

# Integrating Art and Music into Social Studies Instruction

C. Frederick Risinger

I truly believe that the marginalization of social studies is not only harming our profession, it is jeopardizing our democracy. I believe that the political animosity, polarization, name calling, and inability to work together to solve national problems is in some ways linked to the marginalization of history, government, economics, and other social studies courses in the national curriculum. Studies indicate that, at the elementary level, students are receiving as little as 20 classroom minutes of social studies instruction *per week*.

But if social studies is in jeopardy, consider our colleagues in the arts and music. Art and music programs have been reduced or eliminated in thousands of schools throughout the nation. States as diverse as Vermont and California have doubled or tripled time spent on reading and mathematics in recent years. That time comes out of social studies, but also has hit arts education (which includes music) very hard. In some school districts, parents are being asked to pay additional fees to keep choral groups or marching bands alive. Many schools have cancelled art exhibits or shows simply because art classes have been cancelled.

Music and art are primary aspects of human history and culture. Every history book, every book or syllabus about human cultures, emphasizes the art, writing, and philosophical views exemplified by the people of that time and place. Marginalizing art and music can be as damaging to the idea of a multicultural world living in peace as the marginalization of social studies/citizenship education is to an educated, participatory citizenry.

Many thoughtful social studies teach-

ers have integrated art and music into their history, geography, and government lessons. *Social Education* has published a theme issue on the arts for numerous years. Here are some suggested websites that will help classroom teachers and curriculum specialists bring these important aspects of human culture to their students. They will probably heighten interest among many students as well. Even if you think you already do enough with the arts in your teaching, check out some of these sites. You will enjoy them.

One caveat: some of the music sites provide some free music and songs, but might charge for others. I typically do not include sites that require subscriptions or charge for their products, but a couple of them, like “History Happens,” were intriguing enough to include anyway.

## The Walters Art Museum

<http://thewalters.org/integrating-the-arts>

The Walters Art Museum in Baltimore is world renowned for its collection of art from pre-dynastic Egypt to twentieth-century Europe. Currently, they

have a special exhibit from cultures that rose and fell in Mexico, Central America, and Andean South America. World history and culture teachers will find many resources. Perhaps the best aspect of the site for classroom teachers is the “integrating the arts” link, which is aimed directly at K-12 teachers and students. Click on “Teacher Resources” and you’ll find “integrating the arts” kits on Islam, downloadable teacher resource kits, and a wide variety of lesson plans, categorized by grade level, and developed by Maryland teachers to meet state standards for social studies, art, and music.

## The University of Rochester Memorial Art Gallery

<http://mag.rochester.edu/teachers/lesson-plans-social-studies>

Here’s another art museum that has done a great job preparing materials for teachers that link history and culture to artworks. This link takes you directly to lesson plans designed for social studies teachers. One that I particularly liked is based on Jacob Lawrence’s painting, “The 1920’s: The Migrants Arrive and Cast Their Ballots.” Another great lesson plan is based on Albert Bierstadt’s paintings of the American West, which gave Americans a spectacular view of their expanding nation. There’s an elementary lesson titled “Ancient Egypt for Young Children,” featuring “Mummies and More” and designed for preschool-3rd grade. It’s neat.



## Validate your scholars' achievements in a new way... Start a Rho Kappa Chapter Today!

RHO KAPPA National Social Studies Honor Society is the only national organization for high school juniors and seniors that recognizes excellence in social studies. Membership in RHO KAPPA is an honor bestowed upon students by a local chapter for accomplishments in social studies and overall academic achievement. Any accredited high school can apply to start a chapter, through which students will be inducted into the RHO KAPPA Social Studies Honor Society.

For more information call 301-588-1800 ext.107 or visit [rhokappa.socialstudies.org](http://rhokappa.socialstudies.org)

**Apply for a Charter by June 15, 2012 and get up to 6 months free!\***

*\* If you apply now, you will not need to pay the Charter renewal fee until June 2013!*



*Preparing Students for College, Career, and Civic Life*

### Three Methods for Teaching the Social Studies to Students through the Arts

[www2.education.ualberta.ca/css/Css\\_35\\_4/ARsocstud\\_through\\_arts.htm](http://www2.education.ualberta.ca/css/Css_35_4/ARsocstud_through_arts.htm)

In theory, this link belongs at the beginning. However, I wanted you to check out a couple of the museums and lesson plans first. This is a well thought out and written article by NCSS folks Ron Morris from Ball State University and Kathryn Obenchain from the University of Nevada, Reno. It makes an excellent case for using the arts (including music, drama, painting, and sculpture). If I were still a department head, I'd have the teachers in my department read the article and we'd discuss it in our next meeting. The authors describe how students can construct new knowledge by using three artistic methods: (1) scripted; (2) interpretive; and (3) original. This would also be a good article for college-level social studies methods students to use in their classes.

### History Happens

<http://ushistory.com/index.htm>

This appears to be a fairly new site, and I hope it continues to grow. I really like the concept and the music behind it. The founders, a married couple, were discussing the music their children were listening to on the radio, when they decided that you could teach history through music. Their site is now recommended by The History Channel and won a Best on the Web for Teachers award. It is one of the sites that charges for some of the songs and music videos, but the idea is great and could be adapted by some musically-talented students in your school. Be sure to see the music videos "On an Underground Railroad" and "Remember the Ladies." This is a great idea. I hope that state departments of education will make the site free for schools within their state.

### The Library of Congress

[www.loc.gov/index.html](http://www.loc.gov/index.html)

The Library of Congress has to be one of the most complete storehouses of primary materials and other fantastic resources available to teachers. Yet, I have a feeling that only a small percentage of teachers utilize this wide array of easily available materials. Their American Memory collection is simply a gold mine for history teachers. But the Library also can help teachers and curriculum writers find wonderful artifacts for integrating art and music into social studies instruction. Go to the site listed above and you'll see the categories of "Sound Recordings," "Performing Arts," and "Prints and Photographs." Click any of them and you'll have access to items such as photographs of African American life in the United States around 1900, "Patriotic

Melodies," which tell the stories behind many of the songs that have become part of the American national heritage, and a collection of Works Progress Administration (WPA) posters that paint a depressing, but truthful, picture of the Great Depression.

### National Endowment for the Humanities

<http://edsitement.neh.gov/subject/history-social-studies>

I've frequently recommended the NEH website for its coverage of history, political science, and other social studies topics—frequently with a humanities focus. This web link takes you to a large array of lesson plans for all aspects of social studies. Enter "Music" in the dialog box at the top right of the page and you'll find a great set of lessons focusing on American music from all eras. Some of the intriguing sites examine World War II's impact on jazz music and how jazz music impacted the war; "Voices across Time," created to help teachers harness the power of song; and, my favorite, "Thomas Hart Benton—The Sources of Country Music." This lesson combines the wonderful mural art of Benton with music.

### Museum of Fine Arts Boston

[www.mfa.org/americanpaintings](http://www.mfa.org/americanpaintings)

"Paintings of the Americas" is a superb teacher resource. It's set up in a way that replicates taking your students on a field trip. The paintings include 400 works spanning a chronological period from the colonial era to twentieth century modernism. I appreciated how each time period had an introductory page or so that summarized its historical significance and then presented several paintings that illustrated the concepts. The museum has several fine galleries, but U.S. history teachers will want to look at this specific one, if only for a greater appreciation of what they teach.

You can find more websites that include the arts and music using simple search terms such as "music in social studies." Talk with art and music teachers (those that are still present) and ask them if they'd like to work with you to develop an instructional unit linking art or music to your course structure. The arts and social studies may be marginalized, but working together may be a good approach for making us more relevant to educational policymakers. 📖

**C. FREDERICK RISINGER** is retired from the School of Education at Indiana University, Bloomington. He recently set up a new website (check out [mysocialstudies.com](http://mysocialstudies.com)) and works two shifts a week as a bartender at a local microbrewery.