Today’s public schools are as diverse as ever. Students enter the classroom with a broad and complex range of skills and struggles, diligence, and distractions. Into this rich and challenging mix stands the teacher who is charged with creating relevant and engaging learning opportunities for all students.

Though creating such opportunities is important, it may be doubly so for students who are gifted. Curious by nature, students who are gifted often seek to scratch below the proverbial surface to unearth new insights and understandings of the content at hand. In this article, we illustrate how social studies classrooms premised on inquiry and creativity can support and enhance the inquisitive nature of students who are gifted.

Defining Students Who Are Gifted

The National Association for Gifted Children (2010) estimates that up to 10% of K-12 students are academically gifted. While there is no universal exemplar of students who are gifted, such students differ in cognitive and language abilities; interests; learning preferences; motivation; personality; and general behavior. Given the unique learning interests and abilities, how can these characteristics be both evidenced and utilized in an exemplary social studies classroom?

The Inquiry-Based Social Studies Classroom

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2010) states that, “The aim of social studies is the promotion of civic competence—the knowledge, intellectual processes, and democratic dispositions required of students to be active and engaged participants in public life” (p. 9). To become civically competent, students must possess a foundational knowledge of one’s community, nation, and world. Students must be curious and inquiring. They must be able to gather and evaluate sources, collaborate, make sound evidence-based decisions, and employ problem-solving strategies to grapple with the complexities inherent in social studies (NCSS, 2010).

In 2013, NCSS published College, Career & Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. The purpose of the C3 Framework is to provide cognitive and application-based suggestions as to how students should learn, represent, and apply social studies content. The C3 Frame...
from the EDITOR

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A Social Perspective

History, as a subject, provides a venue to peer into the past, where we can hopefully learn from what has come before in the hopes of imagining and creating a better future. The knowledge and wisdom of those that have come before us is ingrained and recorded in the markers of our collective cultures and relayed during school in a variety of subject areas.

Typically, the fields of history, literature, philosophy, religion, anthropology, and law are presented in school as the Social Sciences or Social Studies, which also includes the humanities. The varied nature of the subject matter, coupled with the fact that it involves the products of human activity and interaction, demands that educators do more than assign textbook reading, comprehension questions, memorization of dates, and recitation of facts. In 2013, the National Council for the Social Studies released College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History in an effort to foster the development of responsible, informed, and engaged citizens. Given the impressive nature and advanced level thinking presented in the framework, one could say that Social Studies education has had a mini-revolution.

This special issue of Teaching for High Potential was conceived and organized by M. Gail Hickey, professor in the Educational Studies Department at Indiana University-Purdue University. She sought to include columns and articles that provide a fresh look at the subject of Social Studies by offering suggestions about how students should be introduced to, taught, and inquire about the field. I am grateful for her dedication to the issue and the publication. Now, let’s look at the contents.

In Inquiry-Based Learning for Gifted Students in the Social Studies Classroom, Timothy Lintner and Arlene Puryear use the C3 framework to create social studies classrooms where the focus is on inquiry and creativity. Mary Haas’s Promoting Citizenship Development through Biographies also uses the C3 framework to develop classroom environments that value and promote democratic citizenship by looking at the personal interests of historical leaders. In Dramatic Social Studies Monologues that Stir the Gifted Soul, Thomas Turner and Jeremiah Clabough present monologue techniques intended to excite and inspire students of history. Scientifically Speaking introduces GIS systems as a way to understand and interpret the social differences and issues of the day. The Curriculum Corner suggests that by integrating social studies and world languages, educators can develop a greater pool of linguistically talented and socially aware students. In A Secondary Look, educators are urged to have their students consider historical perspectives through a changing human lens. We take another look at understanding shared life experiences through reading biographies in Heart to Heart. The Primary Place introduces text coding as a metacognitive strategy, Buried Under Books presents pointers for securing a lifetime of reading and The Digital Ecosystem uses the upcoming election season as a backdrop to develop civically engaged students.

In order to develop citizens capable of managing the changes that are in store for the future, analysis of the collective human experience can be found by looking to the themes, attitudes, and creative works of our culture. Exposure, discussion, and understanding begins in the classroom. I hope you enjoy this issue. As always, I welcome your comments, suggestions, and ideas.
STEM and Human Rights for Student “AWhere ness” through GIS

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) were once an expensive rarity for schools, but now are as common as smart phones and tablets and provide a way to bridge STEM with the social sciences. Pairing geography and GIS is a great way to challenge students spatially; spatial ability is a key facet to develop in students for future success in STEM fields (Coxon, 2013). Studying current human rights and social justice issues while utilizing GIS in the social studies classroom can be quite engaging. Howard (2004) called this increased awareness of the world through geography “aWhere ness.”

GIS is used by groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to document human rights abuses in real time. Officers of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights have even trained on GIS. Satellite images are used to monitor and document issues ranging from faraway conflict zones and refugee camps to nearby inner city blight and water pollution monitoring.

Using GIS is also an engaging way for students to learn about geography. Americans seem to suffer from especially high rates of geographic ignorance. For example, a National Geographic Society survey revealed that about 85% of young Americans could not find Afghanistan and Iraq on a map (Howard, 2004). Such ignorance may lead to a lower level of student interest and empathy for the rest of the world. Dealing with social justice issues also fits the needs of gifted students for complexity and real-world learning.

So, how do you get started using GIS in your classroom? GIS Lounge (www.gislounge.com) is a useful resource that offers software suggestions for phones, tablets, and computers. They also offer free MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) that teachers and students, aged 13 years and older, can take part in to learn about using GIS.

There are many different software apps for GIS. One particularly useful app is ArcGIS (www.arcgis.com). It provides access to readymade maps and also allows users to create and share interactive maps. Students can create maps with popups such as charts and webpages. Maps can be easily shared between users, on the web, and in presentations.

GIS also lends itself to project-based learning. Teachers can offer a wealth of choice in projects using GIS while ensuring that they meet standards from writing to world geography. While students can work alone, projects with GIS lend themselves especially well to small-group work, with teams of students working on different aspects of a large issue.

For example, in a large project about the Middle East, some students might choose to create a map of refugee camps around Syria while others might map water resources available to Palestinians cut off by the Israeli wall. A culminating set of presentations to parents or other classes with a hard deadline gives students especially strong encouragement for excellence and task commitment. Moreover, the products can be published online for a wider audience. Such projects are especially applicable to secondary students, but can be scaled down for younger students.

When using new technologies, teachers are often afraid because they do not know everything about the technology. I have found the following method very workable when introducing a new technology. Take some time to play and learn the basics before introducing the technology. Try creating a sample product of the work you will be asking of your students. Begin by teaching those basics to your students and show them where to find more information (many apps offer tutorials and more information online). Then, provide them some time to “play”. As they begin to work on their projects, they will need to problem solve issues that come up. When a student or small group figures out something new, make them the class expert on that aspect. Not only do you not need to know everything, your students will become better problem solvers and develop the most important expertise of all: the capacity for self-directed learning.

GIS allows teachers to incorporate aspects of STEM, geography, and human rights in engaging projects. Such work can help develop student spatial ability, geographic knowledge, and self-directed learning. Ultimately, your students will be more “aWhere” of their world!
The integration of social studies and language arts curriculum content has been a longstanding interdisciplinary collaboration among school teachers and curriculum writers. The rationale reflects the historic wisdom in preparing students with an interdisciplinary liberal arts curriculum. Since the turn of the 21st century, a shift in the American economy has seen a decrease in manufacturing employment and an increase in service employment that calls upon a variety of skills and abilities to work with a wide range of individuals. To counter this, students should be instructed on how to use motivation and responsibility to direct and manage their lives, or what is known as “civic competence.” (NCSS, 2010)

There is a shortage of research focused specifically on social studies and gifted learners (Hockett, 2008) and available research reflects a lack of differentiation for high-ability students in that gifted students are typically heterogeneously grouped for social studies instruction and exposed to a limited range of instructional strategies and types of materials. The most common approaches used in teaching social studies content have been found to include listening to lectures, reading the textbook, answering questions, and defining vocabulary (Hockett, 2008). And, contrary to research-based and theoretical advice encouraging the use of a concept-based curricular framework for developing gifted students’ historical understanding, social studies curriculum is often organized chronologically or topically. But, this is inadequate as students with advanced abilities need advanced learning challenges that include exposure to advanced content, which includes sophisticated texts such as reading and analyzing primary and secondary source documents and problem-based learning opportunities. Professional social scientists use a variety of skills in their work; spotting and developing talent in social studies subject areas calls for curriculum that reflects the nature of what experts in the field do. The ability to speak fluently in a foreign language and understand another culture in diverse contexts will increase educational and professional opportunities for talented students. As Stevens and Marsh (2005) pointed out:

The learning of a foreign language exposes individuals to a range of new experiences. It touches not only upon social interaction, but also personal development and creative exploration, as well as intellectual and skills development. At its best, language learning opens up new worlds to learners within which self-discovery is a positive consequence. Individuals develop skills and acquire new dimensions of social interaction which, even at their simplest, open up new areas of communicative potential (p. 113).

In the assessment rush for proficiency in reading and mathematics, talented students have limited time to learn social studies and foreign languages (Hockett, 2008; MacFarlane, 2012). By expanding the social studies curricular focus to integrate world language study with a range of language options, gifted students will have a more challenging learning opportunity and can develop advanced language syntax and usage skills as well as deeper societal understandings at the heart of

Table 1. Extension materials with cognitive purpose for second language learning displays and bulletin board visuals (adapted from MacFarlane, 2010).

- Visual aids (to build knowledge and understanding)
- Charts and tables with advanced grammatical content for enhanced student comprehension
- World language-related humor specific to the social sciences, including posters with jokes and cartoons to illustrate multiple perspectives
- Quotes by historical or contemporary individuals to inspire students into action
- Current articles from journals, newspapers, and magazines in world languages to connect the study of world languages to everyday life
- Political spectrum topics for illustrating multiple perspectives
- Examples of professionals in social science careers using world language skills and “What would you do?” prompts to stimulate student reflection and discussion
- Objectives and rubrics to inform students of learning goals and criteria for submitted work
- Displays of student work products in world languages to recognize student growth and accomplishment
social studies educational goals and learning objectives. Table 1 suggests purposeful materials for extending social studies curriculum with world language bulletin board displays.

By integrating world language study into social studies curriculum, the field of gifted education will be on the forefront of moving toward the goal of developing and supporting a greater pool of fluent, linguistically talented social scientists. THP

References
Experts suggest various strategies to promote individual awareness of citizenship development, such as working with a guest mentor, shadowing role models, going to work with a parent, and becoming an intern. Other experts propose students learn by gathering and recording historical knowledge through interviews or working for political or social causes. While these strategies may show limited success, more is needed. This article explores how using digital resources related to biographies can help teachers turn their classrooms into environments that value and promote democratic citizenship.

Traditionally, teachers of the gifted have approached social studies curriculum from a textbook-based approach. Textbooks generally teach about citizenship through sharing anecdotes about “outstanding citizens” whose leadership provided significant contributions to our nation. The NCSS curriculum standards (2010) shift the focus from reading social studies textbooks and answering questions about content to an applied focus on 21st century skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. An emphasis on critical thinking supports the building of citizenship skills as well as thinking skills. However, a psycho-social perspective, such as that advocated by Eric Erikson (1980), also must be emphasized if learners are going to be able to develop into participating citizens. Erikson’s perspective focuses on the development of personal values and traits that people need to accept themselves and others. Developing this combination of skills calls for teachers to include a range of experiences and perspectives on life in social studies instruction—not just deeds that define a person as famous.

All effective teachers of the gifted want to create a classroom that encourages individual accomplishments, self-direction, and personal identity among their students; such a classroom setting is particularly important with the social studies curriculum, since social studies is the academic discipline that has the primary responsibility for examining and promoting citizenship. Using digital resources to teach social studies concepts provides students with a greater access to “model citizens” than traditional textbooks, offering opportunities to examine a larger number of careers and occupations gleaned from the biographies accessed.

The Non-Public Lives of Historical Figures
Let us now explore excerpts from the biographies of several historical figures and examine suggestions for helping gifted students develop into participatory citizens while expanding and supplementing their studies of these U.S. citizens’ lives.

Collectors
Introducing consideration of personal use of time, such as collecting or practicing a hobby, into biographical studies raises new questions about historical figures and their times. Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Theodore Roosevelt were known as collectors. The video, “The Stamp Collector in Chief” (www.smithsonianmag.com/video/The-Stamp-Collector-in-Chief.html), explains how stamp collecting played an important role in the life of FDR and programs he developed to answer challenges during his stressful political career. In systematically examining stamps, students do something that this busy and famous president did in order to understand the history, culture, and characteristics of places and nations. By observing the images on stamps, students encounter information clearly related to the NCSS Standards of People, Places, and Environments and Time, Continuity, and Change. Website resources at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Postal Museum and the U.S. Postal Service provide information and projects for teaching about stamps.

Although stamps have a larger variety of designs, coins have a much longer history. Examining the changes in the appearances and production of both coins and stamps, the NCSS theme of Science, Technology, and Society can be analyzed and evaluated. Production, Distribution, and Consumption, another NCSS theme, is also related to the greater need for coins and money in meeting the needs of societies throughout the world.

In lessons related to collections and hobbies, students use skills associated with Dimension 3 (Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence) of the NCSS C3 Framework and arc of inquiry. Students identify and classify stamps and coins based on historical/cultural symbols, habitats, and natural landscapes of places, and products produced. In
examining the production process of special coins and stamps, more questions associated with political decisions of whom and what to memorialize or honor are evaluated. Examining the right to request the issuing of new stamps and coins reveals changes in cultures and policies over time and among nations.

**Naturalists**

Theodore Roosevelt was noted as an energetic outdoorsman and environmentalist. Theodore began hunting and collecting animal species at the age of 9. Studying animals has changed greatly since the days when shooting and stuffing were the standard practices. As a youth, Theodore spent so much time collecting and preserving birds and animals that people complained that he smelled of the process. As president, Roosevelt signed the bill establishing the Smithsonian Natural History Museum. In 1909, after his presidency, he went on an expedition to Africa shooting and collecting animals. Even today the public can view and learn from his collection at the Natural History Museum in D.C. or online at www.mnh.si.edu/onehundredyears/profiles/TR_profile.html.

Unlike Theodore Roosevelt, today’s students have access to video presentations recorded by cameras with special lenses and protective devices to learn more about the lives and habits of species. In examining the changes technology has made in studying animals and their habitats, students gain new perspectives about the relationships between science, technology, and society; and perhaps a new understanding of the fascination people have with adventures and nature. As well as bringing enjoyment, the arts have a long history of recording and commenting on life. Nature films are a form of art, often using music when communicating the story. In learning to separate truth from creativity and imagination, the artist’s perspective needs to be considered in interpreting data in social studies class and in life.

In today’s digital world it is very easy for students to become detached from the stimulating environment of the outdoors, replacing it with virtual environments. Simulated environments cannot replace the genuine questions, puzzles, and surprises that the real world offers to stimulate discovery, analysis, and sharing through cooperative efforts.

Youthful outdoor interests prompt many individuals to study science. Famous scientists with youthful interests in the outdoors include Mae C. Jemison, Sally Ride, Ben Franklin, Marie Curie, Mary Leakey, E.O. Wilson, and Jane Goodall.

**Painters, Inventors, and Other Hobbyists**

From an early age, John James Audubon showed an interest in music, drawing, and nature. He turned his hobby into the pursuit of painting birds of North America. *The Birds of America* was Audubon’s most famous book. His drawings portray birds dramatically and in life size. After 1838, Audubon turned to painting the wildlife of the American West. Many of his paintings can be viewed at the website of the Audubon Society (web4.audubon.org/bird/BoA/BOA_index.html).

The concept of “invention” is much larger than electronic or mechanical devices. Inventions are well-represented in the traditional curriculum and the daily lives of today’s youth. Most people do not know that the great inventor George Washington Carver’s first interest was in art and that he continued to produce works of art throughout his long life. Carver developed ways to turn vegetation into paints and other usable products. Students might be interested to know that the dye in the crayons they use is attributed to the work of Carver.

Often careers in the arts do not lead to livable incomes and great fame. Skills in these fields often remain as hobbies, are combined with other more practical needs, or put away until retirement. Students might be interested to learn that painting as a hobby is associated with such recognizable names as Prince Charles of England, Winston Churchill, and Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and George W. Bush.

**Teacher As Guide**

Students usually enjoy learning about famous people, and reading biographies is integral to the school...
summer deadlines. Too much enthusiasm for one student’s reply may cut short the potential for in-depth learning. “That could be,” or “Does anyone have another idea?” are responses that encourage more questions.

At the beginning of a lesson students respond quickly and then begin to cast doubt on a reply. It is important for students to recognize their own need to rethink and evaluate answers without fear of failure or ridicule. Instead, they should view new uncertainties or questions as potential learning opportunities. Such a thinking skill needs practice throughout life, including while teaching. When necessary a teacher might help clarify the direction of students’ thoughts with questions that prompt additional examination such as:

- What information do we need to determine if our ideas are accurate?
- Where can we find information to help us determine the accuracy of our ideas?
- What are other approaches we might use to find answers to our questions?

**Constructing a Meaningful Lesson**

The big questions and life lessons, unlike TV shows or isolated fact lessons, take longer than 20 to 45 minutes to master; only quiz shows reward the speed of recall. Meaningful learning also promotes and rewards learners with intrinsic satisfaction throughout life. In suggesting or providing opportunities for individual pursuits of interests and accomplishments within some lessons, teachers promote meaningful learning and feelings of accomplishment. Providing additional resources supports skills in research and the self-regulation of learning and time.

For students living in the 21st century, self-regulation of life and learning are objectives equal to, or perhaps more important than, the standards and objectives listed in curriculum guides. The true art in teaching is improving the talents and interests of all students so they learn and grow academically and personally. This is a must for social studies teachers as citizenship belongs to all in a democracy. Citizens from a variety of backgrounds move forward together through respecting and employing their various talents and perspectives. Promoting civic ideals in lessons may begin with stating the objectives, but citizenship is greatly assisted by a classroom environment that encourages all students to address knowledge, skills, and interests in their classes, while at the same time respecting each other. When there is cooperation among teachers, administrators, and students, a school will successfully contribute to citizenship fit for democracy. Looking beyond the popular accomplishments of historical leaders is one way to begin.
Connecting to the Humanities

The humanities can be described as the study of how people process and document the human experience. Humans use philosophy, literature, religion, art, music, history, and language to understand and record their impressions and experiences in the world. These modes of expression have become some of the subjects that traditionally fall under the term humanities. Knowledge of these human experiences gives us the opportunity to feel a sense of connection to those who have come before us, as well as to our contemporaries. In essence, they provide great ideas concerned with who we are, what we think, and how we behave as humans.

Connections and experiences all help us cope with the human condition by offering a “big picture” to what life is all about, either over a long span or just for a moment. Indeed, I had the good fortune to stand in the Reina Sophia Art Museum in Madrid, Spain, studying Pablo Picasso’s famous painting Guernica. Viewing Guernica, hanging alone in its own room in the museum is an absolutely awesome experience for any viewer. Whenever one views such a large work—in this case 11 ft. tall by 25.6 ft. wide—the sheer size makes a strong and powerful statement. Size is coupled with the rather stark color array used—dark blue, black, and white. But, as I viewed the images of people as well as the dominant bull and horse motifs, both Picasso’s message of social justice and his strong political statement came through clearly. Painted as a reaction to the inhumanity of a Nazi “bombing practice” carried out on the Basque town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War in 1937, Guernica shows the tragedy of war and its effect on innocent civilians. There is no question that this painting sends a strong message of the need for peace both then and now. Later, in accordance with Picasso’s conviction that his famous painting should not be displayed in Spain until the country demonstrated liberty and democracy, Guernica was housed in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City until 1981, when it was returned to Spain in celebration of Picasso’s 100th birthday. Knowing these historical facts provided an added depth to the symbolic meaning of this painting.

War and violence are themes that are often depicted in literature, art, and music. They impact all they touch, and the universal human experience is a shared experience of horror, destruction, and victory/despair for different groups, depending on how they evaluate the results. They invoke emotional responses, regardless of which side of the battle one is on, and their effect cannot be forgotten. Religious beliefs, philosophy, and language enter into reactions, views, and, subsequently, discussions of the experience of war and/or violence—whether it was justified, whether it should be sustained, and whether we can live with the consequences of what we do. Whether one reads The Iliad (Homer), Les Misérables (Hugo) The Red Badge of Courage (Crane), or The Things They Carried (O’Brien), one is immersed with the issues of war and violence.

Taking it to the Classroom

This thematic response is exactly what teachers must consider as we plan curriculum. Secondary gifted students are often widely read, and they often have strong opinions. But systematic analysis of the theme, in this case, of war or of violence, and its ramifications on a variety of innocent people, is helpful in truly understanding its impact from a variety of perspectives. Entire courses on the literature of war can give a different spin to understanding the human condition at a variety of times and places but all centered on the war experience. Another way to confront the issue of war or of violence is to begin by using a Visual Thinking Strategy, by studying a painting such as Guernica and then asking three basic questions: What’s going on in this image? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can you find? opens the door to oral or written responses from students that are thoughtful, supported by evidence (second question), and thorough.

By asking follow-up questions such as, “What music would you choose (and why) to depict the feeling you had when you viewed Guernica (or some other painting); when you read The Things They Carried (or some other novel); when you thought about the different philosophies that caused the American Civil War (or another historical event)”, a teacher is offering choice and is demanding a well-developed critical response to a theme. The humanities present choice and thoughtful consideration, and invite carefully crafted responses in a variety of formats. The valuable opportunities presented to students through a well-devised humanities sequence are excellent assets to a liberal arts education, which provides valuable skills for all secondary students in thinking, writing, and speaking by using analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and the opportunity to create. THP

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I have always enjoyed reading biographies. I read biographies as a child and I continue to read them today. Friends tease me and claim that my fascination with biography is simply explained by my being nosy. One colleague claimed, “You just like snooping into other people’s lives.” I joke with them and explain that I actually look forward to visits to my dentist because I get a dose of popular biography in People Magazine in his waiting room.

I believe that gifted students benefit from examining biographies and learning important lessons from talented individuals who have shared their life experiences. Encounters with biographical material can have positive effects when students identify with the individual featured, draw parallels with their own lives, and gain self-understanding. Teachers who use biographies and autobiographies to support psychosocial development have creative options they might incorporate in their classrooms. One involves using biographical snapshots. A snapshot is simply a slender slice of biography, a scenario or vignette that teachers select to highlight an important issue they want students to consider in a class discussion.

I recently enjoyed an autobiography by Brad Paisley, country singer and guitarist extraordinaire, entitled Diary of a Player: How My Musical Heroes Made a Guitar Man Out of Me. This book is the personal account of how Paisley came of age as a musician and a man. He shares the story of his musical passion beginning with his first guitar, a gift from his grandfather when Brad was only eight. This young boy who became passionate about playing discovered that no matter how he evolved, the guitar was his faithful friend. Educators working with gifted students will appreciate Paisley’s biography. It is a story of a talented young man who discovered a passion for music and dedicated himself to becoming an extraordinary guitarist. It is also a story of how mentors and supportive adults influenced the development of talent. Moreover, it offers an important message regarding how a talented young man shared his passion for music with others who needed emotional support during difficult times.

An Example of a Biographical Snapshot
Teachers who want to support the social and emotional characteristics and traits of gifted students may want to inspire their students through Paisley’s biography to focus on

I am proudest of the times I spent playing for people in need, even at that early age. There was always a benefit somewhere, thrown by a guy like County Commissioner Biggie Byard, where the children were raising money for a family or two, and they invited guitarists. Hank and I would go back up people for those events for nursing home performances or children’s charities. I was always getting requests like that. And my parents saw to it that I never turned down these chances to help people. Mom and Dad made sure of that. It was their way of helping me keep some perspective in this crazy dream of mine. Once a month I would go play for the respite care floor of the local hospital. I remember a woman who was one of the residents there; she had suffered a stroke. I was only eleven or so, and seeing this sort of reality was life changing. This woman could no longer speak a word, but she could sing along perfectly with “You Are My Sunshine” or “In the Garden.” I would sit by her hospital bed and strum the chords on my guitar while she belted out the words clearly and effortlessly. Otherwise, she would just stare. It was very heavy stuff. My visits to perform were some of the highlights of her life at that point. I knew that. And somehow I’ve never looked at music the same.

(Paisley & Wall, 2011, pp. 81-82).
using one’s talents to serve others. This can be done succinctly by sharing a biographical snapshot from Paisley’s story. The passage on the previous page from Diary of a Player serves as an example. The scenario provides a window into Brad Paisley’s use of his musical talent to serve others in need.

After sharing this snapshot with students, teachers may pose the following questions to facilitate a class discussion:

- How do you think Brad Paisley’s sharing his musical talent at benefit events shaped his self-image?
- Why do you think Brad’s parents encouraged him playing for others in need? Was this wise?
- How do you think Brad Paisley’s experience playing for the stroke victim changed his view of music? Why was this important to him?
- How might we use our gifts and talents to serve others in our community?

Searching for other biographical snapshots that focus on the adolescent experiences of talented individuals carrying out acts of kindness and generosity may serve as an enjoyable follow-up activity for students. They may enjoy a snapshot scavenger hunt. I discovered that an efficient online Internet search unveils many stories that may inspire gifted students while addressing their psychosocial development. I encourage my readers to enjoy a search for biographical snapshots today. THP

References

Write for THP
Do you have practical classroom applications of current research, theory, and best practices in the field of gifted education? Are you proud of the innovative way you address the needs of gifted students in your school or classroom? Have you created a successful lesson or unit plan that aligns with the revised NAGC Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards? If so, we want to hear from you! Send manuscripts to: Jeff S. Danielian, Editor, THP at jdanielian@nagc.org.

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Readers for a Lifetime

Reading is still a mystery to me. While I understand the cognitive process of reading and know that it is an essential part of learning, there are many mysteries about “the formula” that makes one a reader. I have yet to determine why some people are born readers, some grow into readers, and others fight the invitation to read all of their lives. As a researcher, I am always interested in why people read. I watch and listen to readers and nonreaders everywhere, in my courses, at parties and events, and am regularly engaging with strangers on the NYC Subway.

So, how do educators create an environment where students are more likely to be lifetime readers rather than only read because they are told to do so? We need to consider the conditions under which a talented reader (a student who reads at least two years above what you would expect for a child of that chronological age) would grow as a reader. Over the years, I have interviewed hundreds of kids and parents about the reading habits of children from age 3-25. While not generalizable, my data does indicate a number of conditions that are likely to promote and sustain kids as readers for a lifetime.

Here is some advice to ignite, delight, and cultivate young readers:

**Read aloud.** This includes reading to young children as well as reading to older children. Reading aloud promotes language development by increasing vocabulary, introducing different text structures, and developing comprehension. A person’s listening vocabulary is greater than their reading vocabulary, so it is important to read books that are two years above what a child may be able to read independently. Audiobooks are another great option.

A few recommendations for family read-alouds and/or audiobooks include:

- *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander (Middle Grade)
- *The Mighty Miss Malone* by Christopher Paul Curtis (Middle Grade)
- *A Snicker of Magic* by Natalie Lloyd (Middle Grade)
- *We Were Liars* by E. Lockhart (Young Adult)
- *The Green Glass House* by Kate Milford (Middle Grade)
- *Noggin* by John Corey Whaley (Young Adult)

**Classroom Libraries.** In order to read, kids need books. Ideally you want to have at least 5 books per child* available in your classroom.

- These books need to be at different reading levels. I suggest a range of two years below the grade level to four years above the grade level. Make sure to have audio books as well.
- The books should be varied in terms of genres (both fiction and nonfiction) and formats (picture books, graphic novels, etc.).

**Let Students Read Anything.** There is no formula for the “right books” that should be read. Magazines, newspapers, and comic books are some alternatives. A happy reader is better than a nonreader.

**Don’t Assume You Know Everything about the Reader.** Behaviors and habits can differ greatly between home and school. When Elizabeth’s teacher was reading *BFG* as a read aloud in class, Elizabeth was reading it at home. She was hesitant though, to share that information with her teacher, feeling that she would be given harder work. Get to know the readers you have in class. Just because a child has reached a certain reading level at school, this may not always indicate what they are capable of. Communication between home and school is important and should happen regularly. Reading assignments and projects can be used for all levels.

**Avoid Telling a Child to Not Read Ahead.** If children are reading, we want them to keep reading. If you are worried about a child “spoiling” the reading experience for other students, here are a few suggestions:

- Keep a pile of SPOILER ALERT cards that the child may write on to share his/her ideas without sharing it with the other members of the reading group.
- In your guidelines for literature discussions, discuss how some people may read faster but, during a specific discussion the students will focus only on what everyone has read.
- Work with the children to set their own timetables for reading a text and use phrases such as, “Before we discuss..., you will have had to read at least to…”

**Share Your Love of Books.** Look at your classroom and celebrate reading with images of books, ideas from books, photos of readers (including your kids), and all things literary. For their spring break, my undergraduate elementary education certification students tweeted images of themselves reading and they had a blast sharing images from here, there, and everywhere. THP

(*For a dream library the goal is 25 books per child or 625 books for a classroom of 25 students.*)
Skills for Using Nonfiction Texts: Text Coding

Text coding is a strategy that involves drawing symbols and making short, explicit notes during the reading of a text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). This strategy is intended to help students monitor their thinking (metacognition) as they read, as well as to remember what they thought about specific parts of the text afterwards. Because this strategy enables metacognition, it enhances long-term comprehension. In gifted education, we often promote the idea of metacognitive activities, but seldom define what they might look like. Text coding is an easy-to-implement strategy that truly exemplifies the concept of “thinking about one’s thinking.” The strategy is one that works equally well for fiction and nonfiction texts, and can be used to facilitate class, small-group, or one-on-one discussions about the reading.

The first step is to establish the codes that you will have your students use. For primary students, choose just a few that will be easy to remember. You can add others as the children become more proficient with their use. Some suggested codes are:

- ★ Important
- ! Interesting
- ? Question
- C Connection
- ✁ Agree
- ❌ Disagree
- ❌ Disagree

The next step is to establish the rules for using the text codes. It is best to discuss these rules as you have students work with a specific, short text. These are the rules that we have used with my young students.

- Review the text codes. Try to remember them for helping you to understand what you read.
- As you read, specific ideas will catch your attention. Use text coding to mark these ideas so you can share them during the next class discussion.
- Mark the text in the margins, with the codes to help you remember your thoughts and connections.
- You may want to write directly in the margins of the text, or you may attach sticky notes next to the ideas you have selected.
- In addition to the code, write a phrase or sentence to help you remember why you selected the specific code for that idea. (This is annotation, which would be the second step, after students thoroughly understand how to do the text coding.)
- Use each code at least once. You will probably insert some codes as you read the text the first time; these codes will indicate parts of the text that have caused a strong emotional reaction. You can also add codes when you reread sections of the text.

- Be prepared to share your selected passages with someone. When sharing, remember to discuss the reasons why you coded the text the way you did.

For primary students, allow them to use colored markers and a variety of sticky notes during the process of text coding, as this adds to their excitement and engagement with the task. It is also extremely important that you model the process. The first time that you do this, read a passage aloud and tell the students what you are thinking about and why you are coding the passage in a specific way. Model each code one at a time and provide guided practice opportunities during shared or guided reading. As students become proficient with text coding, allow them to suggest additional codes. You may also add or eliminate codes as appropriate for the level of the student or the genre of the text.

Text coding is an initial step. Annotations added to the margins elaborate and formalize thinking about a specific idea at a deeper level. Examples of annotations would be:

- ✂ I disagree because of what happened last summer when I fell off the swing.
- ❏ Why does he call it “funny”?
- ☺ I love this part! Reminds me of my puppy dog!
- C This story reminds me of a trip we took to my uncle’s farm.

You should expect gifted primary students to write the annotations after just a little practice with text coding. This addition of the annotations allows for active engagement with an understanding of the text. By writing these comments and questions, the students are practicing metacognition through monitoring their own thoughts and reactions that occur as they read.

Text coding is a simple and powerful metacognitive strategy for use with gifted students. It allows students to be more prepared for class discussions related to the readings, as well as enhancing their engagement with and understanding of the text.

As students share their codes and listen to the explanations of others’ codes, they will continue to examine multiple aspects of the readings, fostering even deeper engagement and understanding.

References
Many gifted students want to be superstars. They love to perform, share their work, and be praised for their creative efforts. Monologues, whether delivering famous historic or theatrical speeches or specially written orations for dramatic purposes, allow and encourage this kind of outlet. They give vent to anger, angst, frustration, hilarity, exuberance, and hubris.

Monologues are dramatic speeches designed so that the actor addresses him- or herself directly to the audience. They can take several forms. Most types of monologues are stand-alone “bits” for which little specific context is needed. However, there are heavily contextualized monologues that depend on situation. Setting up opportunities where students can deliver and develop monologues is one effective way of igniting the potential and involvement of gifted learners (Willis, 2006, 2010). Gifted students may find drama exciting because it presents a source of story sequence as well as characterization. In addition, it requires students to become involved in an active away, engaging them in thinking about language in abstract ways.

Communication, as a skill, is present in Dimension 4 of the C3 Framework as a means of expression after inquiry. Dramatic monologues also can provide an exciting way for students in social studies classrooms to exhibit their knowledge of history and historical figures.

Connecting Dramatic Social Studies Monologues to the Gifted Curriculum

Dramatic monologues allow students to utilize their skills and interests in ways that encourage active participation and engagement in the social studies curriculum (VanTassell-Baska, 2013). This assessment enriches the standard social studies curriculum as students explore topics and individuals in more depth. Students are also integrating different facets of learning as they research, write, and perform their monologues. Dramatic monologues utilize an interdisciplinary approach to learning, which is critical for all students, especially gifted learners (VanTassell-Baska, 2014).

Dramatic monologues challenge gifted students. The different components involved in these activities embody the best intentions of the NAGC Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards (2010). For example, dramatic monologues are fitted to the qualities described in student outcomes 3.4 and 4.5 in that they develop students’ literacy skills through research and writing. Many of the other standards are met as well. In the next sections, we will look at four dramatic social studies monologue activities: Historic Infomercials, Anachronistic Phone Calls, Brags. and Whines.

Infomercialing like Paul Harvey and Billy Mann

By age ten, most Americans know about infomercials and the glib, convincing product “pitches”. Infomercials have identifiable elements that make them effective models for monologues. These elements include:

- Introduction of a product claimed to be both unique and different.
- A “hard sell” to convince the viewers that the product will make their lives easier and better. Claims are exaggerated but not to the point of absurdity.
- An attempt to seduce the audience into an immediate purchase by showing them that they need the product right away, they cannot get it anywhere else, and that they are getting a terrific deal.

Historic infomercials are easy for teachers and gifted students to construct and fun to deliver as dramatic monologues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Product</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ancient Roman Times</td>
<td>The Aqueduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Middle Ages</td>
<td>The Crossbow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonial America</td>
<td>The Franklin Stove or the Lightening Rod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Age of Invention</td>
<td>The Electric Light Bulb and the Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the Guilded Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Examples of Infomercials

Thomas N. Turner, University of Tennessee and Jeremiah Clabough, University of Alabama at Birmingham

Dr. Thomas N. Turner’s writing and research have reflected his interest in creative teaching, use of drama in education, and problem-solving activities with students.

Dr. Jeremiah Clabough’s research interests include utilizing primary sources and creative writing activities in middle and high schools.
They encourage humor and research. Students become involved in working with primary documents and develop both literacy skills and knowledge of history and biography.

To help students write their own infomercials, include criteria relating to length, inclusion of facts, and structure with the assignment. Table 1 shows products for which infomercials may be developed, each relating to a different period of history.

The following is a model of a monologue infomercial selling the crossbow.

*The Everyman Crossbow*

Have you practiced and practiced until your arms and shoulders ache with pain trying to master the long bow? You pull and you strain, shooting at the butts for hours every week, yet you don’t get any better. Those short bows may be easier, but you can’t hit anything with them. You’re never going to win the prince’s archery contest, no matter how hard you try. Well, say good-bye to the aches and pains, the wide misses, and the feeling that you always fail. You won’t hurt without game again when you buy the new and improved Everyman Crossbow.

Bullsye! You’ll score a perfect shot with the Everyman Crossbow. At 30 yards, 50 yards—just point and shoot. The bolt will fly true—we guarantee it. The bolt will fly true—we guarantee it. At 30 yards, 50 yards—just point and shoot. The bolt will fly true—we guarantee it. Everyman Crossbow.

There is no better time to try the Everyman Crossbow. And this amazing weapon is not five, not four, not even three pence—for just two silver pennies you can buy your own handcrafted Everyman Crossbow if you contact us at Castle Arms 1066. We’ll send it next fortnight delivery to your hut or hovel.

But Prithee, wait—if you order today, we’ll add two bones of Saint Sebastian and one of the arrows that killed him.

Act right now and for the first 300 customers we’ll also include three turtledoves with feathers perfect for fletching absolutely free.

But don’t wait—order now! This Everyman Crossbow is not available in shops or local armories!

**Waking the Dead with a Phone Call**

The telephone has been around just over 100 years. However, just imagine what it would have been like if phones had existed through history. Anachronistic phone calls are a teaching device that accomplishment just that illusion. They imagine a conversation between a historic figure and someone else, either a real or fictitious person. Of course, you can only hear one side of the phone call, but the other side can be imagined.

Constructing anachronistic phone calls includes a few facts and a little humor to create an attention-catching dramatic device to teach history. Gifted students can both deliver these conversations as dramatic monologues as well as creating their own. Teachers can scaffold the construction of these one-sided dramatic conversations. Here is an example of an anachronistic phone call between William Shakespeare and his “agent.”

**Anachronistic Phone Call with William Shakespeare**


Pause... “Wally Iago, your agent, don’tcha know.”

Pause... “Yeah, old 15% Iago, - big joke. Ha, Ha! How’s “Venus and Adonis” doing?”

Pause... “Oh, I got the commission check. Small bones. What can I say? It’s about a bunch of Greek gods and the pretty boy prefers hunting to kissing. Londoners want action and suspense. And the love part is just cheesy.”

Pause.... “Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! I know it’s a great play, and you’re better than Marlow and Johnson rolled together. But Willie, this stuff just isn’t drawin’ the pit crowd, and you, if anybody, ought to know you’ve got to play to the pit, the yard, the cheap seats, capishe. The hoot and holler gang, the roaring boys.”

Pause.... “Never mind—I’m here for you. I’ve got a play request, almost a commission you might say.”

Pause.... “Who from? You’re not going to believe this. You personally have got a request from Good Queen Bess herself—on the Q-T of course.”

Pause.... “What’s the catch? Oh, nothing much, our beloved queen wants you to write a play about—wait for it—King Richard the Third.”

Pause... “Here’s how we pitch it. You make Richard a real bad guy, mean and ugly, grasping and greedy. You make him a murderer—then Grampa—Henry VII, I mean, is the good guy, the hero who saves England.”

Pause...“Do I think it will work? Will, if this isn’t pure gold, I’ll refuse my commission. We are going to cash in on this, my man. The names Wally lago and William Shakespeare will go down in history.”

**Bragging like Hulk Hogan and Whining like C-3PO**

Once in a while, everybody wants to blow his or her own horn, to crow, to brag. At other times, we feel like moaning, crying, and whining. Brags and whines are monologues constructed to vent such feelings. Since brags and whines are written in the voices of historical and fictional characters, students can let out the emotions without guilt. Such monologues encourage student creativity (Russell, Waters, & Turner, 2014). Monologists can assume the role of any character whether it is people, events, places, or things. Below is an example of a Madison Square Garden Brag and an Andrew Jackson Whine.

**Madison Square Garden Brag**

Madison Square Garden here. I don’t like to brag, but I am the “Sports Mecca of the World”. All of the major sporting events happen inside me in the heart of New York City. I host the Knicks for all of their home games. The first Wrestlemania that saw the epic showdown between Hulk Hogan and Mr. T clash with Roddy Piper and Mr. Wonderful was held inside me. Do not think that I lack musical taste. Elvis and Led Zeppelin were invited to perform at my place multiple times. Unfortunately, there have been bad musicians, if I can call them that, which I will never host again. Yes, Justin Bieber I am talking about you. I also have acting chops as well. Their no count scoundrels cost me
the election in 1824. It just ain’t right. I was gonna be the president of these here United States but I was robbed by Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams. Their corrupt bargain is a dark cloud over these United States. I was supported by more folks so I should be President. However, those dishonorable double-dealers made a horse swap that gave Adams the support he needed in the House to become President. Those low down varmints are corrupting the ideas of Washington, Jefferson, and all those other folks. But I will be back. You just wait until the next election. I will whip Adams and all of his cronies.

Conclusion
Historically based dramatic monologues fit the needs and passions of many gifted students. The four types of monologues represented here bring history alive as gifted students use their imaginations to recreate events. Such monologues make both creative writing and dramatic reading doubly valuable in the classroom. Reading fluency and comprehension are developed by multiple read-alouds. Writing dramatic monologues involves gifted students in research by extending their knowledge, and it also challenges them to explore their creativity, even cleverness. Such monologues encourage humor and the application of writing skills in an enjoyable way. All four of these dramatic activities relate to life experiences and engages gifted students to observe life around them more closely. Dramatic historical monologues are lively performance activities that create an exciting classroom environment for gifted students in the social studies by sparking their imaginations.

References

SMART cookies
By Bess Wilson

Gifted Education Throughout History

Advanced Stonework
AP Hieroglyphics
Apothecary For Precocious Learners
The Original Socratic Seminar
Illuminated Enlightenment

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Inquiry-Based Learning

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work is rooted in four dimensions of informed inquiry: developing questions and planned inquiry; applying disciplinary concepts and tools; evaluating sources and using evidence; and communicating conclusions and taking action.

Developing questions and planned inquiry. A cornerstone of exemplary social studies instruction is developing (and asking) thoughtful and probing questions that further inquiry. Questions can be compelling (“Why was the Suffragist Movement so important?”) or supporting (“Who were the leading supporters of the Suffragist Movement?”) Regardless of scope, questions foster curiosity and critique and lead to more substantive understandings of the social studies content.

Applying disciplinary concepts and tools. Social studies consists of four core content areas: history, geography, economics, and political science/civics. Students can analyze selected historical writings and measure their influence upon future events or actions. When studying geography, students can interpret and/or create maps. To understand consumer preferences, students can create and then “pitch” a product or service they designed; the civics classroom is the perfect place to simulate a mock trial.

Evaluating sources and using evidence. Exemplary social studies classrooms ask students to both use and evaluate multiple source types (e.g., print, visual, auditory, tactile) when analyzing information and forming resultant conclusions. Such claims must be evidence-based and naturally lead to further inquiry.

Communicating conclusions and taking action. At its core, social studies is both active and collaborative. Students need multiple opportunities to demonstrate their newfound understandings.

The vast majority of social studies classrooms provide few opportunities for students to create and ask deep, probing questions (Chapin, 2013). Nor do they foster sustained analysis, evaluation, curiosity, or collaboration. For the most part, students in K-12 social studies classrooms are not being intellectually or creatively engaged (Gibson, 2012). So how can social studies teachers create purposeful, applicable, and challenging learning opportunities for all students, including students who are gifted? One way is through inquiry-based learning.

Inquiry-Based Learning in the Social Studies Classroom

Inquiry-based learning is a teaching method in which students work to develop deep and layered understandings of complex questions, problems, or ideas. This method of instruction hits home for many gifted students and is in line with the advanced level of thinking so often sought out. Students investigate, explore, and interpret interrelated themes and concepts parsing out both commonalities and differences. Inquiry-based learning creates classrooms that are alive with curiosity and creativity and rooted in authentic application.

Though specific to project-based learning, Larmer and Mergendoller (2010) provide seven essential components that serve as theoretical and pedagogical pillars in an inquiry-based classroom. An overview of each component is provided along with an example of how teachers can use each component to create engaging and challenging inquiry-based learning opportunities in exemplary social studies classrooms.

1. The need to know: How do we initially engage or “hook” our students? Though many gifted students are naturally curious and, thus, naturally engaged, it is still important to light the proverbial fire of interest. Using the American Civil War as our fictitious unit of study, have students read the Gettysburg Address or excerpts from Frederick Douglas or Mary Chestnut. Students can analyze and evaluate battlefield maps or contextualize and interpret battlefield photographs. With appropriate permission, show scenes from Gettysburg or Ken Burns’ documentary The Civil War. The key is to provide students with a sweeping yet admittedly cursory “overview” of the Civil War in an effort to pique initial interest.

2. The driving question: A driving question serves as the conceptual foundation in the inquiry-based classroom. It provides students a sense of purpose and an intellectual and creative challenge. The question should be compelling, open-ended, complex, and linked to the objective of the unit of study. Questions can be abstract (“Can the Civil War be justified?”), concrete (“Was Lincoln really the Great Emancipator?”), or focused on solving a problem (“How could religious institutions have done more to end slavery?”).

3. Student voice and choice: Once student interest is generated by the driving question, allow students options in both how to explore and present their newfound understandings. Students can access text and/or digital-based sources, the Internet, oral histories, or artifacts. They can write papers, create posters or digital media, write brochures, or film a short video.
Ideally, students will decide what resources they will use and how they will use these resources to gain a better understanding of the Civil War.

4. 21st century skills: An inquiry-based classroom allows students to collaborate, think critically, communicate, and use technology, all emphasized in the NCSS C3 Framework. Working in pairs or in small groups, students can role-play the arduous life of a slave. They can analyze a military recruitment flyer and discuss its role in fostering wartime propaganda. Lincoln’s suspension of habeas corpus can be debated. Fostering such skills serves the gifted student well in the social studies classroom, and also develops skills all students need to be successful outside of the classroom.

5. Inquiry and innovation: Questions invariably lead to more questions. In the inquiry-based classroom, the Driving Question often spurs other avenues of inquiry. New questions are generated and alternate and provocative conclusions reached. Inquiry into the Civil War may lead students to consider previous or contemporary acts of forced servitude. Students may explore the moral implications of slavery. The role of leaders and leadership in times of crises may be examined and addressed. The role media played—and continues to play—in shaping public sentiment can be debated.

6. Feedback and revision: The inquiry-based social studies classroom should naturally challenge student-held perceptions (“All southerners supported slavery”). By presenting students with multiple interpretations and manifestations of a topic, students come to question both the origin and the validity of what they may have once held as dogma. Arguably, nothing is quite as rewarding as a student who challenges, questions, evaluates, and reevaluates his or her “position.”

7. Presentation: How can students present their understandings of the Civil War? For classroom presentations, students can argue a position, role-play, create a skit or media display, draw, paint, or rap. Allow students flexibility in how they display their understandings. Outside of the classroom, students can advocate for equality, assume leadership roles, or petition for the end of global violence. Sound social studies pedagogy encourages students to become concerned, participatory global citizens. Such participation may simply begin with a scratch of the head, a pique in interest, and a desire to explore the seminal questions.

Conclusion

Though social studies is often presented as a series of disconnected faces and places, a more dynamic and engaging way to intellectually invigorate all students is by rooting instruction in inquiry-based learning. Knowing particularly that students who are gifted possess an innate desire to both excel and explore, inquiry-based learning fosters creativity of expression and representation and pushes students towards a deeper, more complex understanding of the social studies content. It is in such an exemplary classroom that all students, not just students who are gifted, can imagine and explore all the possibilities that social studies has to offer. 

References

Using C3 Framework to Develop Civically Engaged Students

The presidential election cycle provides a wonderful opportunity for teachers of the gifted to showcase their robust digital ecosystem. In addition to the attention focused on the national race for the presidency, there are also an increased number of citizens who will pay greater notice to state and local politics. It is important for teachers of the gifted to engage their students in a critical exploration of the election process. Through the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies, teachers can promote civic competence, develop future voters able to engage in the democratic process, and foster digital citizens capable of deciphering between fact and conjecture through the following steps to developing civically engaged students.

Step 1: Develop a Knowledge Base about Election Laws and Processes

In order to demonstrate civic readiness, students must understand the laws and processes by which the elections are conducted. One resource where students can learn about the laws and processes is the United States Election Commission website (www.eac.gov), which is a national clearinghouse of information on election administration. Of course, provisions of the United States Constitution also affect federal elections.

It is important to remember that laws governing the election process vary from state to state. As such, students should explore The National Association of Secretaries of State website (www.nass.org), which has a link to each state’s chief elections official. Another source for up-to-date information about election laws and processes is the electionLine website (www.electionline.org). These websites provide reliable sources detailing how elections are conducted at the local, state, and national levels.

Step 2: Develop Questions and Plan Inquiries

Students studying local, state, and national elections should use an inquiry-based approach. They can begin by considering which elements about their society they like and which ones they would like changed. According to Cannon (1998), civic identity is formed through understanding the moral and civic obligations of one’s community and then acting on those obligations. In many instances, students’ civic identities are heavily influenced by their parents and often not fully developed until they enter college.

Gifted students have the capacity for developing a civic identity at an early age. One tool to begin introducing students to local elections or older students about how to wade through the issues that define national campaigns, this website will allow you to help your students to begin framing guiding questions through which they can develop their own civic identity.

Step 3: Gather and Evaluate Sources

Once students have begun to establish their civic identity and formulate guiding questions through which they will monitor the election cycle, they need to begin learning about the various candidates’ positions on the issues of the day. Unfortunately, combing through all of the candidates’ running for office at the local, state, and national levels is overwhelming, even for the savviest civically engaged person.

One way to manage all of this information is through content curation, a process of gathering, categorizing, and presenting information pertaining to a specific topic. One such tool that enables users to easily customize this process is paper.li (www.paper.li). This free website will publish a digital newspaper that can be easily distributed. Your students can use the site to curate content related to any local, state, or national election topic. Then, your students can evaluate the issues, weigh each candidates’ stance on each issue, and make an informed decision about which candidate will do the best job.

A website such as ReadingQuest.org (www.readingquest.org/) has several social-studies specific graphic-organizers to sift through the facts of a particular issue.

Step 4: Communicate Findings and Inform the Public

One critical element of productive civic engagement is disseminating an informed opinion. Students must learn how to responsibly advocate for a specific issue they believe in, whether it is at the local, state, or national level. After students have formulated a well-researched opinion, they can produce a podcast that discusses the issues. There are several tools for creating a podcast. Two suggestions are Audacity (www.audacity.sourceforge.net/) (Windows) and GarageBand (www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqAwTcH_EAE) (Apple).

These four steps provide the foundation for sustaining a robust digital ecosystem. By assessing the climate of your digital ecosystem prior to the beginning of this project, you can tailor a discussion to incite creativity and expand previous limits on civic engagement.

References
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