

# Keeping Social Studies **Alive** with a Heritage Activity

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**So many times social studies is** the subject that gets pushed aside or rather left behind as educators have set aside an ample amount of much needed time to teach all other subject areas. They may have forgotten how important it is to also set aside time for social studies or for integrating it into other subject matter. As a fourth grade teacher at Oaklawn Visual and Performing Arts Magnet School in Hot Springs, Arkansas, I strive to keep social studies an active subject by integrating it into other curriculum areas.

I have had the opportunity to teach in a district where all subjects are important to the administration and teachers. Janice McCoy, who is the principal at Oaklawn, has always encouraged this subject in every area of the arts and academics to ensure that it is not ignored. Mrs. McCoy has encouraged the involvement of our physical education and drama teacher to use activities and theatrics in their classes when studying the history of slavery in Arkansas and the Great Depression. The music, dance, and band teacher have used music to discuss the era of the Roaring Twenties, making it come to life for our students. Arts and academic teachers have worked together to create a learning experience that will be remembered not only by our students, but by the whole community of learners at Oaklawn.

## Integrating Subjects

As an educator, I can honestly say that if I did not integrate some standards of social studies into math and literacy, this area of study would more than likely go untouched. Mapping can be easily integrated into math by charting and locating distances from one point

to another or making timelines, but the integration of social studies through literacy is my favorite. I get the chance to introduce historical fiction to my class through books such as *Riding Freedom* by Pam Muñoz, which tells the story of an orphan girl who found work as a young woman as a stagecoach driver. Students are given the opportunity to create a map of the route she took and then make a table of the miles she traveled. Students get to explore non-fiction through books like *An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793* by Jim Murphy, in which they discover how the practice of medicine has advanced over the last two centuries. Students seem to enjoy the unit on mummies, the topic of *Into the Mummy's Tomb* by Nicholas Reeves. They study Ancient Egypt and

3-dimensional shapes like the square-based and triangular-based pyramids.

Although there are Arkansas state standards in social studies, it is not always easy to find the time to meet them. However, I have a love for the subject and an appreciation for history, and I feel that this subject is important to the academic development of our students. Students need to know their own history, and the history of the persons sitting next to them. I feel that studying social

studies is important in fourth grade because it reinforces morals and values that we try as educators to instill in our students. Students need to know why it is important to have pride in what they do and how others in the past have overcome diversity, sickness, and other trials.

Students can use their imagination and creativity in order to create a time and place for them to travel to the past and become cowboys and cowgirls, pioneers, or doctors who have invented a vaccine that saved millions of lives. During the unit of study on Ancient Egypt, students create paper mache mummies and tombs and use the world wide net to explore and find information on Egypt.

