

# Effective Strategies For Teaching Social Studies

C. Frederick Risinger

Several years ago, I developed a workshop on the teaching methods and strategies associated with better test results, higher student participation, and higher student interest in social studies. As the first step in my research, I began with the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test on American history. This was the second NAEP survey on history and it, along with the beginning of the National History Standards movement, had a major impact on the social studies curriculum at the federal, state, and local levels. I was working at the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Science/Social Studies Education at the time and had access to the most up-to-date research and analysis. Not long ago, I was looking through some files and came across the workshop materials. I decided to explore whether research in the past 15 years or so would reveal new techniques or strategies to enhance student achievement and appreciation for social studies and history.

I went back to some old notes and used several of the search terms that I'd used before, plus some newer terms that had to do with more recent technology. I wasn't surprised by the results. Basically, effective instructional methods in social studies and history haven't changed very much, if at all. Of course, newer technology, especially the Web 2.0 programs and applications along with social networking concepts have expanded what teachers and students can do in the classroom. But, good teaching remains good teaching.

Coincidentally, around the same time I was doing this research, a friend showed me the teacher's edition of a history textbook printed in 1911. It was first published in 1898 and was written by Wilbur Gordy, the Superintendent of Schools in Springfield, Mass. I reviewed Mr. Gordy's recommendations for good history teaching. He recommended using literature, such as fiction and poetry, to expand and heighten student

interest. He encouraged "freedom of discussion" about current issues. And, when the students finished a chapter or a time period, he assigned each of them to develop a "set of test questions" for the class to answer. Gordy said that this technique worked well for him and recommended it for new teachers. All three of these ideas would still fit in the category of "effective strategies for teaching history and social studies."

I went back to my earlier workshop presentation and found that the six strategies that I had compiled back then are still applicable today. The list that I put together for the workshop back then looked like this:

- Use Narrative...Tell a Story.
- Encourage In-Depth Study of Some Topics by All Students.
- Use Active Teaching/Learning Techniques.

- Use Literature to Teach Content.
- Make Connections Between Topics and Across Time...Show Cause and Effect.
- Require Students to Write.

Sure, if I were re-writing the workshop today, I'd expand the word "literature" to include the arts. And, I would add a seventh item—something such as, "Use Web 2.0 Applications and Concepts to Heighten Student Interest and Increase Collaboration."

In selecting websites to illustrate the concept of effective teaching strategies in social studies, history, and citizenship, I've tried to blend some of the sites dealing with research into teaching methods and student achievement with sites that exemplify these methods with lesson plans and instructional strategies. This column is a bit different from my usual approach of identifying a subject topic or issue and providing recommended sites to help teachers develop an instructional unit for that topic. This column focuses on what we—the teachers in the classroom do every day—teach our students.

I apologize for some of the lengthy URLs listed. I had to "drill down" into some of the websites in order to find the information I wanted to present.

## Classrooms at Work

[www.netc.org/classrooms@work/index.html](http://www.netc.org/classrooms@work/index.html)

This is only one page of a much larger website for the Northwest Educational Technology Consortium. It serves as a good illustration of my "7th Effective Strategy," using Web 2.0 technology. Check out Peter Knowles's 9th grade "Global Challenge" activity and Jane Krause's 4th/5th grade "Travel USA" lesson. If you go to the main NETC site, there are additional resources of interest.

## Social Studies in Action: A Methodology Workshop, K-5

[www.learner.org/workshops/social\\_studies/index.html](http://www.learner.org/workshops/social_studies/index.html)

This is a wonderful resource provided by the Annenberg Media's Learner.org group. This particular site features an eight-step workshop for K-5 teachers and has Video on Demand for each of the eight sessions. Be sure that you watch the video on "Engaging Students in Active Learning." This would be a superb professional development program for K-5 teachers—and it's free! After reviewing this workshop, check out the other great programs, including "Making Civics Real"; "Citizenship: Making Government Work"; and my favorite, "A Biography of America." The Annenberg Foundation-Corporation for Public Broadcasting link has created some outstanding resources for social studies and history teachers.

## University of Hawaii School of Education Teaching Tips Index

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/>

From the above URL, click on "Teaching Tips Index" under Faculty Guidebook. The teaching tips are for all teachers, not specifically social studies teachers. But I found it useful and interesting. Some of the instructional issues and problems dealt with include "Critical Thinking," "American History Syllabi Resources," and "The Ultimate Plagiarism Resource."

I enjoyed clicking around this long set of ideas and resources for teachers.

## Writing in the Social Studies Classroom

This pdf document was published by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and has an extremely unwieldy URL. To find it through Google, search the author's name "Peter Pitard" (a teacher in Hot Springs, Virginia) and the title, "Writing in the Social Studies Classroom." It's one of the best documents I've seen on how to teach writing in the classroom and, just as important, why writing should be an integral part of teaching history and all social studies.

## Improving Writing Skills in Social Studies

[www.ericdigests.org/pre-926/writing.htm](http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-926/writing.htm)  
O.K., this is an unusual choice. It's an ERIC digest that I wrote in 1987, which

I came across when I did my research about effective strategies. It doesn't have all the recent research about writing in social studies, but it's still a good summary of how to improve your students' writing skills. It reminds me of an interesting era.

## Social Studies Lesson Plans

[http://712educators.about.com/od/lesson-sss/Social\\_Studies\\_Lesson\\_Plans.htm](http://712educators.about.com/od/lesson-sss/Social_Studies_Lesson_Plans.htm)

This website provides a good list of social studies and history lesson plans that fit the criteria of "Active Learning" techniques. If you click around, you will find several additional good lesson plans.

## Characteristics of Highly-Effective Social Studies Teaching and Learning

[www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/](http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/)

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## EISENHOWER ACADEMY

An Institute for Teachers • July 10–15, 2011

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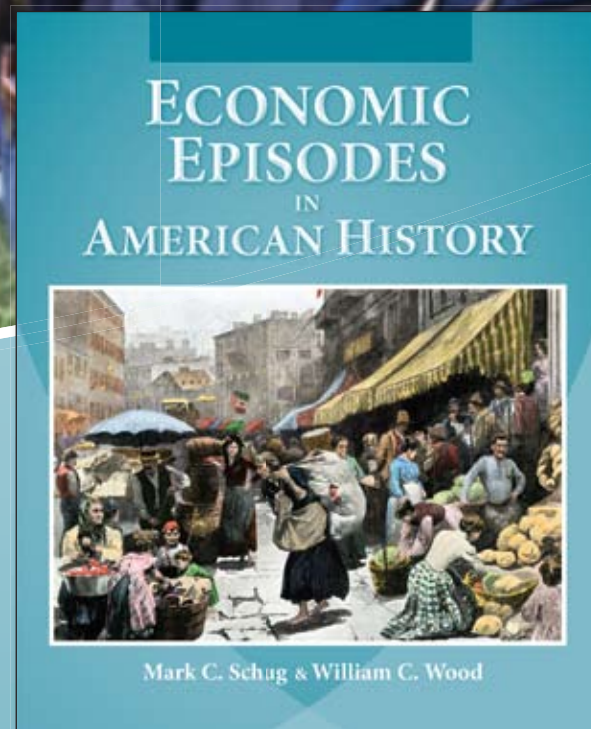




## No history of America would be complete without an economic perspective.

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## Which Chapters Would You Like to Teach?

- CHAPTER 1**  
How Can Economics Illuminate History?
- CHAPTER 2**  
Why Did the British Colonies Succeed Economically—Without Finding Gold and Silver?
- CHAPTER 3**  
Why Did John Harrower Sell Himself into Bondage?
- CHAPTER 4**  
Why Did the American Colonists Fight When They Were Safe, Prosperous, and Free?
- CHAPTER 5**  
How Did the U.S. Constitution Provide a Road Map to Economic Prosperity?
- CHAPTER 6**  
Turnpikes, Canals, and Railroads: What Did We Do Before Interstate Highways?
- CHAPTER 7**  
Was Slavery a Market Institution and Did It Help or Hurt the Southern Economy?
- CHAPTER 8**  
The Civil War and Lee's Dilemma: Why Fight a War When the North's Economy Was So Much Stronger?
- CHAPTER 9**  
How Did the Civil War Change the United States Economy?
- CHAPTER 10**  
The Homestead Act of 1862: Was Free Land Really Free?
- CHAPTER 11**  
Did the Comanche and Other American Indians Favor Communal Ownership?
- CHAPTER 12**  
Why Did Frank H. Mayer and His Fellow Hunters Hunt Buffalo, Almost to Extinction?
- CHAPTER 13**  
Did Railroads Cause the Economy of the late 1800s to Grow?
- CHAPTER 14**  
Hard Currency: Sound Money or Cross of Gold?
- CHAPTER 15**  
Were the Robber Barons Really Robbers or Barons?
- CHAPTER 16**  
Why Did the Nineteenth-Century Monopolies Disappear?
- CHAPTER 17**  
How Did Financial Panics Lead to an Independent Central Bank?
- CHAPTER 18**  
Who Was the Titanic Baby and Where Was He Going?
- CHAPTER 19**  
What Made the 1920s Roar Economically: Real Growth or a Stock Market Bubble?
- CHAPTER 20**  
Why Did a Mild Recession in 1929 Become the Great Depression of the 1930s?
- CHAPTER 21**  
Was the New Deal Good for the Economy?
- CHAPTER 22**  
The Economics of Union Membership: Solidarity Forever?
- CHAPTER 23**  
Did Rosie the Riveter Win the Battle for Working Women?
- CHAPTER 24**  
Why Did the Economy Grow after World War II?
- CHAPTER 25**  
Who Desegregated Major League Baseball: Adam Smith or Jackie Robinson?
- CHAPTER 26**  
How Did the Marshall Plan Become a Model for Foreign Aid Programs?
- CHAPTER 27**  
What Were the Origins of the African American Middle Class?
- CHAPTER 28**  
Why Did Communism Collapse?
- CHAPTER 29**  
How Did the Economy Influence Presidential Elections in the Stagnant Seventies?
- CHAPTER 30**  
Is the Information Revolution as Big as the Industrial Revolution?
- CHAPTER 31**  
Is Free Trade Out of Date?
- CHAPTER 32**  
Is Growth of the Federal Government Good for the Economy?



**SURFING THE NET** *from page 37*

From the Kentucky Department of Education's Instructional Resources page click on "Highly Effective Teaching and Learning," then "Characteristics of Highly Effective Social Studies Teaching and Learning." This site is one of the best sites that I've seen that examines what kind of teacher behaviors and instructional techniques lead to enhanced learning by students. It may seem a bit bureaucratic, but there is a lot of good information for curriculum coordinators and college-level social studies methods instructors.

**Cause and Effect Writing Challenges Students**

[www.educationworld.com/a\\_curr/curr376.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr376.shtml)

This article in *Education World* explains cause and effect writing and includes links to three very good lesson plans at the conclusion.

All of us want to be considered effective social studies teachers. I know that I was a better teacher for my experiences at conferences sponsored by NCSS, the regional social studies conferences, and state council meetings. Just the other day, I saw an article about state and national "teacher of the year" awards. I was pleased to see that social studies and English teachers were inordinately represented in these awards over the past four decades. Part of the reason is our subject content; but I think that social studies teachers understand and value the significance of what we teach; and we work hard at doing a good job. 🌐

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