

## Editor's Notebook

In the thought-provoking opening article of this issue, Kenneth C. Davis states emphatically that social studies educators “must take the lead in protecting the fundamental ideals of democracy and preparing a new generation of citizens for active civic engagement.” (184) The start of a new school year is an excellent time for us to renew our mission of teaching students the content knowledge, intellectual skills and civic values that will enable them to sustain and advance our democracy.

In his article, Davis warns of a worldwide trend toward political authoritarianism, and cites historical examples of the replacement of democracy by “Strongman” rule based on propaganda and demagoguery. “Sometimes democracy dies quickly....But rarely does it meet its demise in darkness. Very often democracy dies in broad daylight.” (180) A good social studies education protects democracy by ensuring that students acquire knowledge about the past and present, develop skills in evaluating information and arguments, and understand the historical legacy of social movements that have promoted freedom and justice. Students with this educational background are well prepared to engage in civic actions that support a thriving democracy and advance the common good.

In our Lessons on the Law column, Tiffany Middleton confirms the need for stronger civic education as she reviews the results of the 2019 Survey of Civic Literacy by the American Bar Association. In the survey, which posed 15 basic questions from the U.S. Citizenship test to 1,000 people, only 5% of the respondents answered all the questions correctly. Respondents had particular problems with questions on the topics of holding federal office, freedom of speech, and jury service.

Some good news is that youth participation in the 2018 midterm elections more than doubled compared to the previous midterm elections in 2014 (28% compared to 13%), according to survey results reported by Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg and Abby Kiesa. Youth participation is still low, and they recommend that teachers try to boost it by engaging students in critical conversations about current issues, and providing students of voting age with accurate information about how to register as voters.

Two articles in this issue are particularly suitable for Constitution Day lessons. In our Sources and Strategies column, Lee Ann Potter presents notes by James Madison on the debates in the Constitutional Convention on June 18, 1787, when Alexander Hamilton made a six-hour speech criticizing the Virginia and New Jersey plans for the federal legislature and outlining his own alternative plan. She suggests that students use the notes to examine the rationale underlying the different proposals and to analyze the extent to which each proposal resembled the eventual establishment of the legislature in the Constitution.

In our Teaching with Documents column, Jenny Sweeney recommends two documents that are especially suitable for teaching about

the Constitution because they “are simple in form and relatively easy for students to read, and yet they have great historic depth” (207)—the 1967 nomination of Thurgood Marshall to the Supreme Court by President Johnson, and the Joint Resolution by the House of Representatives and the Senate in 1971 proposing the Twenty-Sixth Amendment that lowered the voting age to 18. She offers suggestions for using these documents and other resources of the National Archives in class.

Keith C. Barton emphasizes the importance of human rights education, and points out that it often leads students to volunteer, donate to charity and treat others fairly. Important as these objectives are, his Research and Practice column advocates the need for students also to be aware of the key role played by institutions that promote and protect human rights, and to support these institutions.

There is no shortage of online sites advertising lesson plans and activities for teachers, but many of these resources have not been reviewed for quality. In our Elementary Education column, Jennifer L. Gallagher, Katy M. Swalwell, and M. Elizabeth Bellows present a checklist for analyzing the social studies value of online lessons and activities, and illustrate its use in evaluating a popular literacy activity, the “QU Wedding.”

Justine Esta Ellis and Benjamin Pietro Marcus highlight the need for religious studies education that combines content knowledge with the development of skills in analyzing religions from an academic rather than a devotional perspective. They recommend the use of the 3B Framework, which examines the beliefs, behaviors, and senses of belonging of religious communities, as a useful approach to understanding the diversity of religious identities and expressions.

The component of the C3 Framework's Inquiry Arc that may be most likely to make educators hesitate is the call for Taking Informed Action. Carly Muetterties and Kathy Swan, in their column on Teaching the C3 Framework, point out that although this can “conjure up visions of student walk-outs or protests at City Hall,” (232) the tasks for Taking Informed Action can “come in many shapes and sizes, from the complex (e.g., organizing a schoolwide donation drive) to the everyday (e.g., having an informed conversation).” (232) They present examples of possible actions that can answer the compelling question “How Will I Make a Change?”

In the concluding article in this issue, Kathy Swan, John Lee, and S.G. Grant examine the Korean War and its consequences through an inquiry based on the C3 Framework. They identify important primary and secondary resources on Korea that have become available in recent years, and present a lesson plan that examines the challenges that Korean-U.S. relations have faced since World War II.

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