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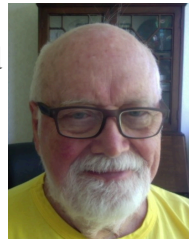
Welcome to the MLK Day Edition of the MCSS Toolbox. It is a new year and as many of my friends have noted, time does fly by. I can confirm that it does not slow down as you get older. I suddenly realized it is January and time to put together a new Toolbox. Please enjoy and **share with your colleagues.**

From the Editor-

This issue has many resources and a couple Opt-Ed articles.

- Be sure to look at MCSS announcements starting on p.2.
- Also on p.2 is an important statement from MCSS and MCHE about commitment to diversity and inclusion.
- On p.4 is an article related to the January 6th Insurrection.
- Starting on p.4 is an activity from a former student of mine dealing with gun violence.
- Teaching and the use of AI is again in this issue on p.6.
- A video contest for middle and high school students, with prizes, related to world population is on p. 8.
- Included in this issue are a few items suggesting lessons for MLK Day and Black History Month as well as for Native American History.
- Lastly, but hardly least, on p.10 is an activity from a former student of mine from Wayne State, Liz (nee) Kozek. Having taught through Covid she concludes, "ultimately, we need real classrooms, and excitement, and silliness, and human teachers. She explains why in her story.

This issue will speak to these problems, as well as other resources, in the hope that having students at the appropriate age can learn the facts and make up their own conclusions about them in healthy, open dialogues.



Are there articles you especially like, dislike or would like to see more of? Do you have ideas or opinions you think others would like to read? If any of these are true, please send them to me at pettapiece@wayne.edu. I also welcome book or movie reviews for use in a classroom or for the edification of other social studies teachers. Remember, NCSS recognizes seven disciplines and social studies is important K-16. If you have any ideas which could benefit any of these please send them to me. You may get into the Fall issue of the MCSS Toolbox and help your colleagues. Deadline is August 31, 2024.

I hope you have a successful rest of the school year.



-Bob Pettapiece

Editorial Board

Bob Pettapiece, Editor/Publisher
Jim McConnell, Contributing Editor
Cetaura Bell, Copy Editor



MICHIGAN SOCIAL STUDIES OLYMPIAD

THEME: Stand Up: Risk Takers and Change Makers

Location: All events offsite

March 8, 2024 Registration Deadline

March 31, 2024 Event Selection Deadline

April 19, 2024 Deadline for mailing offsite event
materials

After May 13, 2024 Notification of winners to
coaches will occur AFTER 5/15

Standing up for what you believe in takes courage and resilience, especially when the outcome of such actions are uncertain and if what one believes in may not be the norm of society or popular at the time. Studying history and the complexity of current issues shows us that some people or groups are risk takers and stand up under uncertainty and the fear of failure while others make the decision to not act. The theme “Stand Up! Risk Takers and Change Makers” provides students the opportunity to study historical and contemporary risk takers that have stood up for something they strongly believe in and who demanded change. Students are able to examine what motivated these change makers, what risks did they take, what were the outcomes of their decisions to stand up, and what impact did they have on society and possibly future generations?

Click for more [Details](#).

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2024 MCSS Annual Conference - Destination Democracy

May 3, 2024 8:00 AM until May 4, 2024 5:00 PM

Macomb Intermediate School District

REGISTRATION Details

They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety. - Benjamin Franklin, Pennsylvania Assembly: Reply to the Governor, November 11, 1755

As we navigate the multitude of opinions about what social studies looks like in our classrooms today, it is important to remember that putting all students first and being true to our core teacher concepts we have as educators is as important as ever.

We encourage presentation proposals for our theme *Destination: Democracy* for this year's conference to celebrate all of the hard work done by our elementary school social studies teachers as they discuss everything from developing a sense of time and chronology to laying the foundation for the development of civics by focusing on the values and principles of American democracy as Kindergarten standards state.

We want to celebrate the work done by our middle school teachers to promote a huge amount of social studies content from teaching spatial thinking by using maps and other geographical tools to acquire and process information to explaining the challenges faced by our new nation through an analysis of the

development of the Constitution as a new plan for governing.

We also want to look at how high school teachers are engaging students in everything from differentiating between the global systems of trade, migration, and political power during the age of exploration to analyzing the role of our government in the economy.

This year's conference will return to the Macomb ISD May 3-4, 2024. Our keynote speakers will be Joe Spaulding whose work on 2018's Proposal 2 regarding gerrymandering greatly affected voting and democracy in our state. We will also hear from Dr. Annie Whitlock who's research is centered on teaching elementary social studies through civic engagement, place-based inquiry, and curriculum integration at the University of Michigan Flint and now at Grand Valley State University. We will also hear from Mr. Carl Brownlee, a middle school social studies teacher at Fisher Magnet Upper Academy in the Detroit Public Schools who is the reigning Region 10 Teacher of the Year, a former U.S. Marine and a Gulf War Veteran.



Statement from MCSS and MCHE

In our commitment to diversity and inclusion, The Michigan Council for the Social Studies, and the Michigan Council for History Education, condemn the racist practices and policies that have resulted in the use of violence against members of our society, particularly members of the Black community. We are appalled by the killings and brutality. As organizations committed to social justice and racial equality, we continue to stand with our Black students, families, and educators. We will work to change the narrative about race in this nation by using our voice to make positive changes in education and our communities. We will continue to help address and eliminate racism, prejudice, and bigotry in all forms through honest dialogue and education. Informed people have the tools to engage in substantive conversation, to advocate for important policy changes, and to take informed action to foster positive changes in our communities and for future generations.



Social Studies Resources

from Scott Koenig, Social Studies Consultant, MDE

[MI Social Studies Hub](#)

As Michigan begins implementing the new social studies standards this website will be your most valuable tool for implementing the standards and the C3 Framework with fidelity.

[What Does MI Social Studies Education Look and Sound Like?](#)

Meet Kentwood, Michigan's Matthew Vriesman and learn more the Gilder Lehrman Institute's National History Teacher of the Year Award [here](#).

[MI Profile of a Graduate](#)

The skills which should be obtained through instruction that includes real world challenges, cross-content integration, relevancy to student lives, and transfer of knowledge.

[Teaching Comprehensive History](#)

"As members of a diverse state, nation, and world, school staff and students need to know our rich, complex history. These powerful webinars, along with the provided resources, encourage Michigan educators and school leaders to deepen their knowledge so they may share with their students. As searing as some of our history is, we have a responsibility to teach it all." -Dr. Michael Rice, State Superintendent

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) is hosting a webinar series in collaboration with institutions of higher education, cultural centers, and the 12 federally recognized tribes of Michigan that form the Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Departments to assist educators with the teaching of and learning about comprehensive history through thematic instruction. Related to this is the [Indigenous Education](#) website.

[#GoOpen Michigan](#) A source for open content & tools.



Teachers Wrestle With How to Discuss January 6 With Students

by Olivia Waxman (Time 1/2/24)

Tom Richey, a teacher in Anderson, South Carolina, is hesitant to call the **Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol** an insurrection when he's in his classroom.

"If a teacher were to come into a mostly Republican community talking about the January 6 insurrection, that's a politically charged term," Richey says, despite the fact that the 2023 report by the bipartisan House Select Committee charged with investigating the violence refers to it as such. "I don't approve of anything that happened on January 6, but I think for a teacher to use a term like **insurrection** in a classroom setting would be unnecessarily partisan and inappropriate."

Richey is far from the only teacher wrestling with how to discuss Jan. 6 with students as the country approaches the third anniversary of the attack. Because there is no standardized history curriculum in the United States, there is no nationally required curriculum on Jan. 6. Teachers have to figure out how to link it to what they're already teaching, whether as part of planned lessons on how the Electoral College works, different forms of protest, or post-Civil War era violence, or devote a class period to talking about it. See the [complete article](#).



Thinking about school shootings

by William Boyer (1/6/14) [Edited]

As an admittedly idealistic educator, who began a full-time teaching career in a public high school only a few months before the April 20, 1999 Columbine High School massacre, I am still not used to the new abnormal of trying to navigate reported gun violence.

As we continue our planned responses in case of such terrifying emergencies, most of us still do not expect such disasters, even after the national spike in serious school aggression since returning from the Covid-19 lockdown.

In my metro region, the Oxford High School Shooting (11-30-2021), only 40 miles north of Detroit and the Michigan State University Shooting (2-13-2023), about 90 miles from my high school, forced some more recent examples where students — and staff — demanded at least some kind of discussion on how to process such tragedies.

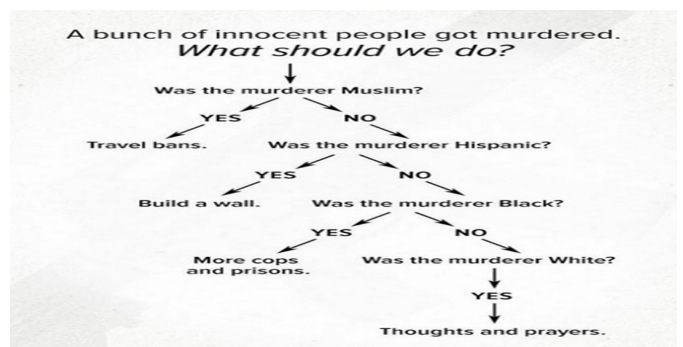
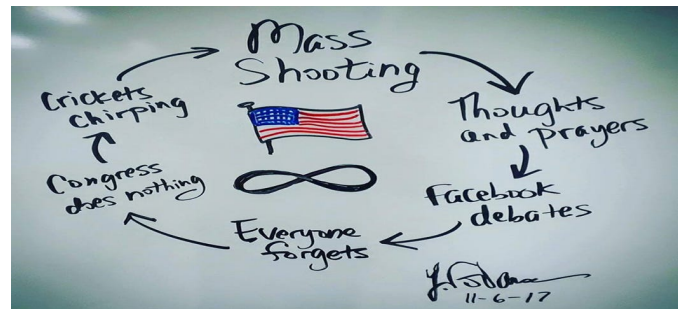
Last year's MSU catastrophe disrupted a frequently simplistic narrative; that school shooters were always sociopathic young white males — and by implication, not quite as relevant to our 98% Black demographic. Yet the reports of a random 43 year-old African American gunman bewildered some once dismissive teenagers in each of my social studies classes.

A few students did mention shocked brothers, sisters and other relatives attending MSU at the time.

While many inquiries remain unanswered, as a teaching tool, the open-ended questions tend to lead better with a more evocative, empathetic and yes, necessary dialogue — those teachable moments often treasured by social studies educators with current events in particular.

To help explore these "courageous conversations," the prompts below might aid secondary school teachers at a loss for trying to facilitate such an important follow-up.

They also give the more reticent students a chance to express themselves in writing.



Try answer the current events questions using complete sentences as you express your view.

1. What do you believe is the message of these two memes regarding the recent increase in mass shootings across the United States?
2. Do you agree or disagree with what these authors are trying to say? Why?

3. What, if anything, can lawmakers do about gun violence? Could any law help? Explain your answer. Include how your response relates to the Second Amendment of the Constitution (*A well regulated Militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.*)

In an annual legislative branch project-based simulation requires students to create their own bill, suggested from a long list of possible topics. After drafting their proposed law, they enter it in a joint session of their mock congress, with a floor debate leading to an eventual roll call vote of yay, nay or abstain, before the teacher (ah, that's me) acting as governor or president, vetoes or signs any passed student bill into law.

Sometimes, I veto bills on an important technicality or because they are unfunded mandates, yet classes could also override my veto with a 2/3 majority.

It's always an enlightening exercise giving students the (typically eager) opportunity to better internalize these basic elements of a representative assembly, instead of traditional drill-and-kill worksheet memorization.

While I've enjoyed this simple civics project for over 20 years, this semester revealed the most student-created attempts at various mock gun control legislation. Most of the bills did not pass in spirited debate, except for the basic reform of changing the national legal age to own, purchase and use firearms without licensed supervision (usually to 21, although one class tried to pass a bill making the legal age 24).

I do not urge them to take any certain position, only how to develop a voice to be heard.

Clearly, such bills do not suggest a panacea for reducing mass gun violence.

They do hint at a student body more determined to speak up, perhaps more motivated to try out something in the name of an ever elusive peace, from a reoccurring, dissonant echo, now emanating from a grieving district in Iowa. . . .

William Boyer is a veteran social studies teacher in Detroit. You may read more of his work at williamrboyer@substack.com.



A Way Forward in Civics Education

by Lee Trepanier (Ford Forum, 6/8/23)

The so-called school wars show no signs of cooling off, even while the schools receive failing grades in civics education. Our author suggests a way we can simultaneously improve civics education and lower the heat. [Read More](#)



Best Free Martin Luther King Jr. Lessons and Activities

By Diana Restifo

These free lessons and activities provide a wide range of approaches to teaching about Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day commemorates the birth of one of the greatest civil rights warriors of the 20th century. Although King was an American who focused on segregation and inequality in the U.S., his impact was global.

Decades after his death, King's nonviolent struggle for equality and justice remains highly relevant to today's students and teachers. The free lessons and activities below provide a wide range of approaches to teaching about King, from a simple word search for younger learners to thought-provoking, in-depth lesson plans for middle and high school students. [More here.](#)

[Editor's Note: These may be also good for February, Black History Month.]

Michigan
Council for the
Social Studies



Vision Statements, an Editorial

by Bob Pettapiece

A new North Star by Jon Saphier in the November 27, 2023 [Kappan](#) calls for . . . A vision statement that helps districts create lasting school reform, but it must direct plans and focus that allow schools to accomplish their goals. I suggest you read it and consider a few things. . .

Besides considering who is involved in the process (everyone?), ask who makes the final version decision. I was on my high school all faculty team many years ago to develop a new curriculum (a form of mission statement). We worked long and hard and came to consensus on many issues including algebra for 9th grade students. While it was important to offer the subject, we also recognized many students were not ready at that age for algebra. The committee decided to make it an elective for 9th graders. The assistant principal made the decision to make algebra mandatory, thus condemning many unready students to failing the class. The committee was very disheartened to have their work overturned by the AP.

As for vision statements which look to the future from the present, some research is in order. If a goal is have students be prepared for life after high school (or elementary or middle school) then some former students should be questioned about how ready they were in their next phase of life after their schooling experience. They should be asked what should be added or perhaps omitted from the curriculum. It is also advisable to read about what other similar schools are doing.

I am on a board of national organization which has developed a new vision statement. I has been a long and somewhat time consuming process involving **everyone** and it also includes reviewing it every year for the next five years.

Bottom line, if a school or a school system is going to develop a vision statement, realize it is going to be hard work, but the rewards can be great.



6 Ways to Boost Student Agency

By Erik Ofgang

Advice for boosting student agency from award-winning educator Dr. Krista Herrera

"I really believe it's our job to help prepare students to advocate for themselves and to be able to solve the problems of our communities," says the

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction at Santa Maria Joint Union High School District in California. "I'm a high school administrator. So our students are going to take over the roles of running our community in the next 10 to 20 years." [Read the article.](#)



Taking Notes vs. Photographing Slides

From Tech & Learning (12/18/23)

New research has found that students who take notes outperform students who photograph slides during an online lecture. "We consistently found that note-takers remembered more information from the lectures than photo-takers or no-note-takers," says Dr. Sarah Shi Hui Wong, an instructor at the National University of Singapore, and the lead author of the paper. "In fact, photo-takers performed just as poorly on the test as their peers who didn't take any notes at all."



American Women Quarters™ Honoree Posters

Celebrate the women featured in the American Women Quarters Program!

2022 Series

The first five women to be honored on coins issued under the American Women Quarters™ Program are Maya Angelou, world-renowned poet and scholar; Wilma Mankiller, the first female Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation and an activist for Native American and women's rights; Adelina Otero-Warren, a leader in New Mexico's suffrage movement and the first female superintendent of Santa Fe public schools; Dr. Sally Ride, the first American woman in space and first acknowledged gay astronaut; and Anna May Wong, the first Chinese American film star in Hollywood, achieving international success despite racism and discrimination, will be the first distinguished American women celebrated on the reverse of the program's circulating quarters. Download classroom-ready posters at links below.

- [Maya Angelou Classroom Poster \(11x17 in\)](#) | [Maya Angelou Classroom Poster \(24x36 in\)](#)
- [Sally Ride Classroom Poster \(11x17 in\)](#) | [Sally Ride Classroom Poster \(24x36 in\)](#)
- [Wilma Mankiller Classroom Poster \(11x17 in\)](#) | [Wilma Mankiller Classroom Poster \(24x36 in\)](#)
- [Nina Otero-Warren Classroom Poster \(11x17 in\)](#) | [Nina Otero-Warren Classroom Poster \(24x36 in\)](#)
- [Anna May Wong Classroom Poster \(11x17 in\)](#) | [Anna May Wong Classroom Poster \(24x36 in\)](#)



Educators: Include Native perspectives year-round

from Tech & Learning (12/11/23)

Educators should move beyond a November focus on Native American culture by integrating Native voices and perspectives into instruction throughout the school year, write Jerad Koepp, a specialist in the North Thurston Native Studies Program in the North Thurston Public Schools in Washington state, and Alison McCartan, a high-school social studies educator in the same district. They advocate in this commentary for understanding and learning about local tribal histories, building relationships with Native communities and incorporating Native voices and perspectives into curriculum development.



Researchers consider effect of mandatory civics tests

Penn State researchers Jilli Jung and Maithreyi Gopalan in this interview discuss the assumption that state-mandated civics tests, specifically the Civic Education Initiative adopted by 18 states, increase voter turnout among 18 to 24 year olds. Their research reveals that the mere knowledge of civic facts fails to motivate first-time voters, and they suggest activities such as mock elections to further engage students in the political process as well as giving students specific information about voter registration and voting. **Full Story:** [WPSU \(University Park, Pa.\)](#)

NCSS Conference addresses how schools treat social studies

From NCSS SmartBrief (12/8/23)

Social studies is treated like an afterthought in the country's classrooms, even amid controversies, says Lawrence Paska, executive director of the National Council for the Social Studies, who notes that the subject is completely neglected in some places. The recent annual NCSS conference in Nashville, Tenn., also addressed the increasing politicization of the social studies, explored ways for educators to navigate restrictive state laws and emphasized the importance of inquiry-based learning. Full Story in [The Hechinger Report](#).



Indian museum offers resources for history lessons

An online resource from the National Museum of the American Indian is available to teachers to provide accurate information about Native American history and culture for classroom instruction. In this article, Maria Marable-Bunch, the associate director for museum learning and programs at the Smithsonian site in Washington, D.C., writes that the resource includes lesson plans, student activities, videos and documents that are intended to transform teaching and learning about Native peoples and shine light on contemporary culture. Full Story: [SmartBrief/Education](#)

According to the news, the world Population as of January 1st is now at 8,000,000,000, Eight Billion!

Population Education ([PopEd](#)) provides K-12 teachers with innovative, hands-on lesson plans and professional development to teach about human population growth and its effects on the environment and human well-being. As the only national program for teachers that focuses on human population issues, PopEd fills an important need within U.S. classrooms.

With an emphasis on interactive learning and balanced discussion of different viewpoints, our program has earned a reputation for educational excellence. All Population Education curriculum materials are classroom-tested, rigorously evaluated, and frequently updated to be leaders in their content and approach. They are interdisciplinary, well-suited for a cooperative learning environment, and classroom-ready. All of the materials are matched to current national and state academic standards and frameworks.



Watch how coins evolved in colonial and early America. [Video <4 min.] More [lessons](#) from the U.S. Mint.



Resources to Broaden Diversity and Representation in the High School Psychology Curriculum

Research summaries, psychologist profiles, guiding questions, and other resources are provided for teachers and aligned to APA's National Standards for High School Psychology Curricula. [Start here.](#)



[A guide to help students decode media like text](#)

Teachers can use images, videos and memes -- things that most students already see on a daily basis -- in the classroom to teach students how to analyze

media, writes Darcy Bakkegard, an educator and author. In this article, Bakkegard shares resources to help students learn real-world skills through the decoding of multimedia elements as text as well as examining the tools and techniques used to produce images and video. Full Story: [Edutopia](#)



[Enhancing Education: The Power of Active Learning Classrooms](#)

Encouraging the use of an active learning classroom is a focus of John Kerrigan, Director of Curriculum & Instruction at Middletown Township Public Schools in New Jersey. His version features an alternative classroom arrangement with wall-to-wall whiteboards, collaborative seating, and the teacher's desk in the middle of the room. "This type of classroom promotes a 'guide on the side' approach to teaching and learning, making the instructor one with the students rather than the sole dispenser of information in front of the room," says Kerrigan. Full Story: [Tech & Learning](#)



[Idaho educator takes history lessons into community](#)

Chris Lund, a social studies teacher at Wallace Junior Senior High School in Idaho, is providing a closer look at local history in an elective that has students going outside the classroom. The ninth-graders have gone on a walking tour of historic homes, interviewed local residents and examined historical records as they sharpen their research and observation skills. Full Story: [Shoshone News Press \(Osburn, Idaho\)](#)



[Educators share ideas for engaging students in civics](#)

Educators gathered at the American Civics Education and Literacy Initiative Civics Education Summit at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown shared some of the ways they are engaging students in civics lessons. Ideas included holding a Supreme Court Showdown where students debate the most important Supreme Court case, creating a tournament similar to March Madness brackets to determine the most influential social activist, or having students write bills pertaining to change at their school to follow the process of Congress. Full Story: [The Tribune-Democrat \(Johnstown, Pa.\)](#)

Two educators use costumes to tell stories of history

Dressing up as historical figures can help students understand more about history and current events, such as wearing a lab coat to represent a scientist, say Jazzi Goode, a North Carolina elementary- and middle-school educator, and Tracey-Ann Lafayette, a Connecticut third-grade teacher. The pair offer advice to peers who may be considering using costumes in class, including how to keep costs low and to use caution when it comes to depicting a historical person's culture. Full Story: [KQED-TV/FM](#)

[Editor's Note: This can also be used as a living museum where students in costume stand around a big room (gym?) in costume and tell brief history as visitors push a button by them.]



How to discuss the war in the Middle East from ChalkBeat

My students asked if I was 'Team Israeli' or 'Team Palestinian.' Here's what Sari Beth Rosenberg said.

I understand why many teachers are afraid to bring up the Israel-Hamas war. I, too, was afraid.

[Continued . . .](#)

[Editor's Note: One of the core issues in this war is the problem for Israel is Hamas, not Palestinians.]



My Student Was Submitting AI Papers. Here's What I Did

by Erik Ofgang

"Over the summer it finally happened to me: While reading a student essay in an introductory online college course at one of the universities at which I teach, I began to suspect not only that this student hadn't written it but that no human mind had. In other words, it was the work of AI," writes Erik Ofgang, Tech & Learning Senior Writer and higher ed instructor. "Like many educators across the globe, I was thrust into a brave new world of modern teaching that I had not been trained for and to which an appropriate response was unclear." Full Story: [Tech & Learning](#)



Why Public Schools Must Bolster Civics Instruction

By ignoring the discussion of democracy are we dooming it?

By Raymond Sanchez, Education Week September 28, 2023

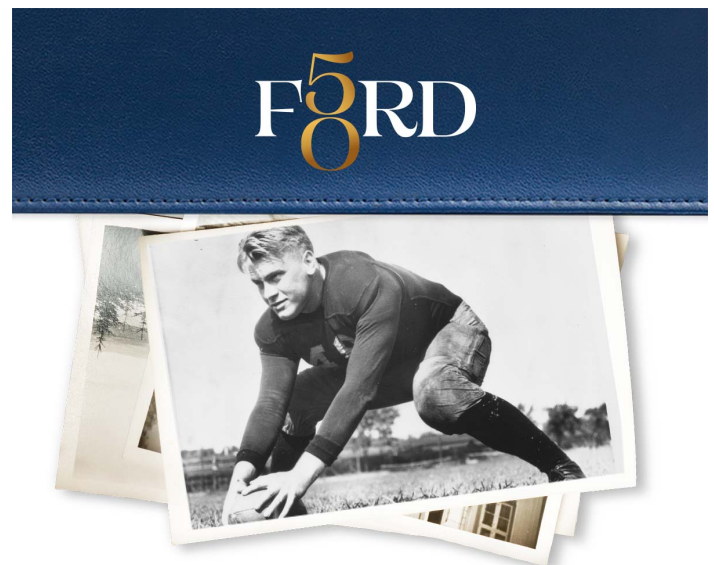
The practice of democracy requires a citizenry that is educated and engaged. It acknowledges respectful disagreement as a form of collaboration that leads to better, more informed outcomes. To be high functioning, it demands broad participation, with the clear understanding that it is the voters who control their destiny, not those who are elected to represent them.

But of late, the active disenfranchisement of voters—especially our youngest participants—has stressed our democracy in deeply negative ways:

[Read the rest of the article. . .](#)



The student editors of the Walt Whitman Journal of Psychology are resurrecting the print version of the journal. They invite any interested TOPSS members or friends to subscribe to the print edition. Print copies are free and can be requested at www.wwjop.org.



This year may be a good year to visit the Gerald Ford Museum in Grand Rapids. From MVP to VP to President, 50 years.

[Details](#)

This collection of artifacts and stories chronicles the history and importance of the nation's second in command, and interweaves Ford's own journey to the office. Visit the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum to experience it today!

Free Curriculum to Download

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation offers free, downloadable **African American History curriculum** for grades 3 through 12. Each unit is broken into themes and includes lesson plans, strategies for teaching as well as student handouts. Visit [HERE](#) to download.



How to use games to enhance civic education

Educators can turn games into effective teaching tools to enrich civic education, writes Michelle Blanchet, an education consultant and former teacher. Blanchet writes that games can enable students to explore concepts like fairness, respect and government intricacies while fostering skills such as self-regulation, and creating opportunities for immersive and skill-building learning experiences. Full Story at [Edutopia](#).



World of 8 Billion Student Video Contest Is Open

The *World of 8 Billion* student video contest is back! To participate, students create videos to share their ideas on how to tackle global problems related to population growth. For the 2023-2024 school year, students can choose to address any of three new topics relating to population: Climate Migration, Health, and Invasive Species. Winners will receive prizes up to \$1,200. All entries must be uploaded by 11:59 PM EST on Tuesday, March 5, 2024.

[Learn more about the contest](#)



Migration Stories

Lesson Plan (9-12)

In small groups, students take on the role of real-world migrants and take turns in the “hot seat” to answer questions about their unique journey. [Get the free lesson plan](#)



A Pandemic Field Trip

By **Liz Hutchinson** [This example took place during the start of Covid (2020) while students were online at home, teachers were in their building.]

While I happen to be a high school English teacher, but any educator who got through the pandemic can describe how hard it was to adapt our lessons, or cajole students into participating, or just break up the darn monotony of teaching to a screenful of blank boxes (audio only) where faces should have been, but usually were not seen.

For me, the worst part about it was not being with the kids. Interacting with them, getting to know them, watching them grow. Though for their part it's probably the time they get to socialize with friends before being jammed into another chair for another hour in another room. Wash, rinse, repeat.

I realized a few weeks into the already-faltering experiment that most of my students were 10th graders who had never been inside our 10-12th grade building. So, feeling like the guru of technology because I could smoothly switch between the camera on my desktop to the one on my tablet, I decided to take the show on the road and go on a *field trip*. Untethered from my desk we became tourists, explorers. In my room the kids saw my collection of Funko Pop figures, the disco ball hanging above the desks, the walls of painted handprints from my seniors dating back to 2005, the student bathrooms, but most importantly: the mythical teachers' lounge.

I concocted a story about how they couldn't let anyone know I let them see it, as though we were an elite team of special forces on a covert mission. And suddenly, the blank video boxes came alive and the microphones switched on as they asked me to zoom in, or explain some of its oddities, like why he have three different microwaves. And that was the chance I'd been waiting for, the mother of all secrets. Whispering that it was a violation of my sacred oath as a teacher, I slowly opened the door and revealed what must be the most repulsive, food encrusted interior in the history of microwaves. A chorus of *eww!* and *disgusting!* ensued as I cut away and took us out to the hallway.

One period, in an exceptional fluke of timing, the principal was outside just as we exited the lounge. The microphones began shouting commands to RUN. And so I did, the camera depicting my getaway in a cinematic moment worthy of Sam Rami as we fled back to the classroom.

That day we shared a moment of connection, and laughter, and *normal* that had been missing going back to, well, March 13th, one that I never successfully recreated, though we did sometimes do show and tells and mini talent spotlights featuring guitar solos, dog tricks, artwork, comedy acts, and others only qualifying as talent by pandemic definition. But on the final day of that school year, when my last class was about to end, the blank boxes on my screen lighted up with the faces we'd been deprived of for 40 weeks. Nearly every student shared a memory from our time together, and universally, those memories connected back to our field trip.

That is why, ultimately, we need real classrooms, and excitement, and silliness, and human teachers. Those kids didn't recount a lesson I taught, or a story we read, but they did remember how it felt to laugh, connect, to have an inside joke. In turn, I experienced one of the most validating moments in my 23 years of teaching, during what was certainly its most discouraging, and was reminded that what we do matters – we matter.

[Editor's Note: Aside from teaching during the pandemic, this may be a foundation for an in-house field trip for first year students, at any school.]

Liz Hutchinson is an English teacher at Chippewa Valley High School.



