



Essentials

For Teaching ✓

Social Studies

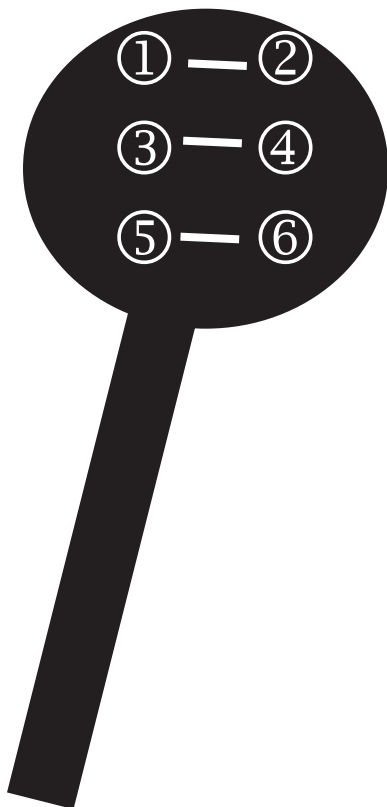


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*A publication of the President Benjamin Harrison Foundation for the
 President Benjamin Harrison Home Education Department*

*The mission of the President Benjamin Harrison Foundation is to increase public
 understanding of, appreciation for, and participation in the American system of
 self-government through the life stories of an American president.*

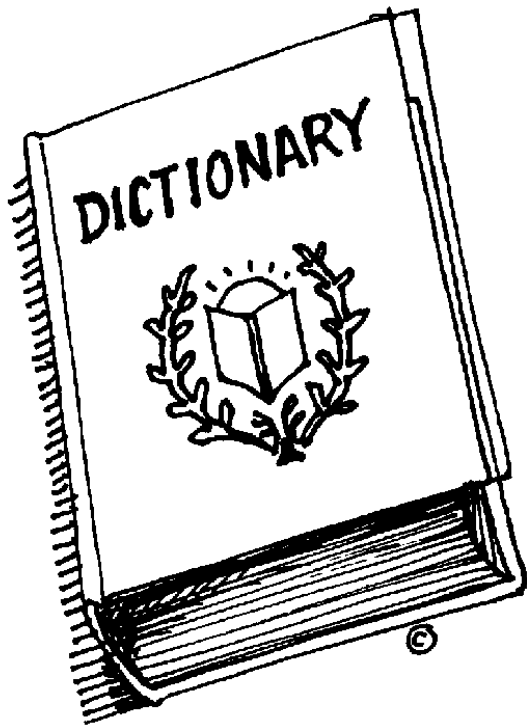


Webster's defines History as:

A chronological record of significant events (as affecting a nation or institution) often including an explanation of causes.

Social Studies as:

A part of a school or college curriculum concerned with the study of social relationships and the functioning of society and usually made up of courses in history, government, economics, civics, sociology, geography, and anthropology.



Dear Reader,

Believe it or not, professional and public history circles contest the use of terminology such as “history” or “social studies.” Let’s be real. An educator of elementary or secondary children has larger concerns than labels. This booklet will not define terms such as history, political science or geography. “Social studies” will include all of these disciplines and more.

The purpose of this book is to use past observations to suggest systems that our organization has found to be successful. We are not passing judgment on any pedagogy, and we don’t have all the answers. The President Benjamin Harrison Home Education Department has enjoyed seeing tens of thousands of students every year, with many repeat visitors. Our collective educational philosophy is governed by over twenty years of teaching experience, the input of family and friends in the field of education, teacher focus groups, college collaborations, and good old-fashioned trial and error. We have had our share of failures as we translated thoughts into practice. We still constantly refine our methods. But the basic essentials we offer here have been refined over many years. We hope that they will inspire analysis, dialogue, and new ideas.

Most of all, we hope this material will be useful. It will be particularly helpful to educators who are put into the “reluctant” position of teaching social studies. On the other end of the spectrum, there are nuggets here that avid history fans will find helpful. We hope readers will share thoughts and experiences with us while implementing the concepts in *6 Essentials For Teaching Social Studies*.

Roger Hardig, *Director*
David Pleiss, *Assistant Director*

The Education Department
President Benjamin Harrison Home

1

ESSENTIAL FOR TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES:

Use exciting content (don't be afraid to deviate)

Stories From the Road: The Crossroads

Teaching in a public high school many years ago, I had an experience that changed and shaped my entire outlook on the methods of educating. While presenting U.S. History to 11th graders, I found myself relying on supplemental textbook quizzes and the pre-made tests. I was chagrined with myself because these lessons were not recommended for regular use by education methods classes. On the other hand, I was glad to be rescued by them, because I was swamped with other classes. After every student in the room bombed one such quiz about the Great Depression, one of them asked, "Why are we studying this? These people were obviously stupid and spent more than they made. These people were careless." Whoa. Things came to a screeching halt. Was this opinion held by the rest of the class? A collective nod noted the affirmative. Although the class was desperately behind in the semester's material, this was a worthy crossroads where we could put the brakes on and linger a while. Here was an opportunity to give these kids a lesson in real-life economics. For the next two classes, we talked about the realistic salary expectations for a high school graduate in today's economy. While discussing life after graduation, a couple of students expressed interest in specific occupations. Those jobs were researched and the median incomes for people with high school diplomas and college diplomas, as well as for high school drop-outs, were listed.



The ensuing discussion helped them understand how to develop a budget. We first established what was important to them: Rent (living alone or with a roommate), a car, entertainment, clothes, and vacations were universally desired. How would they spend their paychecks when they got out on their own? Discussion followed about the realities of payroll taxes, social security withholding, rent, and car payments. We noted the rates of actual apartments close to the school. Some students were shocked to learn that it was against the law not to carry car insurance. Not surprisingly, these "fiscally responsible" kids, who had criticized the actions of people living in the Great Depression, were on the road to becoming absolutely upside down in debt. They would be bankrupt, and "bankrupt" means that they would spend at least one penny more than they made. This awoke within them the understanding of the parallel between them and the victims of the Great Depression. After a moment of stunned silence, even the most quiet and reserved students in the class became enraged. Declarations were made about unfair government practices. Finally, the student who had criticized the victims of the Great Depression asked, "How is a person supposed to make it on their own?"

From there, we outlined a budget and broke it into categories to cover real-life issues. These same kids, who were going to be office secretaries at the age of 18, living in \$200,000 homes with new cars and eating out every night of the week, reverted to living in apartments with roommates, eating at home and either buying used cars or relying on public transportation. They were grasping compromise on a new and very personal level. We found our footing again on the historical subject matter with a new empathy for people who experienced the Great Depression. We learned the value of FDIC insurance and its importance to the financial stability of our nation. These kids were now earning more than money. They were gaining knowledge, with interest.

Read the Owner's Manual

An educator's concern is not whether to use a textbook, but HOW to use it. Textbook companies are usually very good at laying things out in sequential order. Timelines are essential in the field of social studies. They allow students to see where an event falls in relation to other events. The timelines themselves become the highway for study, and educators can choose the exit ramps for exploration. If the class comes to a crossroads of misunderstanding, it can become an opportunity. As Yogi Berra wisely said, "If you come to a fork in the road, take it." Kids can tell when the teacher is interested, and the excitement will resonate with them. Will they all share the excitement? Sometimes. But the excitement will challenge most kids to seek out topics that interest them.



My experience with the Great Depression lesson was my first step toward creating a new method of lesson planning that has been developed and refined by the Education Department. Everything that we teach must be germane and appropriate to the Harrison family legacy. It is also tempered to fit Indiana Curriculum Standards. The timeline reflects the lives of Benjamin Harrison and his prestigious family, and we can fit all applicable subject matter from history into my programming. You might think that this timeline is intensely limiting. However, because Benjamin Harrison's great-grandfather was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, we have almost 200 years of American history to utilize. This essential lesson is employed every day.

The Rearview Mirror

Social studies are different from any other discipline. Math and science have fixed quotients that are always the same. But in social studies, there are many different lessons to learn and relate. Someone must decide what piece of the

puzzle to study, when and why. Could a discussion about the Great Depression have included more class time on the Flappers and the excess of the 1920s? Probably. The supplemental material recommended a study of booming radios-per-household. This rise led to related "escape" activities like movies, which have become part of an entertainment industry that has proven depression-proof. But not every educator will be interested in that area of discussion.

A student cannot look at the entire scope of history and make any sense of it. Some educators try to convey a wide base of information, but they can only skim the surface. If a teacher wants the students to truly learn and retain their knowledge, it is better to go deep than wide. There is risk involved in this approach. Will wonderful material be left out along the way? This will happen, regardless of the approach. On the other hand, the teacher's interest and enthusiasm is infectious and it will raise the interest level for everyone involved. An author once said that he did not care for jazz music until a friend took him to see a jazz group in concert. The pure joy on the musicians' faces and the intensity that he saw in their performance made him look at the music in an entirely different light. Since that day, he's been a confirmed lover of jazz.



Educators should fearlessly focus on their passions, if that's what it takes to excite them. To teach Civil War history, one educator may focus on the events leading up to it, introducing field calls and slave songs that produce a sympathetic response in the classroom. Another educator may look at the economic differences in the northern and southern cultures. Yet another would see the election of Abraham Lincoln and the dictates of national government through the eyes of a southerner.

2

ESSENTIAL FOR TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES:

Use Primary Source Material

Ordering Original Parts

The first rule of any long journey is to check under the hood, and make sure everything is in good shape. Oh, and don't forget the map. To get to the crossroads, the educator must find the exciting content. Now, the question is: HOW is it found? One way is through the use of primary source materials.



What are primary source materials? UCLA University Institute on Primary Sources gives the following definition:

Primary resources provide firsthand evidence of historical events. They are generally unpublished materials such as manuscripts, photographs, maps, artifacts, audio and video recordings, oral histories, postcards, and posters. In some instances, published materials can also be viewed as primary materials for the period in which they were written. In contrast, secondary materials, such as textbooks, synthesize and interpret primary materials.

Secondary sources are necessary, but different. They can have many limitations. The facts can be glossed over, seen as whimsical, or be delivered in such a hokey medium that they are construed as superfluous or, in the worst case, fictitious. Secondary source material removes immediacy and adds a “sheen” to information, allowing for quick study. Students overexposed to this material may fall asleep in the car or even suffer from secondary source disorder. In all fairness, secondary source material is necessary because it captures a wide range of material within the limited scope of a class. Credible and well-written secondary source material fosters good big-picture viewing. Without reinforcement by primary source material, however, secondary information can become a tedious drive over the flatlands. Students deserve the chance to interpret original artifacts for themselves. Primary source material is essential to the learning process because it promotes intrigue and empowerment. It may even bring the class to a crossroads.

Oral Traditions

Students can have direct experiences with primary source material without leaving home. Parents and grandparents are great sources of history. An elementary student can ask a parent what he or she remembers about the World Trade Center attack on September 11, 2001. The student can ask a grandparent what he or she recalls about World War Two, the Vietnam War or the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The accounts of elders may even be accompanied by photos and letters.

A third grade girl once brought her grandmother's letter to the museum. Her class was participating in the Coming To America program, a lesson designed to give students a closer look at the third class passengers who boarded European ships to come to Ellis Island. (This important immigration center was opened by Benjamin Harrison in 1892.) The students learned about the ordeals of the fleeing populations through old photos and quotes from steerage passengers. At the end of the program, the girl gave the instructor permission to read her grandmother's letter in front of the class. Her grandmother had personally experienced Ellis Island through the eyes of an immigrant. The letter exemplified the messages of hope and hard work that the class had been reviewing. By the end of the letter, there wasn't a dry eye in the room.

Stories From the Road

Primary source material was used to good effect when a group of education students from a local university visited the President's home. The goal in hosting them was to conduct a class that promoted the use of primary materials. The following program was part of a take-home assignment, but this sort of activity or analysis could be done in the classroom very easily.

There needs to be great sensitivity when using emotional source materials. In fact, this would not be used with elementary (or even secondary) students. There needs to be a certain amount of maturity to understand some of the more shocking events in history. It is good for college students because it gets their attention. When this picture was displayed on an overhead projector the room became immediately quiet. The students studied the photo for a while, along with the subtitle, “A fourteen-year-old Confederate Soldier Killed by Bayonet at Fort Mahone.”



After letting them digest the image, this assignment was given.

You have a choice:

You are a newspaper reporter covering this battle

- 1. Describe the battle from this 14 year old soldier's point of view*
- 2. Write the story in the form of an obituary for this child.*
- 3. You are the sergeant for this soldier's company. You must write a letter home to notify family that this soldier has been killed in action.*

All of these college students, no matter which option they chose, went into great detail in creating a fictitious name for this young man. One young lady even said that it was important to her for the boy in the photo to have a family.

What do you think this assignment accomplished? For one thing, it made the Civil War real to the group and forced them to focus on a single event that took place in the past. The participants looked at a big event from one person's perspective instead of using a survey of an entire event. As students read their assignments, it became apparent that they were very focused on the activity.

Several things about their work took me by surprise. First of all, not one person in the class stated in the assignment whether this battle was a Confederate or Union victory. It was also a shock that only one of these students expressed the additional tragedy of the Battle of Fort Mahone, after looking at the event from a timeline perspective. The class had a clear lack of knowledge about one of the key periods of American history. As part of the Siege of Petersburg, the Battle for Fort Mahone took place in the state of Virginia on April 2nd and 3rd, 1865. The accepted end to the American Civil War happened at Appomattox Court House on April 9th, 1865. The one student who understood the timeline significance pointed out that the boy had died only six days before the end of the war. She brought the group to a crossroads. The room was quiet and thoughtful again. The realization put an entirely new light on the information, and the picture was again put up on the overhead projector.

This activity forced these college students to research the time period. Many of them had no concept of a bayonet, for instance. The class had to find information about the Battle of Fort Mahone and learn details about it. The students' oversights were troubling. It seemed reasonable that they would have researched both the date of the battle and the outcome. The fact that a college-level group did not take it upon themselves to list the battle's outcome was disappointing. An educator should assume nothing.

As the student volunteers read their assignments, we, as a class, discussed each student's work in turn. Even the presenter would note the weaknesses and strengths of his or her own paper. For many, the written themes included the boy's bravery, his loyalty to his cause, and the unique valor of someone so young. The student who "got" the big picture wrote an obituary filled with despair. In her research, she discovered that by 1865, the Confederacy was absolutely bereft of soldiers and supplies. Furthermore, she lamented that this life had come to an abrupt and violent end. She could not shake the fact that this was a child. She also stated that it was hard to stay in character when doing the assignment. It was hard to ignore that the end of the war was merely days away. The sense of loss and futility was evident in her writing.

Concluding the project, we fell into a discussion that shed light on how different personalities process the same information. The image of the Confederate youth exemplified the importance of primary sources. The young lady who had shed light on the time frame of the battle was convinced that this unnamed boy in the photo was the victim of a horrible, pointless event. His life, so full of potential, had ended way too early. Others in the class stated that this child had lived a life of valor, and that the validity of his cause, in the grand scheme, was secondary. Some students became philosophical, reminding all of us that death is an inescapable part of life's cycle. For them, the boy had died while fighting for a cause that he believed in, and while it was tragic, his death should be seen as heroic.

The Rearview Mirror

As you can tell, this picture elicited strong opinions. Once again, such passion increased the level of learning. The education department was asked to present a two-part program about primary documents for an entry-level college education class and it was important to make a strong impression. There are countless ways to use primary source material to enhance lessons. The example above tapped into the emotions of the participants. Whether or not the students realized it, the nature of the source material forced them to become connected to historical content. Sometimes it's all right for material to shake students because they must be awake to learn. When a class realizes that historical people are still people, with common hopes and fears, the stories become fascinating. Primary sources remind students of the uniqueness of social studies and they energize the study of human experience. In the broader scheme, they explain how humans react to their changing environment.

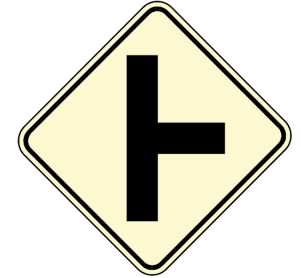
3

ESSENTIAL FOR TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES:

Use Other Disciplines and Delivery Methods

All Maps Have Something to Offer

Over the years, the techniques in this chapter have become important in the way the education department presents tours and programs. They are helpful for educators using both traditional and non-traditional teaching formats, because they offer different avenues to make material accessible and exciting. They are like the little nuances of driving that aren't covered in Driver's Education class. If the path of learning is going to have forks and crossroads, it is important to look for as many adjoining streets as possible.



Most educators are well acquainted with the work of Howard Gardner. More than 20 years ago, Dr. Gardner (Harvard University) introduced his theory of multiple intelligences. His findings, which examine the ways that people learn and process information, have made him a world renowned speaker and scholar on human development. Dr. Gardner says there are seven basic intelligences:

1. Linguistic intelligence
2. Logical-mathematical intelligence
3. Musical intelligence
4. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence
5. Spatial intelligence
6. Interpersonal intelligence
7. Intrapersonal intelligence

Over the years, many educators have contemplated his work when developing lessons for children. Some schools (including one public school very near the Harrison Museum) use his model for their curricula.

Many educators who graduated college in the 1990s learned the "Thematic Teaching" model. Cells, groups and teaching teams were all becoming the fashion. According to this model, if a social studies teacher was on a teaching team while the English teacher was having the students read "Crime and Punishment," then the social studies teacher would follow the theme and teach a unit on Russian History. Standards-based education has now taken the forefront. Either way, a good educator should cross-pollinate material, meet standards, and highlight any lessons or stories that directly correlate with other disciplines.

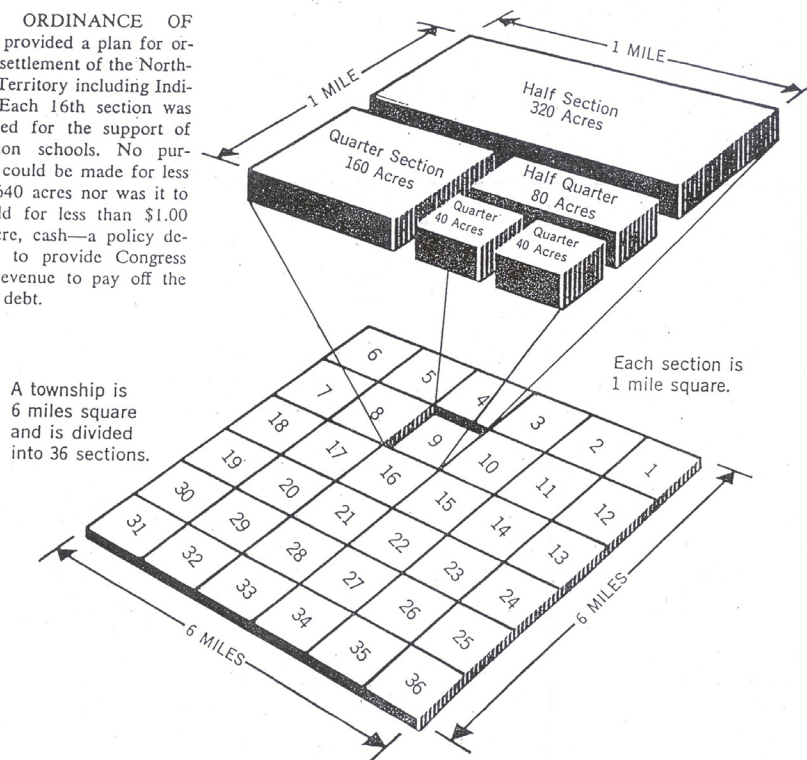
One of the museum's program offerings, Settlers and Surveyors, crosses more disciplines of study than any other course, and, not surprisingly, it is the most popular of the 13-program roster. A role-playing activity, it covers the settlement of

the Indiana Territory in the early 19th century. At that time in history, Indiana was on the cutting edge in that there was a plotted, surveyed, and orderly settlement of pioneers heading west. The program's theme applies to the Harrison family because Benjamin Harrison's grandfather, William Henry Harrison, was the first governor of the Indiana Territory. For third grade students, this program provides a direct connection to communities, a major theme for their social studies standards. For fourth graders, the program covers the major topics involved in Indiana history and the westward movement. While the content of the program is generally the same for every class, the nuances and delivery vary from group to group because the program is kinesthetic in nature. The children have to thoughtfully build a frontier town, while considering the greater good of the community. The Settlers and Surveyors program is the most challenging and rewarding program because it applies to third and fourth grade curricula. Third grade is one of the most dynamic grade levels for childhood development. Third graders who visit for this program in September and October are, in essence, not much different from second graders. Third graders who visit in April and May are equally challenged as they endeavor to relate to material used for fourth graders in the fall and spring.

The agenda is very student-focused. The participants sit on the floor around a huge map. In the scope of a one-hour program, they are put into decision making scenarios, situated alone on the prairie, as they struggle to stay alive by supporting one another. The class quickly sees their limited resources diminish, and they realize that trading with one another lasts only until these resources are gone. New resources and materials have to be introduced and basic needs have to be met. Through their own thoughtfulness, students see how businesses were developed on the frontier. The program forces them to understand survival in a new territory. But that's not all. They must think like Victorians, who were unfamiliar with electricity. Once a student recognizes and identifies a specific need, he/she is given the corresponding business and asked to pick a location that is advantageous for the business and beneficial for the other settlers. Because the new business owner is working with the others in the group, he/she is forced to think about how business placement will serve the fellow classmates who are located all over the map.

Math comes into play when we discuss the fact that each square on the map is a mile wide, and that such a space contains 640 acres. If a child wants to centralize a business to make it accessible to all, he/she must count the squares to find the middle. However, there are deeper layers that cross other educational disciplines. For instance, a major section of elementary math standards includes problem solving. Many teachers have told us that the real strength of this program lies in its problem solving situations. A basic need on the prairie was building material, wood specifically, and we deal with this issue very early in the session. The business that provided wood was the saw mill. Many children are familiar with this business, through westward games and simulations. But many children are not familiar with the actual term. A fourth grade science standard mentions the changing of form and matter (the example the guide uses is the conversion of solid to liquid, ice to water). A saw mill exemplifies this process in a unique way. The educator can point to a wooden classroom door and ask the children where it comes from. Is there a tree in the forest that is already shaped like a door? There is no such thing. For some classes, the instructor needs to get very basic on this point.

THE ORDINANCE OF 1785 provided a plan for orderly settlement of the Northwest Territory including Indiana. Each 36th section was reserved for the support of common schools. No purchase could be made for less than 640 acres nor was it to be sold for less than \$1.00 per acre, cash—a policy designed to provide Congress with revenue to pay off the public debt.



This program highlights the ways in which different children process information. Students who are inclined towards logical-mathematical and spatial intelligences tend to have an easier time with this material. Other children may have to be asked, "Is there bark on this piece of wood?" or "Is a tree shaped like this?" Then,

“What do you have to do to make a tree look like this?” You have to cut it down, strip the bark, and then change its size. In this example, matter has been changed or altered. History is being used to show relevance to science.

For the museum’s election year program, students have to campaign to be President of the United States. They use a Victorian method of advertising called rebus to create a poster. In the rebus method, pictures are used to phonetically sound out words. Benjamin Harrison used a rebus that included pictures of a rabbit, an eye, and a rising sun to recreate his name, “Hare Eye Sun.” The students create a rebus for their own names, decide on a favorite issue in the community, and, with words and art, communicate the ways in which they would contribute to the issue. Children who are in tune with linguistic, musical, and interpersonal intelligences shine with the election program because it requires artistic and written articulation of ideas and thought.



Stories From the Road

Any change in location or focus can be a learning opportunity. Because our museum gift shop is very small and school groups can be very large, we try to encourage pre-ordering or online shopping before the visit. However, many teachers and students want to see first-hand what we have for sale. In the past, one ill-prepared class frequently forced another to miss the gift shop. Accompanying parents or teachers in these situations were like the students’ personal ATM machines, digging for extra money to cover a sale. This was a crossroads in which knowledge was key in the solution to a problem. Today, there are math lessons for children who visit the gift shop. A group of students may not enter until they can recite, as a class, their multiplication table using the state tax percentage number. We explain to visiting students that there is a percentage tax for every dollar that they spend. A child with a third grade education should know how much money he or she has and what it can buy. Teaching children to factor in tax and to be self-reliant in simple tasks like buying rock candy are worthwhile lessons in the real-life applications of math. This covers multiple lessons in the math curriculum standards.

The Rearview Mirror

Anything can be a lesson, and every method has some merit. Educators should try to show how other disciplines and subjects are related their own.



ESSENTIAL FOR TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES:

Use Open-Ended Questions

Using the Turn Signal

A considerate driver always indicates an intention to turn. A good educator questions students regularly, using their answers as information about which direction to take in the material. It's best to ask questions that can't be answered with a "yes" or "no" when making such an investigation. The use of open-ended questions forces participation. If the inquiries are worded correctly, they will excite students about the subject matter.

Stories From the Road

Before embarking on a career in education, it's important to understand that the college student who studies it and the actual teacher in the classroom are in two entirely different worlds. There is a significant difference between the way Programs are conducted at the museum and the way students are taught as education majors. My last college class was Social Studies Methods. I was about to begin student teaching in the classroom. It was hoped that the course content would offer helpful tips on material style and management. Exposing college students to K-12 classrooms was not in vogue like it is today. I had a few classroom visits, and in these periods of observation I always saw students with worksheets.



About a week into my methods class, my professor outlined his ideal teaching method. He told the class that there is no need to teach the Civil War. All wars, he stated, are based on the same basic issues, and what teachers need to do is get to the crux of the overall subject by teaching a unit called "War." In one unit, he continued, you can teach WWI, WWII, Civil War, Vietnam, and all the others. Students taught in this regimen would realize that all conflicts are based on causes that include avarice, religious validations, and revenge for past transgressions. In his view, all conflicts in the history of civilization could be organized into a very few basic tenets, and this style of teaching could be applied to all subject matter in the field of history. A teacher could do another unit on poverty and cover the Great Depression, the hyper-inflation of the 1970's and 1980's, and the feudal surfs....all in one unit. Using this method, a section would have no historical facts. Source materials and specifics become mere footnotes listed at the end of the lesson. To clear up confusion, basic questions would be presented to students in order to guide them through the concepts.



The daily lesson plan had a goal and objective listed at the top of the page, followed by questions that led me from the beginning of the lesson to the end. Any articles or source materials discussed in that lesson were to be photocopied and attached. The most challenging part of the lesson was the generation of questions that would guide us from one major point to another. Our class was told that we would be spending the entire semester learning how to form these questions. Frustration began to override bewilderment.

Nonetheless, his lessons have been used everyday of my working life. I use them to discover the level of interest in a class, and I use them to find out what the students already know. Every form of methodology has some merit.

Driving With a New License

After college, every new educator learns through trial and error. (In the beginning, there seems to be a lot of error and everyday is a huge trial.) My first solo class was government, and a syllabus was designed for the class period. On the first day, one of the students asked, "What is a syllabus?" From there, things went from bad to worse, and by the time the class was done, the kids were barely awake, staring off into space, doing everything except paying attention, and the boredom in the room was palpable. I thought my content was gripping! Apparently, the kids didn't share my enthusiasm.

What teacher doesn't believe from college experience that he/she would be put in a class with students who were open vessels for education, who were yearning for instruction? Not one of my college classes ever covered the topic of discipline. That subject was reserved for elementary methods classes (more on this subject in the next chapter). Did the apathetic slap in the face from these 12th graders require scrapping the specifics and going to a themed approach? Would all the contents be reduced to a few "basket terms," as my old professor would have done? No. In fact, his approach was and is one of the most flawed ideas available. It pre-supposes that all students think the same way and understand all the basic causes of major conflicts.

The use of questions was a lifeline. The syllabus was scrapped and a new map was made out of sheer desperation. A list of trigger questions was developed. The responses to these questions would indicate how much prior knowledge the students had of a specific subject, and suggest a delivery style for the material. The old professor was right on one major point: An educator has to get to the crux of the issue. Not all people are excited about social studies or maps, they just want to know where they are going. The material had to be taught in a way that connected to the kids. Their responses to questions revealed where they were in



their studies, while also showing the tenor and make-up of the group. Ultimately, their answers suggested when it was safe to make a turn.

How to Ask For Directions

When constructing a lesson plan, always remember an eye-opening fact that supports the use of open-ended questions in the classroom. A teacher can't dwell on any one aspect of a lesson for more than 17 minutes. Studies have shown that the average person has an attention span of 12-17 minutes for a single activity. Twenty minutes will push the outer limits. When writing a lesson plan, some educators think of the "hook" first and work their way backwards. It is a good idea to draw three lines on a piece of paper and think of three or four distinctly different things to do in a single lesson. A good teacher must ensure that the students will work together on a task, or work on an activity that produces individual ownership from each child. One of the activities should be something that is hands-on or student-focused, and each transition is introduced with open-ended questions. After thinking "big picture" and brainstorming ideas, reduce the scope of the map and find the fastest route to the destination.

Adjust your approach to include specific questions and at least three transitions. The Harrison Home offers a program for fifth grade students called *The Signing*. It deals with the events leading up to the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Benjamin Harrison's great-grandfather encouraged Thomas Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence, and signed it directly below him. He was also a Chairman of the Committee of the Whole, became the President of the Second Continental Congress, and was a 16-year governor of Virginia. The "signing" program focuses on the importance of this man's life and contribution to our country, but it also looks at the events that led to the Revolutionary War.

The museum's teaching medium is a little bit different from the traditional classroom. Instructors have to synthesize an entire unit in about one hour. The teacher does not have tomorrow to finish anything. For this program, the instructor wears a period costume similar to one that would have been worn by a Virginia planter during the signing. The clothes are props to teach colonial lifestyles and dressing habits. This



one simple detail has been a most effective improvement to this program. When students walk into the room, their attention becomes immediately focused when they see the instructor in costume. The program begins with four questions.

1. Who lived in this house?
2. What made this person famous? Why are you here?
3. (The instructor walks over to the Declaration of Independence and points to it) What is the name of this document and who is the author?
4. What was the purpose of this document?

By question three, the instructor can tell if the class has been prepared before their visit to the museum, where they are in their textbooks, if their teacher likes social studies or likes this particular topic, and, in some cases, the specific textbook they are using. The instructor can also tell if they have been exposed to primary documents.

One day recently, after I had the four questions above answered in full detail, I ventured another one, asking them if they had discussed the French and Indian War. After a huge "yes" response, I told them how that world war started in a little town in Pennsylvania. George Washington was witness to the brutal murder of some French soldiers by his Native American guide, and his signing of that document was the single action that turned the incident into an international event. Then I stopped and loudly emphasized the next point: "Never, ever sign your name to a piece of paper you cannot read or do not understand." I completely changed directions to keep the kids on their toes. Next, I asked them why I would make such a suggestion. The kids all had great reasons why they should never do that. I had taken something huge and reduced it to something a 12 year-old could grasp. I then came back to my point, that the piece of paper that Washington signed was written in French and he did not fully understand the language. George Washington ended up taking ownership for an event he really had no part in starting. The kids saw the results of a small act that they could understand.

When children are learning social studies, they should be exposed to the consequences of using sound judgment. It's a very practical way to make subjective historical information connect to a student, because children are keenly aware of issues of fairness. No matter if a group has full knowledge of the French and Indian War, kids understand the crossroads of fairness. By using a simple statement, getting to the crux of the topic, and then simply asking why, a teacher can convey

a lot of information and inspire students to explore on their own. As the discussion continued about the French and Indian war, the Proclamation of 1763 (listed in detail to be covered by the Indiana Curriculum Standards) and the restrictions to westward expansion, I said, "Guess what? These American colonists hated this restriction but they still loved being British. Don't you ever forget that. So, how did we go from loving being British (pointing to the Declaration of Independence) to hating it?" From there we got into taxes, The Quartering Act, and the Sons of Liberty. A lot of content had been covered. Soon, the students were recalling information that they learned at school. From there, it was safe to continue with the material in a proper timeline.

With this group, I tried a closing point that worked very well. My wife is a fourth grade public school teacher, and she said that there has been a huge emphasis on bullying in schools. Could this lesson could be applied to one of the programs at the museum? Then it dawned on me that the Declaration of Independence reads like the greatest anti-bullying document of all time. In the program *The Signing*, I gave an analogy that depicted bullying and asked one student in the room if he/she would like living in this environment everyday, being bullied by the soldiers and the acts of the king. Then I restated my point by reading the Declaration as an anti-bullying document and gave specific examples found within the document. "If you are pushed around all of the time, life becomes miserable, no matter how much money you have." Referring to the signers at one point, the students were asked, "Why would you put your name on something and risk treason if you are one of these rich signers?" All of a sudden the kids started empathizing with people who were marginalized and bullied, and at the end of our little discussion they started looking back at their teacher. She announced to me that they had just done a mini-unit on bullying. In my 14 years of doing this program, almost every class has demonstrated a working knowledge of the greater causes that led to the Revolution. The burden of learning was on them...not me. Revelations come through a discussion which is generated by questions.

There have been times when I have gotten through all the program material with school groups that didn't discuss the material beforehand. Naturally, it is easier and more effective for the class when there is a little bit of preparation on the students' part. A new way of looking at something can then be established using leading questions, and a big intimidating "untouchable" document can become something real. In the particular example of the signing program, I took a chance at a crossroads and asked the students about something that reinforced a recent lesson. Because it is easy to "overshoot the runway" with 12 year-olds, seek and relate to their level whenever possible.

The Rearview Mirror

There is something to be gleaned from every philosophy of teaching, but it is dangerous to put an entire regimen into permanent practice. A teacher needs a good core understanding of the subject matter. A doctorate-level command of the knowledge is not necessary. Mainly, an educator needs to be comfortable about his or her level of knowledge. Good educators teach the group first, not the content. In the beginning, this realization can be frustrating, because a lot of material is going to be left out. Once again, some material will always be left out. Every individual starts learning from a different place or level of understanding. Questions, if they are crafted well, can focus the students on a particular point and get them thinking in a certain direction. If the lesson is reduced to a few major points that the teacher wants to convey, the path to achievement becomes quite exciting and liberating. One should be willing to shift material and deliver it differently for each group. Sometimes, if a class responds in a certain way, the instructor can be more kinesthetic in the delivery, rely more on visual clues and include a lot of options to address multiple intelligences. Also, while it isn't a good idea to lump all events together in the fashion of the old professor, the concept of advancing a lesson with questions, and the assertion that the right set of questions can connect students with content, are valuable keys to successful teaching.



5

ESSENTIAL FOR TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES:

Use Field Trips

One way to pass the time on a journey is to play road games. In regard to teaching history Barbara Tuchman said, “Tell stories.” Children appreciate hearing a good tale, and learning something from it, in spite of themselves. The best stories are told from first-hand experience.



Hit the Road, Jack

The following are some findings from The Lake Snell Perry Survey done in February 2001—from the American Association of Museums (AAM):

1. 87% of Americans find museums to be trustworthy. No other institution has a similar level of trust.
2. Americans of every demographic group—gender, location (rural or urban), education level, and age; believe that museums are a trustworthy source of objective information by at least 80% or more.
3. While schools continue to be viewed by Americans as first in importance in educating children, museums, along with libraries, are next in line among institutions that people believe are important educational resources.
4. Museums are trusted more than books.
5. 60% of Americans say they have visited an art museum, history museum, aquarium, zoo, botanical garden, or science and technology center within the past year.
6. The public’s trust in museums was found to be based on three themes: They present history, they are research oriented, and they deal in facts.
7. People were found to be almost evenly divided on whether museums are trustworthy because they present first-hand interaction with past events and history and/or because they offer independent and objective information.

While the material in this chapter could have been included in the Chapter Two, “Use Primary Documents,” it has a different scope and deserves a closer look. Museums are, by their very nature, friendly to the mode of a narrative. Using primary sources, museums tell a story of a particular place, person or time. Field trips to museums allow students to make contact with the tangible truth behind their studies. Their lessons are underlined by the physical movement into history, and by the relocation to a sacred space. There are few experiences that can reinforce textbook lessons more than a well-timed field trip.



Gustave Caillebotte
French, 1848-1894

Paris Street, Rainy Day
1877

Oil on Canvas
83 1/2 x 108 3/4 in.
(212.2 x 276.2 cm)

Charles H. and Mary F.S.
Worcester Collection

Stories From the Road

This 1877 painting by Gustavo Caillebotte is entitled “Paris Street, Rainy Day.” It is prominently displayed at the *Art Institute* in Chicago. A docent related a story about the way in which she approached this artifact with a school group, using a teaching method as fascinating as the piece itself. She asked the young scholars to stare at the picture and tell her what they saw. The answers were pretty familiar -- a woman, a man holding an umbrella, rain. Then she took the group to a crossroads. She prodded, and said, “Describe it. Describe for me what you see.” Nobody said anything. Then she said, “Can someone tell me what rain smells like? Has anybody tasted rain?” What followed was an intense analysis of the picture. The kids discussed the fact that this was a time before cars, a time when people burned coal and soot pollution would be heavy, and a time in which the lady and the man, by virtue of their dress, were probably wealthy.

Can a teacher do this activity with art in a classroom? Possibly, but not with the same intensity. One needs to travel. The students in the Art Institute were in a special place, surrounded by the works of masters. The consequential analysis and enjoyment of artistic genius was all but guaranteed. The physical space was a channel for intensive learning. Museums are special in that they are not only places for education, they are also places for reflection and solace, for the encouragement of life-long learning.



The President Benjamin Harrison Home is fortunate to maintain a presidential home in which nearly 80 percent of the artifacts are original to the president's family. When children visit the museum, docents and educators make a conscious

effort to connect the students with the space. One way the museum tour guides do this is to ask a child (maybe a girl) to volunteer, separate her from the group and ask her to stand with in front of the class. Then her schoolmates are asked if she can be a President of the United States. Usually, the group titters and says no. It is alarming and sad that many reply that the reason she cannot be president is because she is a girl. We then go into the basic requirements to obtain the office, and the group is told that if this child would become President of the United States, people would pay thousands of dollars to own a piece of her clothing and her home would become a museum. When we get to the back parlor of the home, the same child stands between the back and front parlors. Then the class is told that the child is standing on the exact spot where Benjamin Harrison accepted the nomination from the Republican Party on July 4, 1888.

These activities always invoke a strong response. They are not effective any place but here. Many children bring their parents back to visit after a field trip, and the parents will mention that they had no idea their child was interested in history. One student conspicuously announced to the tour group that, on an earlier visit, “she was the president.” The content became real to her, and she knew more about Benjamin Harrison than her parents did.

Overcoming Road Blocks

Educators sometimes don't view such field trips as valid learning experiences, and their reasons vary. There is a stigma that field trips are “vacations” away from the classroom. There are some who think that field trip destinations and museums peddle “fluff” or are more interested in entertaining. Since the late 1970s, American museums have increasingly made education a centerpiece to their missions. Many sites offer pre- or post-trip materials and are serious about making program content comply with state standards. Furthermore, most museums are eager to partner with schools. The field trip, sadly, is a diminishing option for a lot of public school teachers, but there is hope. Many districts have available internal monies that can be applied for by writing a grant proposal. Principals and superintendents are often aware of other creative ways to fund museum visits. Many times, educators take the initiative to raise money independently, with spectacular results. One teacher met great resistance when she asked parents to fund her class field trip schedule. The families pled poverty and refused to fund the field trips. So she got the school's permission to have a movie night in the school cafeteria. A local video store donated some movies that were appropriate for kindergarten-through-fifth grade kids, popcorn was purchased, and a flyer was sent home with the kids announcing movie night on Friday. The cost per child was between \$5 and \$7. The same parents who balked at funding field trips could not drop their kids off fast enough. It's all about priorities.

The Rearview Mirror

The mind of a child is a sponge and needs to be exposed to a variety and depth of educational experiences. Students being exposed to focused and purposeful educational programming in a sacred space are more likely to learn and retain knowledge and memories. These visits are therefore important and worthy of the time and money spent.



6

ESSENTIAL FOR TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES:

Establish Boundaries

Distinguishing the Driver from the Passenger

Traveling long distances takes a lot of discipline. One must stay alert, watch the speed limit and drive between the lines. The good news is that, once you turn these techniques into habits, they become second nature, and you can simply enjoy the drive. This section is meant to be a “basket” for things that didn’t find a home among the other chapters. It involves interpersonal recommendations that form the psychological basis of good in-class technique. True, these concepts apply to any teaching discipline, not just to social studies. But this fact alone proves their worth. Most attempts to teach children are destined to fail without them.



1. If you are an instructor in front of a group of children, it is inadvisable for children to address you by first name. Educating children is a profession that is as serious as being a doctor or a lawyer. Children should address teachers appropriately. By insisting on an appropriate title, teachers are instructing children on the basic rule of respect. The museum staff has worked with many teachers and followed countless docents who complain about student discipline. On more than one occasion, a polite group of students has become difficult, because

of a poor docent. In addition, AP classes have become very challenging to manage under the supervision of a few classroom teachers.

There was a common thread with these individuals. They gave away their first names or encouraged students to address them in a manner that reflected friendship rather than a learning relationship. An unearned familiarity developed every time, which dropped the instructor to the same level as the child. This may seem obtuse to

some readers, but equality and friendship with authority figures can make children uncomfortable on a deep level. The top reason for poor discipline is that students are unclear about boundaries. Calling teachers by their first names does not always preclude wretched behavior, but the judgment of going down that path is questionable. Teaching is hard enough; why make it harder? It is a rare child who has the maturity to address an adult by a first name and maintain proper decorum and appropriate behavior. Furthermore, children who address the teacher as “Mr., Miss, or Mrs.” help establish a culture of order. The old saying applies: Always be friendly, but remember that the teacher and student cannot be friends.



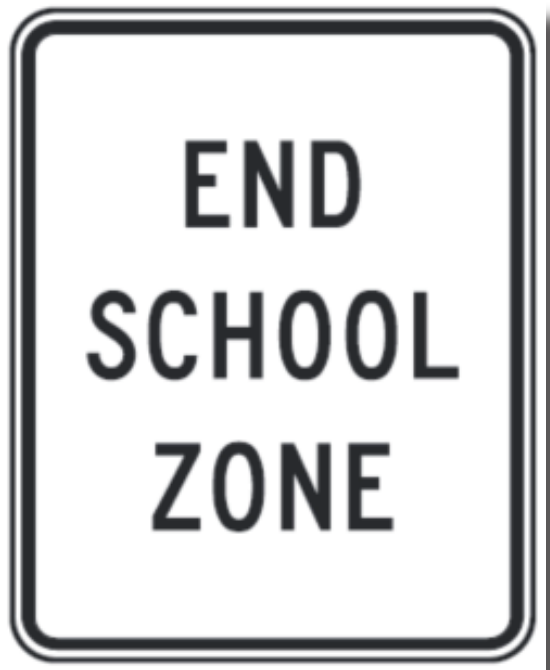
2. While you should refrain from using your first name around students, their first names can be used to establish rapport and hold the interest of the group. This practice comes into play when you ask open-ended questions: “Jason, what are your thoughts?” Everyone likes to be called by name, and students respond well to adults who can remember them. Using their first names shows an appropriate level of respect for the students that empowers them to try harder. Excitement and crossroads become a greater possibility. From there, interest builds, and learning is on the way. It’s a good habit to latch on to as many first names as possible during a program and to use them frequently.

3. Wander around the room. Be comfortable enough with your material that you are not tied to a lectern. Making a conscious effort to speak from different places in the room is an effective way to ensure that all students feel included in the task at hand.

4. Use social studies topics that highlight stories of hope. The issues that children face today are mind-boggling. Always try to accentuate empowerment. Giving the children my full attention, try to use examples that highlight the value of education. At the same time, expect them to focus, be on task, and behave. Trials and tribulations are not new. Children need to learn that people in the past did not have the easiest situations to overcome. For years, no one in the U.S. knew that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was confined to a wheelchair. Today, it would be inappropriate to omit that part of his story. Our 17th President of the United States was functionally illiterate until he was in his thirties. Information like this encourages children to understand that determination, hard work and a sense of responsibility have driven great moments in history.

Writer and historian, David McCullough, offers these insightful remarks about the study of history. The gist of his message will ring true throughout all of time, and it is nicely captured in this 1995 quote from the National Book Awards Ceremony at the Plaza Hotel in New York City:

“Indifference to history isn’t just ignorant, it’s rude. It’s a form of ingratitude. I’m convinced that history encourages, as nothing else does, a sense of proportion about life, gives us a sense of the relative scale of our own brief time on earth and how valuable that is. What history teaches it teaches by example. It inspires courage and tolerance. It encourages a sense of humor. It is an aid to navigation in perilous times.”



**END
SCHOOL
ZONE**