



# News & Ideas

**Welcome back to the MCSS Toolbox.** In this issue are many teaching suggestions and viewpoints from our state and around the country. I hope they can inspire and help you during this exciting time. **Enjoy!**

## From the President-

By Rebecca Bush, MCSS President

It's great to type this welcome knowing that a great number of our schools in Michigan will begin the school year face-to-face in what we know is the most beneficial mode of instruction. I hope each of you had an opportunity over the summer to rest, relax, and become rejuvenated for what I anticipate will be another year ripe with opportunity to teach social studies.



Your board has been active throughout the summer working to advance several MCSS initiatives and to address current public issues surrounding social studies curricular topics and resources. To that extent, please find the [MCSS Board of Directors' statement](#).

As the school year gets underway, I encourage you to check out many of the member benefits we are proud to provide to each of our members. Look for a fall edition of instructional units written by MCSS members who participated in the *Writing Digital Histories* grant, a Teaching with Primary Sources grant funded by the Library of Congress. Additionally, an announcement will be released soon with details for our Annual Conference this spring.

On behalf of the MCSS Board, I wish each of you a terrific school year. What an exciting time to teach social studies!



## From the Editor

by Bob Pettapiece

This is my 18th publication for MCSS, starting in 2013. It has been a good run and I hope to be able to do this for more years. As a teacher in Detroit Public Schools from 1967-96 followed by full time teaching in Teacher Education at Wayne State until 2016, I have seen a great deal of change both in and out of the classroom.

Starting my teaching career at a junior high, a few blocks from the action of the summer of 1967, provided many lessons in history and sociology as well as many challenges in teaching not covered in my teaching undergraduate preparation courses.

As exciting and challenging as those times were, I believe I would find teaching during the pandemic an even greater challenge. I hope this issue offers you some tools to succeed this fall and beyond.

On an up note, "The 53rd annual [PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools](#) reveals that despite the challenges of the pandemic, Americans continue to have high opinions of their local schools and teachers in particular. Similarly, respondents are highly confident overall in their local school's ability to handle potential challenges in the new school year."



## Editorial Board

Bob Pettapiece, Editor/Publisher  
Jim McConnell, Contributing Editor  
Sharon Elliott, Copy Editor

## \* \* MCSS Announcements \* \*



On the MCSS [website](#) are four recaps of a recent webinar series. The recaps are-

- **News media and civic engagement: High school students find their voice and place in their community**
- **A Story That Impacts All Of Us: Anishnaabek history in Michigan.**
- **Dealing with Race and Racism in Michigan: Past, Present, and Future**
- **From Controversial to Complex**

## \* \* More Announcements \* \*

from Jim McConnell

### Free Offer to Wayne County Teachers

The National Council for History Education's executive director, Grace Leatherman, is offering all social studies educators in Wayne County a free one year NCHE membership. This is a great opportunity for us to be connected to the greater history education community. Please sign up and extend this offer to other colleagues in Wayne County.

Register here:

<https://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/eventReg?oeidk=a07eici83tca77569ec&oseq=&c=&ch=>

### News from the Michigan Council for History education E-Notes

For a September 17 **CONSTITUTION DAY Quiz**, visit the MCHE [website](#) and click on History Quizzes under the "Contests and Awards" topic.



### Register Now for the **Historical Society of Michigan Conference**

The 147th Annual Meeting and Michigan History Conference will be held virtually this year on September 24-25, 2021. Standard registration ends September 23. For more information and to see the conference booklet, see <https://hsmichigan.org/2021/08/08/mhc/>

(From Jana Pisani, Ferris State University)

### Michigan Council on Economic Education

The MCEE has organized a guide to help teachers get started teaching high school economics in Michigan. It includes topics such as current events, economic ways of thinking, markets, fiscal policy, economic indicators, monetary policy, economic systems, and many others. Check it out at: <https://www.michiganecon.org/highschool>

(from David Hales, Wayne RESA)

### Michigan Geographic Alliance

The Family Geography Night Kit is available on loan from the MGA to help your school host a dynamic event which will invite families to experience geography and think critically while exploring the power of global knowledge. The Family Geography Night Kit contains directions and manipulatives for 10 exciting activities that can be adjusted for your grade level.

The Cost is \$75 to rent the kit. For more information on the Family Geography Night Kit please visit [here](#).

For info on the MGA, visit [here](#).

(David Hales, Wayne RESA)

### Henry Ford Museum

The inHub Community is live at the Henry Ford Museum! inHub offers a free, basic membership which provides educators with access to all kinds of history resources, including curriculum and professional development. The aim of inHub is to engage kids of all backgrounds in history, help them get excited about the innovations the world has seen over time, and to inspire future innovators. Use the link below to see what inHub can offer you!

<https://inhub.thehenryford.org/>

(from Kailie Burk , Rockford Schools)

### Michigan Oral History Association

The Michigan Oral History Association's website contains links to a number of oral history databases, including the National Park Service's Park History Program and the Detroit 67 Oral History Project. To access these links and others, see <https://michiganoha.org/category/regnatslug/>

(From Jana Pisani, Ferris State University)

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### Michigan History Center

Did you know that September is International Underground Railroad Month? Michigan History Center is celebrating by hosting weekly virtual events. Each free event will lead participants through specific, Michigan-based events which occurred along the Underground Railroad. Use this resource to brush-up on your U.S. History knowledge, or offer this as an activity for students to engage in. Use the link below to find the schedule and register for a free, [virtual event](#).

(from Kailie Burk, Rockford Schools)

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**Library of Congress** Change in Early 20th Century America: [Doing the Decades](#) Analysis of themes in U.S. history and culture across several decades, using primary and secondary sources.

(from Dick Cooley, GVSU)

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## ZOOM into Lansing for Michigan State Capitol Tour

Are you interested in taking your students on a tour of the historic Michigan State Capitol? Concerned that cost or distance will prevent you from offering your students this great learning experience? Then, you need to check out the NEW ZOOM State Capitol Tour. Matt VanAcker, Director, State Capitol Tours, said, "We are delighted to have the opportunity to share our beautiful Capitol with your group." ZOOM Tours can be scheduled by calling (517) 373-2353 To assist Zoom tour guests in preparation for the tour there are multiple resources available at the Capitol website including links to Capitol videos and educational booklets such as: Getting to Know Michigan, How a Bill Becomes a Law, Michigan in the American Civil War, Guide to Capitol Architecture and Monuments and many other titles. For more info, visit <http://www.capitol.michigan.gov/Tours>

## Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center offers Virtual Resources

Check out the many resources available at the Michigan supreme Court Learning center [website](#). They offer many Education Resources as well as details on how to schedule a tour of the Learning Center for your students. (Tours suspended until COVID-19 status is reduced.) To learn about the Michigan Supreme Court, including a brief discussion of its Court's structure and operating procedure, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RaXR92Lehc8>

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## NCGE Announces 2022 Conference Plans/ Dates & Seeks Session Proposals

With a theme of "Historical Communities of Promise and Practice," the 2022 NCHE Conference is set for St. Louis, MO, March 17-19, 2022. Call for Proposals, Keynote Speakers, Registration, and Enrichment Excursions. Check NCHE at <https://ncheteach.org>

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## The Shot Heard Round the World

This virtual program developed by the Concord Museum uses the Museum's artifacts and multimedia animations to bring the story of the iconic events of April 19, 1775 to life. The microsite brings together the voices of actors in this true-life drama, images of artifacts that allow for close inspection, animations of contemporary artwork and troop movements, and a running tally of the numbers engaged on both sides. Visit Concord Museum at <https://concordmuseum.org>

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## Hearst Foundation & MCHE Announce 2021 U.S. Senate Youth Program Recipients

Lynn DeSmet (USSYP Deputy Director) and Nicholas Orłowski (MCHE President) announced two Michigan students, Ms. Naina Maria Somya Agrawal-Hardin and

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Mr. Kenneth Gu. as the 2021 honorees for the USSYP (United States Senate Youth Program). They joined Senator Debbie Stabenow and Senator Gary Peters in representing Michigan during the 59th annual USSYP Washington Week, that was held March 14-17, 2021. Naina Agrawal-Hardin of Ann Arbor and Kenneth Gu of Troy were selected from among the state’s top student leaders to be part of the 104 national student delegation who each also received a \$10,000 college scholarship for undergraduate study. Due to the pandemic, the 2021 program was the first-ever fully virtual Washington Week.

Deadlines are rapidly approaching to **NOMINATE A STUDENT** for the 2022 program. For more information on this outstanding program, please visit <https://ussenateyouth.org/the-hearst-foundations/>

**USS Alliance and the Last Battle of the American Revolution**

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution (focusing on the Sestercentennial of the July 4, 1776, signing of the Declaration of Independence, Michael Deren, *The Past in Person*, states, "Another interesting historic piece by The History Guy." Click on the [link](#) for the intriguing story of the creation of the U.S. Navy is found in Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy" by Ian W. Toll.

**When & Where are the Next Olympics?**

(A) The 20 XXIV Olympic Winter Games will take place in Beijing, China, from Fri, Feb 4 to Sun, Feb 20, 2022. There will be 109 events in 7 sports.  
 (B) The 2024 XXIII Summer Olympiad will take place ins Paris, France, from July 26 to August 11, 2024. There will be 329 events in 32 sports.

**Become a "Great Michigan Read" Partner, Get Free Resources For Your Classroom**

Starting in Fall, 2021, the Michigan Humanities Council will sponsor the Great Michigan Read, with a spotlight on the historical fiction novel, *The Women of Copper Country*, written by Mary Doria Russell. The story takes place in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula and tells the story of a woman who takes a stand against a copper mining company. Those who register as Great Michigan Read partners can receive free copies of the book for their classroom as well as

reading guides, teacher guides and more resources which will help bring history to life in your classroom.

(from Kailie Burk , Rockford Schools)

**2021/2022 History Events Calendar**

NOTE: Please confirm details/logistics with the organization's website. Dates, and times subject to changes. **Compiled by Dr. Jim McConnell, [jam1776@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jam1776@sbcglobal.net)**  
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- Sept. 8 (Wed., 7 p.m.) “Lost on Lake Michigan: The Wreck of the SS Chicora,” with Robert Myers; Historical Society of Michigan, (HSM )”History Hounds", [www.hsmichigan.org](http://www.hsmichigan.org)
- Sept. 14 (Tues., noon) “In the Same Lane: Desegregating Michigan Bowling,” with David Kenney; Historical Society of Michigan, (HSM) History Hounds, [www.hsmichigan.org](http://www.hsmichigan.org)
- Sept. 22 (Wed., 7 p.m.) Joe Louis: Battering the Color Barrier, with Marcy Sacks; Historical Society of Michigan, History Hounds at [www.hsmichigan.org](http://www.hsmichigan.org)
- Fri.-Sat., Sept 24-25, 147th Annual Meeting and Michigan History Conference, Historical Society of Michigan -Virtual Event, Updates at [www.hswmichigand.org](http://www.hswmichigand.org)
- Sept. 28 (Tues., noon) “Sitting Down to Stand Up: The 1936-1937 Flint Strike,” with Edward McClland; Historical Society of Michigan, (HSM )”History Hounds" [www.hsmichigan.org](http://www.hsmichigan.org)
- Sat.-Sun., Oct. 16-17, Detroit Free Press Marathon; Swtails at [https:// www.freepmarathon.com](https://www.freepmarathon.com)
- Oct. 19 (Tues., noon) “General Alger’s Railroad: The Detroit, Bay City & Alpena Railroad,” with David K. Vaughan; Historical Society of Michigan, [www.hsmichigan.org](http://www.hsmichigan.org)
- October 22-23, 2021, Great Lakes History Conference, Grand Valley State University, Downtown Grand Rapids Campus, “The History of Sociability,” Details at [https:// www.gvsu.edu/glhc/](https://www.gvsu.edu/glhc/)
- Oct., Nov. & Dec.—The Historical Society of Michigan lectures continue almost weekly. For program details, visit, [www.hsmichigan.org](http://www.hsmichigan.org)
- 2022—Happy New Year!**
- March 17-19, 2022, St. Louis, Missouri, NCHE Conference “Historical



Communities of Promise and Practice,” More info at [www.ncheteach.org](http://www.ncheteach.org)

Fri.-Sat., March 25-26, 2022, Michigan in Perspective: Local History Conference Novi, Michigan, Updates at [www.hsmichigan.org](http://www.hsmichigan.org)

Fri.-Sun., June 24-26, 2022 Upper Peninsula History Conference, Iron Mountain. Updates at [www.hsmichigan.org](http://www.hsmichigan.org)

Fri.-Sun., September 23-25, 2022 Historical Society of Michigan History Conference Albion, Michigan. Updates at [www.hsmichigan.org](http://www.hsmichigan.org)

## \* \* Commentaries \* \*

### Kudos to MCSS

from Marsha Lewis, MCSS board member

I have never been prouder to be a member of MCSS, as I have been over the last few years. The council is not perfect (thankfully), but the stances it has taken of late have been, by far, some of the most meaningful to date. I honestly believe the shift has a lot to do with the state adoption of new standards and a bias review committee, but other factors like societal issues created a need for reflection.



You may be wondering what motivates me to make such statements, so I will share in the hopes of elevating why this and why now. I grew up in a newly developing suburb in Texas where seventh grade is dedicated to Texas history. Even though I absolutely disagreed with the way my teacher taught about the enslavement of Africans in the state it gave me an opportunity at a young age to inquire, debate and discuss this tumultuous time in history. With all that is going on in the world--COVID-19 cases still being reported, multiple countries facing crisis, and increasing division in our daily reality--our state has been added to the critical race theory (CRT) vs. social studies education face off debate. Over the last 25 years, CRT has been commonly referenced in higher education, legal spheres, and corporate and organizational diversity and inclusion efforts as a means of helping eliminate fixed mindsets about marginalized groups. The goal of reviewing policy to include the influential people historically underrepresented, according to researchers Howard & Navaro (2016), is the driving force behind CRT, not a

rewriting of history to create any emotions other than the natural inquiry that comes from new knowledge gained as opponents would have the general public believe.

Government action, like Senate Bill 460, looks to dictate the terms of education without educators or students in mind. Such proposed legislation in our democracy aligns more with actions of an authoritarian government, in that it seeks to pick and choose what a student should learn in the best interest of a group of government officials and not based on standards, research or inquiry. This is concerning for so many reasons, but the main one is how closely it feels to what Hitler did when he used subtle policy and discriminatory practices to begin a full-blown world war seeped in hate and racial injustices. The MCSS Board along with State Superintendent Michael Rice have aimed to publicly refute these claims before schools start and teachers begin planning.

Imagine the transformation we would see if we allowed educators to teach students to express their views, stand by issues, work with classmates on areas of disagreement or ignorance about others' lived realities by using inquiry, real life discussions and debate to inform and refute areas of concern. Should we hope to retain our democracy and the ability for our future generations to lead us into a brighter tomorrow, we must allow for all truth and experiences to be taught, explored and researched. We must accept that America is not a *melting pot* but a *salad* with a variety of people, ideas, and unique attributes. If we lean into our discomfort and look the all aspects of our reality, including how we got here today, we may just begin to be the America that the Founders spoke of when they lifted a call for *a more perfect union*.

### References

Howard, T. C., & Navarro, O. (2016). Critical Race Theory 20 Years Later: Where Do We Go From Here? *Urban Education*, 51(3), 253–273.

Ms. Lewis has been a staff member of the Detroit Public Schools Community District since 1995 and has served in various positions on both the school and district level. Marsha also serves as a MCSS and MCCE board member, co chair of the state bias review committee for SS adoption and various other organizations, committees on the state, regional and national level. She views a collaborative school environment as the key to creating successful teachers and students. She believes partnerships with parents and community partners are essential to enriching the experience of students across the state.

## Could Educating for American Democracy Actually be Sheep in Wolves Clothing.

Personal Commentary by Jim McConnell,, MCHE Board Member

On Tuesday, March 2nd, I joined social studies educators, museum directors, and leaders of national foundations to learn about Educating for American Democracy (EAD). Hoping to learn about the actual content of EAD, I was disappointed to hear a series of statements advocating for support of the proposal. The presentation was well-edited and should have been able to elicit my support. However, I did wonder why there was so little of substance when this zoom gathering billed as an introduction to the combined efforts of so many national and state organizations\ should have presented by details and less PR. At least, references were made to the Seven Themes of Geography, with details available on their website.

These value references to themes made an old, retired, cynical guy like me think back to the early 1990s when the Five Themes almost overwhelmed social studies education. However, progressive leaders of geographic groups worked to preserve the core social studies disciplines while striving to enhance geographic knowledge. Their work enhance geographic concepts while also integrating these ideas into the teaching of history, economics and civics.

I wondered when History's Habits of Mind might become part of the dialogue. NCHE describes these Habits on their [website](#)

. History's Habits of Mind, believes that historical thinking develops a unique capacity to comprehend human situations, challenges, and interactions.

Thinking historically introduces students to the wonders of the past and fosters the ability to make judgments about the present. History's Habits of Mind articulates this distinctive approach, one that leads towards engaging with and understanding the contemporary world and serves as a foundation for life-long, productive learning and active citizenship."

I believe our focus should be on improving history teaching as well as civics. As an active citizen with a 100% voting record in ALL election from 1960

to the present, I continue to advocate for an informed citizenry, with a balanced sense of past, present and future. However, I admit to being an *Outlier* who is not willing to blindly endorse the basic thrust of the EAD. project. But, please do not place my views alongside blatantly political attacks on EAD.

To learn more about EAD, I suggest you look at the group's [website](#).

Further support for EAD comes from the **National Council for History education (NCHE) and American Historical Association.**

## Teaching History in a Time of Crisis

Edited from the National Council for History Education [website](#)

NCHE believes that open and deliberative discussions about changing historical interpretations are central to democratic life. Importantly, teachers, students, historians, and community members must confront and investigate injustices in the past and present.

## \* \* Teaching Ideas \* \*

### Update on redistricting in Michigan

submitted by Jim McConnell

Having met frequently over the past several months, the Michigan Independent Citizens

Redistricting Commission has now obtained the critical 2020 Census data THE MICRC has developed a plan to create boundaries for 13 U.S.

Congressional districts, 38 State Senate Districts and 110 State House of Representative Districts. Public hearings will be held across Michigan during the month of October. Note this this schedule is subject to change and

will be posted on the commission website.

All social studies teachers are encouraged to provided information to help their students become well-informed students of this key political process.

The MICRC's work over the next few weeks will determine the political landscape in Michigan for the next decade.

**MICRC Mapping Schedule:**



- See the [mapping schedule](#). The schedule shows the commissioners intend to work on all three chambers simultaneously switching among the House, Senate or Congressional chamber on a daily basis.
- The commission will take a regional approach to mapping. See the [regional breakdown](#).
- Find meeting information and agendas on the [MICRC's website](#).
- Watch meetings live online or past meetings via the MICRC's [YouTube channel](#).

- [2020 census update: What are Michigan's biggest population changes in the past decade?](#)
- [Biden counties growing faster than Trump's in Michigan but the state is still a tossup](#)

### How would you draw lines for 6 districts?

An exercise for students

Do three versions of the map, one favoring **A** voters, one favoring **B** voters and one favoring neither **A** or **B** voters. (Each letter symbolizes 5,000 voters of a major political party). Lines must be continuous for each district.

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A B A B A
B A B A B
A B A B A
B A B A B
A B A B A
B A B A B
    
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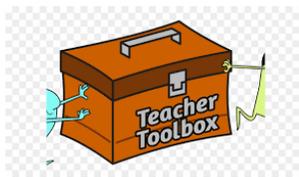
When done with all three maps, get in groups to compare designs. Each group decides which map is the fairest for voting.

### Upcoming Public Hearings

[Editor's Note: A field trip with students to one of these events might be worthwhile if the process is explained before arriving.]

Once mapping is complete. The MICRC will approve maps that will be submitted for public consideration. During the following scheduled meetings, the MICRC will take public input on their proposed maps. It's important for people to attend the public hearing closest to them and weigh in on the draft map proposals.

- Monday, October 11 - Northern Michigan University, Marquette
- Wednesday, October 13 - Treetop Resorts, Gaylord
- Thursday, October 14 - The Dort Center, Flint
- Monday, October 18 - DeVos Place, Grand Rapids
- Wednesday - Oct 20, Radisson Plaza Conference and Hotel, Kalamazoo
- Thursday, October 21 - Lansing Center, Lansing
- Monday, October 25 – MRCC Banquet and Convention Center, Warren
- Wednesday, October 27 – Suburban Collection Showplace, Novi Thursday, October 28 – TCF Center, Detroit



### ZOOM into Lansing for Michigan State Capitol Tour

Are you interested in taking your students on a tour of the historic Michigan State Capitol? Concerned that cost or distance will prevent you from offering your students this great learning experience? Then, you need to check out the NEW ZOOM State Capitol Tour.

Matt Van Aker, Director, State Capitol Tours, said, "We are delighted to have the opportunity to share our beautiful Capitol with your group." ZOOM Tours can be scheduled by calling (517) 373-2353 To assist Zoom tour guests in preparation for the tour there are multiple resources available at the Capitol website including links to Capitol videos and educational booklets such as: *Getting to Know Michigan*, *How a Bill Becomes a Law*, *Michigan in the American Civil War*, *Guide to Capitol Architecture and Monuments* and many other titles. For more info, visit their [website](#).

### Key Clips:

- [2020 Census data and map: Michigan population change by county since 2010](#)
- [Michigan AFL-CIO proposes redistricting maps for state commission](#)
- [Census changes may spell trouble for Michigan Democrats as redistricting starts](#)

## Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center offers Virtual Resources

Check out the many resources available at the Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center [website](#).

They offer many education resources as well as details on how to schedule a tour of the Learning Center for your students. (Tours suspended until COVID-19 status is reduced.) To learn about the Michigan Supreme Court, including a brief discussion of its structure and operating procedure, visit [here](#). Partnership Formed Between National Battlefield & Education



## River Raisin National Battlefield Programs by Chuck Estep

A little over a year ago, the Monroe County Intermediate School District (MCISD) formed a partnership with the River Raisin National Battlefield Park (RRNBP) located at 333 N. Dixie Highway in Monroe, Michigan. Together they would collaborate to provide educational programming aligned with the Michigan Social Studies Standards.



During the War of 1812, the battles fought here were significant as it was the largest loss of life in the United States prior to the Civil War and was pivotal both in the future history of the United States and Native Peoples until present day.

Last May and June, the first Virtual Field Trips were provided to schools around southeast Michigan from the Educational Center at the RRNBP. A variety of topics were offered:

- Musket Demonstration
- Tribal Elder

Dugout Canoe

Maps of Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Michigan

William Atherton (Kentucky Militia Interpreter)

Spinning Demonstration

Fur Trade

Sessions lasted 30 – 45 minutes and sessions were grouped appropriately by grade span. Students were also able to interact with presenters around each topic. Chuck Estep, Educational Consultant with the MCISD served as the facilitator during each session.



“I’ve been working with providing virtual learning to students for many years. While the technology has changed since I first started providing Virtual Field Trips, several things have remained the same. Teachers want context for learning within the scope of the standards at a convenient time with plenty of student engagement,” said Mr. Estep.

88 Classrooms from Monroe, Wayne, and Ottawa County participated and there were 2,288 students in attendance. Plans call for more opportunities for virtual learning throughout the course

of the new school year. Additionally, work within the Exhibit Hall is still in progress and once it is ready, will provide incredible in-person learning experiences for both children and adults.



“Virtual Learning is so important for this facility. It will provide educational opportunity for schools that are too far to come to Monroe and see this incredible place,” said Mr. Estep. For more information, you can sign up for the Monroe ISD’s Social Studies Educators’ [Listserv](#).

Also, you can visit the River Raisin National Battlefield Park Website for events and other important information at: <https://www.nps.gov/rira/index.htm>.

To reach Chuck Estep, call 734-342-8777 or email [chuck.estep@monroeisd.us](mailto:chuck.estep@monroeisd.us).



## Unit plan for clearer thinking and decisions

From Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools (a division of APA)

A brand-new TOPSS unit lesson plan on Cognition is available online for **all teachers**, available at <https://on.apa.org/3dp2kxL>! TOPSS thanks authors Codey Fickes, Dana Melone, and Cedar Riener for their work on this great new resource.

The unit plan contains three lessons, on Cognitive Processes Involved in Understanding Information, Problem Solving, and Judgement and Decision Making, along with eight activities, six critical thinking exercises, and resources for teachers.

This project was supported by a grant from the American Psychological Foundation David and Carol Myers Fund to Support Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools.

## The Most Important Ingredient in a Successful Civics Education

By Pete Bailey from the PopEd [Blog](#), July 8, 202

One of the most important questions we can ask is: how can we improve young people’s civic education? There is a growing worry that U.S. residents lack the necessary understanding of government, political processes, and democracy. But the good news is that this year lawmakers in Congress proposed the largest investment in civics education in decades through the [Civics Secures Democracy Act](#), giving \$1 billion in state funding to civic education programming. Additional funding for civic education is always positive, but the bigger question is how to spend it.

Should we invest in curricula that teach students about our constitution and the makeup of the government, or should we instead encourage our students to get involved with their community through projects, volunteering, and voting? Maybe we need to boost skills like spotting bias and improving civil discourse.

While one could make a logical argument in favor of any of these options, teaching current events is the most efficient way for educators to improve civic education in the United States.

## The Case for Current Events in Civics Ed

Schools are often considered to be safe places for students to learn, grow, and then graduate into the “real world.” Although we always want our students to feel safe, it is important to recognize that they are already a part of the world, and the events happening right now outside of the classroom are affecting their lives and their futures. Instead of acting as a shield, educators can be a valuable resource to help make sense of current events, and explain nuanced subjects that require additional knowledge and experience to fill in the gaps of a news clip a teen may have seen on TikTok. Teaching current events allows educators to cover a myriad of civic content, including knowledge, skills, and action civics, while also introducing students to that “real world” they will soon inherit.

## Teaching Government through Current Events

As I write this, the news cycle is swarming with think-pieces about how President Biden can pass a bipartisan infrastructure bill through an evenly split senate without

abolishing the filibuster- a sentence that is pure gibberish to many students. The vocabulary used in most coverage of current events is not always accessible for middle and high school students, though the content could surely interest them. For example, try asking students if they would like their grandmother’s house to have reliable internet access when visiting. As educators, we have the power to give students access to understanding current events when we spend classroom time breaking down these types of headlines and making room for discussion.

Unpacking this news cycle also reinforces several concepts required in every U.S. History or



government class including separation of powers, checks and balances, and how a bill becomes a law. It isn't often you can point to a concrete example to answer the all-too-common question *why do we have to learn this*. Knowledge about U.S. history and government is much more engaging when students see it in action through current events, rather than on a slide next to a picture of the Founding Fathers. Current events not only teach similar content but also reinforce this knowledge organically when our students click around on social media, catch a clip of cable news, or even... read a newspaper!

[Editors Note: I used current events for many years in my high school and college classes. They were often blended with geography and other social studies skills.]

### Making Room for Action Civics

Action civics takes students out of the classroom and into the community where they can apply the civic behaviors they learned in school to their own neighborhoods.

Civics education has transformed in recent years as young people discovered that their voices have power. Student organized protests like [Fridays](#)



for [Future](#) and [March for our Lives](#), show that our youth are more than able to participate in civics when they want change. Teaching current events is a great way to spur interest and allow room in the classroom for increased civic engagement because it opens a window for all students to connect with what is going on in their community. Action civics is not limited to protesting. More and more teachers are finding ways to organize their students around issues they care about and then giving them the space to take action by contacting their representatives, submitting opinion pieces for a local newspaper, and of course, voting!

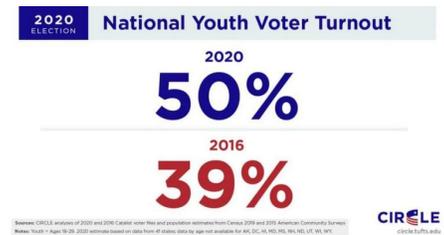
Data from the 2020 election shows that the youth vote increased across the country. A recent study from Tufts Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) estimated that [50 percent of young people](#) ages 18-24 voted in the 2020 election – an 11 percent increase from the 2016 general election. It's hard not to see the correlation between student-organized protests over the past four years and a major bump in youth voter turnout. By

teaching current events and spurring interest in action civics, teachers can create long-term civic engagement.

### Boosting Civics Skills with Current Events

Action civics might benefit the country in the long run, but teaching current events can also have a powerful effect on important skills that are already a part of the existing civics curriculum. When students discuss current events in the classroom, they need to form their own opinions, and in many cases, be able to back up their reasoning with factual research (a process many Facebook posts could use). Whether the task is to debate their peers, write a position paper, or find a solution to a problem, civics education pushes students to

research, think critically, and make strong arguments. Improving these types of skills will help students perform better in just about every subject now and in the future.



Possibly the most important civics skill set for our students to master is deciphering fact from bias or misinformation. Students will undoubtedly come across many false or misleading articles from dubious websites when researching current events. Continuous practice and support from their peers and teachers allow students to hone their media literacy skills and use it to avoid falling victim to an increasing amount of fake news.

### The Goal

While there are plenty of reservations to discuss current events in an increasingly polarized country, it is precisely that reason why we need to. From learning the basics about our government to creating a civil discourse with those you disagree with and ultimately participating in our democracy, students with a strong grasp of current events will have the tools to solve tomorrow's problems. Educators play a unique role in this process and help create informed citizens by simply opening the door to current events in the classroom.

*Image credits: Newspaper ([A Man Reads a News Paper](#) by [Daniel Friday Danzor](#)); Protest ([Fridays for Future 25.01.2018 Berlin](#) © [Jörg Farys / Fridays for Future](#) by [FridaysForFuture Deutschland](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)); Voter turnout ([circle.tufts.edu](#))*

## \* \* Views from Around the Country \* \*

## Teaching US history gets more challenging

by Sarah Schwartz (in [Education Week](#), 8/11/21/  
summarized in [NCSS SmarrtBrief](#) 8/13/21)

Conflicting ideas and stakeholders have long influenced what is taught in the social studies classes of US schools, as detailed by the background in this article. This fall, teachers in some states will adjust to newly enacted laws and requirements while parents in some locations are challenging teachers, lessons, texts and literature choices, including a Tennessee district where a group of mothers objected to "Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story," written by Bridges, who was 6 when she was among the first Black students to integrate a school system.

## Germany faced its horrible past. Can we do the same?

By Michele L. Norris

[The Opinions Essay in the [Washington Post](#), 6/2/21]

Shortly after the National Museum of African American History and Culture opened in 2016 on the National Mall, I was speaking to some patrons of a successful nonprofit about the importance of candid racial dialogue in politics and in the places we live, work and worship.

One of the participants had recently toured the museum and had a pointed question. Why, she wondered, were all the exhibits that visitors first encounter dedicated to slavery? Among other things, she was referring to a reconstructed cabin built by former slaves from Maryland and a statue of Thomas Jefferson next to a wall with the names of more than 600 people he owned. "Couldn't the exhibits begin with more uplift?" the woman asked, arguing that Black achievement was more worthy of the spotlight. She suggested that the museum should instead usher visitors toward more positive stories right from the start, so that if someone were tired or short on time, "slavery could be optional."

Her question was irksome, but it did not surprise me. I'd heard versions of the "Can't we skip past slavery" question countless times before. Each time serves as another reminder that America has never had a comprehensive and widely embraced national examination of slavery and its lasting impact. Yes, there are localized efforts. But despite the centrality

of slavery in our history, it is not central to the American narrative in our monuments, history books, anthems and folklore.

There is a simple reason: The United States does not yet have the stomach to look over its shoulder and stare directly at the evil on which this great country stands. That is why slavery is not well taught in our schools. That is why the battle flag of the army that tried to divide and conquer our country is still manufactured, sold and displayed with defiant pride. That is why any mention of slavery is rendered as the shameful act of a smattering of Southern plantation owners and not a sprawling economic and social framework with tentacles that stamped almost every aspect of American life. . . .

[Editor's Note: The rest of essay is on the [Washington Post](#)]

### End Note:

My thanks to all those who contributed to this issue of MCSS Toolbox, especially Jim McConnell.

Please help your colleagues by submitting an article or OptEd or anything else that would help educators be more successful in teaching social studies.

As you may notice, most of the articles here seem to aim at secondary teaching. While many ideas can be made to fit younger or older students, like current events, some solid elementary ideas or college teaching approaches are welcome. Lastly please feel free to send a Letter to the Editor. Deadline for the MLK issue is December 31, 2021.

Please send all ideas to Bob pettapiece, [pettapiece@wayne.edu](mailto:pettapiece@wayne.edu).

