

Using Online Field Trips and Tours in Social Studies

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The theme for this *Social Education* issue every year focuses on the arts, including literature, in the social studies curriculum. In the past, I've written about integrating art, music, and literature (including fiction, biography, and autobiography) into social studies classrooms. When I began to prepare for this column, I realized that I had included most of the best sites in the last column that I wrote on this topic. (Readers who are NCSS members can find my previous columns in the NCSS archives. All you need is your membership number and you can register for this access at www.socialstudies.org/publications.) I recalled that while working on an earlier art column, I had included several sites that were online "virtual" field trips to art museums around the world. I decided that this would be a good topic for this column. While not focusing directly on art, music, or literature, classroom teachers, students, and supervisors can find many virtual tours of museum offices, and agencies that do have art content. The use of virtual tours can be extremely effective—whether used as an entire classroom experience (such as the teacher guiding students through a tour using a computer projector), or as a separate assignment where the students do the tour on their own. Many teachers also use virtual tours for individual and group projects. Students go on their own virtual tours and report back to small groups or write an evaluative essay about the tour. In some cases, teachers (and in other cases, students) have created virtual tours of

local historical sites, museums, and other locations in their community or region.

Throughout the nation, both the preK-12 public schools and universities are being hit hard by drastic reductions in tax revenues and state funding. Among the first budget cuts are important supportive activities such as field trips and participation in wonderful programs such as spelling bees, academic decathlons, CloseUp (www.closeup.org), and Project Citizen (www.civiced.org). Well, if we can't take the students to see historical sites and museums, we can use the Internet to bring these sites to the classroom.

Several of the websites that I've selected contain lists of virtual field trips that allow teachers or students to choose which "trips" they want to assign or take—either as a whole class activity or as individual assignments. I recommend that teachers check out the sites and develop a list to submit to their students. One very interesting virtual tour on "Egyptian Mummies" was well organized and included important information for world history teachers, but it contained a page on "mummifying a chicken." (They used Cornish hens, and it did explain how mummification works, but I'm not certain this site should be used in an elementary or middle level class.)

One more note: some of the recommended field trips and tours were originally developed by classroom teachers for their students; and some of the trips and tours were actually designed by stu-

dents as individual or whole classroom projects.

Toward a Virtual Field Trip Model for the Social Studies

www.citejournal.org/articles/v9i4socialstudies1.pdf

This is an interesting report on a case study of virtual field trips, published in an online peer-reviewed journal that is jointly sponsored by five professional organizations, including the NCSS College and University Faculty Assembly. The author, Jeremy Stoddard, examines one well-known organization known for its work with NCSS, Colonial Williamsburg. For those of you who want to examine a well-established virtual field trip or tour, this is a good place to go. I can see college-level methods instructors assigning this to their students. The Colonial Williamsburg staff didn't agree with all of Stoddard's findings; you can read their responses at www.citejournal.org/vol9/iss4/socialstudies/article2.cfm.

Virtual Field Trips: A Sampling

www.teachersnetwork.org/book/vfieldtrip.htm

This site, by Barbara Smith, magnet coordinator in the Houston, Texas, schools, is an excellent site for both novice and experienced teachers about virtual field trips. Smith points out that virtual field trips utilize technology tools "to help students visualize and understand subject matter through exploration and active learning." She also suggests that teachers use her recommended list of links as a guide to creating their own virtual field

trips. She highlights a link, www.virtualtourist.com, that provides guidance for students to create their own travel pages. Her recommended websites are very eclectic and include virtual trips to “Virtual Antarctica” and The Louvre Museum in Paris.

Examples of Virtual Tours and Electronic Field Trips

www.thwt.org/virtualtours.htm

This outstanding site is from the Center for Teaching History with Technology (you should bookmark this site). It’s one of my favorite sites for learning about Web 2.0 resources. Tom Daccord, one of the co-founders, has started a Ning social networking site associated specifically with NCSS. This page illustrates the various ways that virtual tours and field trips can bring creativity, excitement, and learning to the social studies classroom. It also includes more than a dozen recommended virtual trip sites and links to sites that help teachers create their own virtual field trips or design classroom projects where the students design their own. If you’re interested in using Internet resources in social studies, the Teaching History with Technology website should be at the top of your favorites/bookmarks list.

Social Studies Virtual Field Trips

www.calvertnet.k12.md.us/departments/instruction/socialstudies/virtfieldtrip.asp

This is a very helpful website and one that illustrates how an individual K-12 school system can provide outstanding resources to its teachers and students. This is just one page of the Calvert County Public Schools in Maryland. It lists and links to nearly 30 selected virtual field trips. U.S. history/government sites, such as the Gettysburg Battlefield and an extensive tour of the American Wild West, are listed. In world history, students can tour the ancient Egyptian pyramids, tour the Mayan city of Chichen Itza, and tour the Seven Wonders of the World.

Homeworkspot.com

www.homeworkspot.com/fieldtrip/

Homeworkspot is an interesting website. There are a few advertisements, but not so many as to be distracting. All of the lesson plans and resources are free. The materials are divided into elementary, middle level, and secondary levels. Their “Field Trip Archive” contains the most extensive list of any of the websites that I found. They range from the Art Institute of Chicago to the Machu Picchu archeological site in Peru (a very good virtual tour, by the way), to a visit of Willy Wonka’s Chocolate Factory. While many of these tours would be great for whole-class presentations, many others would be appropriate for individual or small-group projects.

Education World

www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr057.shtml

Education World is loaded with professional development materials, lesson plans, information for administrators, and many classroom resources. This article, titled “Take a Museum Field Trip—Without Leaving Your Classroom,” has a useful introduction to virtual field trips and includes links and descriptive information to many of the top museums in science, art, and history throughout the world. The description of the museum and its collections includes a suggested student activity or two for each museum. The article concludes with a list of other links, including one that has listings for many museums throughout the United States and another that includes virtual field trips to Asia, Europe, the United Kingdom, as well as environmental and geological field trips.

TechTrekters

www.techtrekters.com/virtualft.htm

I saved a site with a very interesting story behind it for the last. Debbie Rollins, the founder and webmaster for TechTrekters taught for a while and

then was a stay-at-home mom for seven years. She returned as a computer teacher and gradually moved into a position as a technological consultant for PBS and Connected University (as in Classroom Connect). There are many great resources available at TechTrekters, but the list of virtual field trips is by far the most extensive of any of the sites I discovered for this column. It includes trips to the Acropolis, Ellis Island, and the tomb of Tutankhamen. In addition to this extensive list of virtual field trips, TechTrekters includes a list of all types of history resources, simulations, PowerPoint presentation information, and many more. Even if you don’t plan to go on a virtual field trip, you should visit Rollins’s website.

I could have included several more very good websites for this topic. I could also have given you the direct links to some of the more popular virtual field trips and tours such as the White House tour (www.whitehouse.gov), The Smithsonian Museum (www.si.edu), and the U.S. Capitol building (www.senate.gov/vtour/index.html). You can easily find more sites on your own. I used the search terms “virtual field trips” and “social studies” at first and refined a bit after that. After looking at many of the virtual field trips, I think that, while taking an entire class on a virtual field trip may be a good activity, the individual or small group project approach has the greatest potential. Try a few virtual field trips out and let me know what you think. 🌐

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