

Editor's Notebook

The contributors to this issue of *Social Education* investigate past milestones and current controversies that make excellent subjects for social studies classes. The creative teaching suggestions that accompany many of the articles bring even the more abstract topics to life.

An attack by Japanese naval aircraft on the USS *Panay* in 1937, which the Japanese government declared accidental and for which it paid compensation, caused a crisis in U.S.-Japanese relations. A little-known dimension of the incident was the expression of spontaneous sympathy and apologies by Japanese citizens to the U.S. embassy in Tokyo. In the U.S. national archives, there can be found Japanese letters of apology, and one of them, written by a schoolboy and including a small donation of money for injured sailors, is the featured document in this issue's Teaching with Documents column. Trevor K. Plante and Lee Ann Potter present the historical background to the incident, and offer teaching suggestions for classes dealing with U.S.-Japanese relations in the 1930s.

It is an annual tradition of *Social Education* to publish a feature on the most recent Nobel Peace Prize award. Last year, the prize was awarded equally to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Al Gore. Lee Bisland and Iftikhar Ahmad examine the issue of climate change, and redress an imbalance in the media coverage of the award by looking extensively at the work of the IPCC as well as that of Gore. They recommend activities and resources for teaching about climate change in the classroom.

A highlight of this edition is a special section of four articles on economic topics. In the first of these, Josh Otlin presents a lesson he has developed on poverty, which shows students that "arguments about economic issues are based on interpretations of data, and that different analysts can reach different judgments about those data." (75) After examining statistical information on people and families living in poverty, students evaluate alternative arguments about the causes of poverty, and attain a better understanding of different approaches to dealing with the problem.

Economics teachers are familiar with the provocative question asked by students: "why can't the government just print more money?" Greg Schreur's strategy for showing students that the result would be higher prices, and not higher living standards, is to divide the class into two groups, one of which is assigned much more money to spend than the other, and to ask each group to bid for a set of desirable goods and services. The results show that the group with the larger amount of

money simply pays more for the same goods and services than the group with the lower amount of money.

It is now much more expensive for Americans to travel overseas than it was five years ago, and the principal culprit has been the declining dollar. In an article provided by PBS NewsHour Extra, Quinn Bowman describes the dramatic slide in the dollar's value, and analyzes the reasons for the decline. Annie Schleicher provides accompanying teaching suggestions that will help improve students' understanding of this complex topic.

It is just over ten years since the National Council on Economic Education published the national economics standards. What effect have these had on the teaching of economics in the primary grades? An article by Yana V. Rodgers, Shelby Hawthorne and Ronald C. Wheeler presents the results of a state-by-state survey of economics standards. The author observe that "almost all states have economics standards for every primary grade beginning with kindergarten," (90), while noting that most states embed their economics standards as a strand within the social studies standards rather than as a separate set of standards. As the authors point out, there is a significant variation between states in the completeness of their economics standards, and in the specificity of the guidelines for different grade levels.

Given the low turnout among younger voters, it is important to seek innovative ways of engaging students in the electoral process, and a presidential year like this one offers exciting opportunities for doing so. Helen Joyce describes her experiences with a schoolwide project designed by herself and colleagues that simulates the election campaigns by having students run as the presidential and vice-presidential candidates of each party. The project engages several school departments as well as social studies: English (which provides a press corps and media coverage), math (which conducts surveys and tallies results), science (which identifies candidates' policies on the environment), and foreign languages (for a review of candidates' policies toward countries associated with a designated language).

During its current term, the Supreme Court is scheduled to make a critical decision on whether detainees at Guantanamo Bay can claim *habeas corpus* rights. In our Looking at the Law column, James Landman reviews the expanding history of the writ of *habeas corpus*, emphasizing its importance to the U.S. legal system, examining its suspension during the

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Civil War, and suggesting teaching activities related to the writ. After Guantanamo, he writes, “We may well be in the midst of another transformative period for the writ—one that may contract the writ’s scope.”(105)

In his Internet column, C. Frederick Risinger recounts his impressions of the materials and resources featured in the large exhibit at the 2007 NCSS annual meeting in San Diego, and recommends some organizations and agencies that provide free

Internet-based resources for teachers and students. The organizations focus on topics ranging from international conflicts to the promotion of Palestinian-Jewish dialogue, and from the U.S. Constitution to contemporary economic concerns.

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

Letter to the Editor

Silence on the Iraq War

The 87th Annual NCSS Conference, *Crossing Borders, Building Bridges*, was well attended by the nation’s leading social studies theorists, researchers, and teachers. The program offered opportunities to learn about recent research on historical inquiry, citizenship education, integrating technology into the curriculum, and a variety of international topics. There was, however, one paramount issue that was noticeably absent: the Iraq War. Of the hundreds of sessions offered, none focused on this critical war that has had a tremendous impact on our nation’s schools, military, and economy. The honorable Sandra Day O’Connor’s keynote speech description of her work on the Iraq Task Force was the exceptional moment the war was directly addressed.

Although the NCSS has crafted position statements on controversial issues like intelligent design, sexism, and the No Child Left Behind Act, it has failed to construct a statement articulating its position on the war. This is disconcerting when most Americans consider the war the most critical issue of the day. Since 2003, more than 3,800 American soldiers have been killed and 28,000 wounded. Tens of thousands have been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, a condition that haunts veterans throughout their lives. The Associated Press estimates that 75,000 Iraqi civilians (some would argue this is a conservative estimate) have been killed. The war in Iraq has also placed a considerable burden on American tax revenue. At the time this was written (12/27/07), the National Priorities Project calculates the cost of the war to exceed \$480 billion (see nationalpriorities.org/cms/costofwar).

In addition to American sacrifices in blood and treasure, the war has had an impact on our nation’s schools and students. The No Child Left Behind Act requires school districts to share students’ personal information with the federal government. To gain direct access to potential recruits, the Pentagon has devised an online interactive military simulation entitled *America’s Army*. This online combat simulator is a recruitment tool that capitalizes on teen preoccupation with video games and virtual worlds. There are also numerous reports indicat-

ing that the Pentagon has stepped up its recruiting efforts on high school campuses.

Rather than continue to evade these critical issues, it is time for teacher-educators, curriculum theorists, and social studies teachers to hold an open dialogue about how we teach the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq as well as the recent challenges to our Constitution. For certain, these are issues of utmost importance. The Organization of American Historians initiated an ongoing discussion about the war in Iraq in April of 2003 (see www.oah.org/meetings/2003/roundtable/). The war has been at the center of congressional debate, covered in American newspapers, and featured on broadcast news. It has already proven to be a central issue in the run-up to the 2008 presidential election. Yet, NCSS has yet to craft a position statement or foster an open discourse on the American invasion and occupation of Iraq.

As we approach the fifth anniversary of the U.S. invasion, we can no longer feign neutrality and avoid the discord that democratic deliberation is bound to produce. With no end in sight, we cannot neglect our responsibility to address our nation’s most pressing issues. There is no better time to take seriously the NCSS position on academic freedom. This is the foundation of free historical inquiry and the umbrella under which we must hold an open discourse on the relationship between social studies education and the war in Iraq.

I implore the NCSS board to seriously consider the House of Delegates Resolution 7-04-01. This resolution urges NCSS members and affiliates “To take a public stand as citizens on behalf of the values and goals taught in social studies and necessary to the practice of our profession; and To do whatever they can to bring the Iraq War to a speedy conclusion.” If nothing else, I sincerely hope this resolution initiates a long overdue discussion on the Iraq War.

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