?

## ASSESSMENT:

Ask students to draw a picture and write a caption about a change that they would like to see made to their school or its environs. This one-page “report” can include or exactly repeat information from the interviews. Wholly new proposals are also okay, but they should not be purely fanciful (such as science fiction).

## Extension activity

Students might create a brochure proposing a school beautification project (building on one of the student’s proposals, as selected by the teacher). The brochure could be distributed to other classes, to the interviewees, or to administrators and community agencies. 

## Notes

1. A recent videotape showcasing K-12 classrooms that incorporate school-to-career activities in their curriculum features Carol Galan’s class: *School to Career: Educators Meet the Challenge*, produced by the School of Education, California State University, Dominguez Hills, (30-minute videotape); Carson, CA: CSU Dominguez Hills, 2000). Funding was provided by the Professional Educator Faculty Engagement in School to Career Grant, California State University, Hayward. The author would be happy to send you a copy of the videotape, at mailing cost, while supplies last if you would complete a brief survey. Please contact Diane Hembacher at [dhembacher@csudh.edu](mailto:dhembacher@csudh.edu).
2. “Goals 2000: Educate America Act, H.R. 1804” (Washington, DC: 103rd Congress of the United States of America, Title I, Sec. 102, 1994)
3. National Institute for Work and Learning ([www.niwl.org/school.html](http://www.niwl.org/school.html)).
4. Veronica Getskow (illus. Bruce Pierce), *Incredible Edible Geography* (Irvine, CA: Thomas Bros. Maps Educational Foundation, 1999)
5. Andrew Beale, “Elementary School Career Awareness: A Visit to a Hospital,” *Journal of Career Development* 27, no. 1 (Fall 2000): 65-72. This article features suggestions on maximizing a trip’s value for career awareness.
6. Maria A. Kunstadter, *Women Working A to Z* (Ft. Atkinson, WI: Highsmith Press, 1994).
7. History-Social Science Content Standards for California Public Schools, [www.cde.ca.gov/standards/history](http://www.cde.ca.gov/standards/history).
8. Kathryn Obenchain and Ronald V. Morris, *50 Social Studies Strategies for K-8 Classrooms* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003).
9. Josephine Barry Davis, “Identifying with Ancestors,” *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 16, no. 2 (November/December 2003): 13-16.
10. Thanks to Priscilla Porter, professor emeritus at CSUDH for this idea.
11. Barry Ricci, “School-to-Career: It’s Elementary!” *Principal* 79, no. 4 (March 2000): 70-71.
12. Peter W. Barnes and Cheryl Shaw Barnes, *House Mouse, Senate Mouse* (Alexandria, VA: VSP Books, 1996); also in the series: *Marshall, the Courthouse Mouse and Woodrow, the White House Mouse*.
13. David A. Adler, *A Picture Book of Jesse Owens* (New York: Holiday House, 1992).
14. Frances A. Kames and Suzanne M. Bean, *Girls and Young Women Inventing: Twenty True Stories about Inventors, Plus How You Can Be One Yourself* (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit, 1995).
15. For related ideas, see Walter Parker and John Jarolimek, *A Sampler of Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 21-22.
16. Mary M. Erbach, “Cutting Class . . . At a Museum,” *Book Links* (August/September 2001): 31-33.
17. Virginia Lee Burton, *The Little House* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1969); Bonnie Pryor, *The House on Maple Street* (New York: William Morrow, 1992); Judi Kurjian, *In My Own Backyard* (Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge, 1993).

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