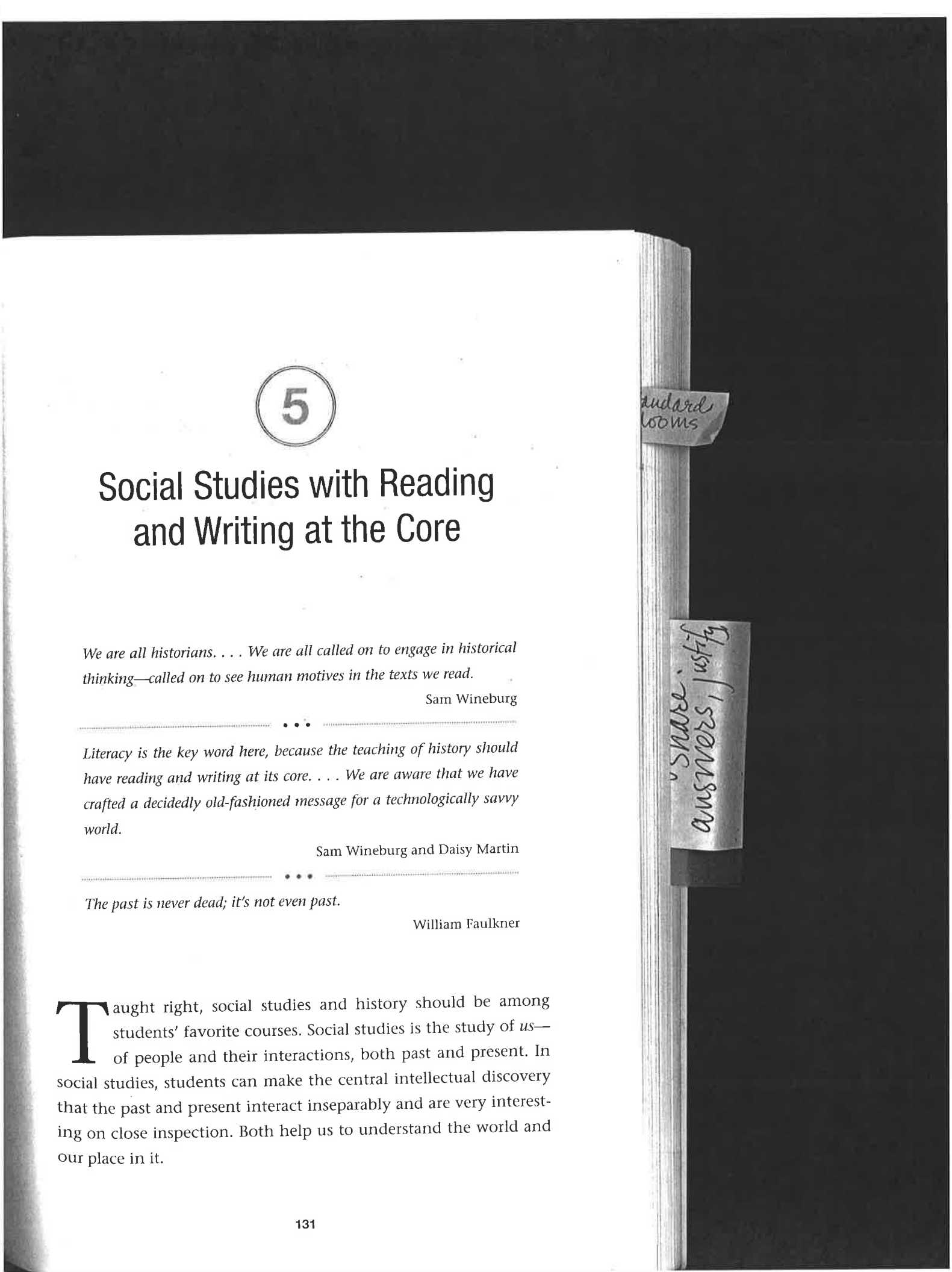

5

Social Studies with Reading and Writing at the Core

We are all historians. . . . We are all called on to engage in historical thinking—called on to see human motives in the texts we read.

Sam Wineburg

• • •

Literacy is the key word here, because the teaching of history should have reading and writing at its core. . . . We are aware that we have crafted a decidedly old-fashioned message for a technologically savvy world.

Sam Wineburg and Daisy Martin

• • •

The past is never dead; it's not even past.

William Faulkner

Taught right, social studies and history should be among students' favorite courses. Social studies is the study of *us*—of people and their interactions, both past and present. In social studies, students can make the central intellectual discovery that the past and present interact inseparably and are very interesting on close inspection. Both help us to understand the world and our place in it.

In his autobiography, Norman Podhoretz writes of the epiphany he had in his first year at Columbia University. He realized that history wasn't about "other people"; it was about him—his country, his world, right now. "When I entered Columbia," he writes,

> I thought history was a series of past events. . . . I did not know I was a product of a tradition, that past ages had been inhabited by men like myself, and the things they had done *bore a direct relation to me* and to the world in which I lived. . . . It set my brain on fire. (1967, p. 33, my emphasis)

James Loewen writes similarly of this "direct relation" between historical studies and our immediate lives. History, he notes,

> is about us. Whether one deems our present society wondrous or awful or both, history reveals how we got to this point. *Understanding our past is central to our ability to understand ourselves and the world around us.* (1995, pp. 12–13, my emphasis)

As with literature, social studies and history enlarge us. Both help us understand ourselves; they reveal the hidden or unquestioned cultural and political influences that act on us, often without our consent. Social studies, including large doses of *current* issues and events, allows us to understand those influences. Like literature, social studies broadens our vision and sensibilities beyond the limits of direct experience. In this way, it allows us to have a greater hand in the history we all help to make—in our own nation, town, or temple.

How can ordinary teachers fulfill the promise of social studies with students who seem indifferent to it? There is a way; for social studies to "set the brain on fire," it must have authentic literacy and controversy at its core.

Wisdom, enthusiasm for learning, and college preparation can only come from intensive, frequent reading; talking (*lots* of talking);

writing; and arguing about the people, issues, and events of the past and present. As we've seen, facts are essential. Kevin St. Jarre (2008) speaks for many of us when he writes that students have to know the pertinent facts that precede and inform the issues of our time. But these aren't enough by themselves. He pleads with us to recognize that "what [students] need are more Socratic discussion and reading, more analysis, more writing and *more reasons why they should care*" (2008, p. 650, my emphasis).

If we want students to care about social studies, we must put reading and writing at its core (Wineburg & Martin, 2004).

Social Studies with Language and Literacy at the Core

Literacy is indeed the key to effective social studies instruction (Wineburg & Martin, 2004). Next to language arts, social studies is perhaps the most intensively literate of the disciplines. Both help us understand people and cultures. Both promote the deep understanding of the human condition, which Schlechty (1990) wrote of in his early description of 21st century education. Both require us to read closely and carefully for *nuance*—beyond literal meaning, so that we may be wise, wary consumers of language that is so often used for commercial, political, or self-aggrandizing purposes.

It's all about language. As Stanford's Sam Wineburg writes,

> Language is a medium for swaying minds and changing opinions, for rousing passions, or allaying them. This is a crucial understanding for reading the newspaper, for listening to the radio, for evaluating campaign promises, or for making a decision to drink a NutraSweet product based on research conducted by the Searle Company. (2001, p. 83)

Wineburg believes students must be taught to "argue with the text"—both with textbooks *and* other current or historical

documents. This makes all students and adults "historians . . . called on to see human motives in the texts we read; called on to mine truth from the quicksand of innuendo, half-truth, and falsehood that seeks to engulf us each day." Social studies is the place to learn this, to "think and reason in sophisticated ways" (2001, p. 83).

Of necessity, we can only learn to "mine truth" from a curriculum rich in opportunities to argue and dismantle written and spoken arguments. Wineburg and his colleague, Daisy Martin, call for an "investigative curriculum" that consists of a "two-part equation . . . the teaching of history should have *reading and writing at its core*" (Wineburg & Martin, 2004, p. 44, my emphasis).

This echoes the sentiments of many prominent history educators. James Banner is the cofounder of the National History Center in Washington, D.C. After studying history teaching in multiple representative states, he and several national experts found that it was deficient in precisely those skills that are "fundamental to historical knowledge and thought: writing well, constructing arguments, reading critically, assessing evidence" (Banner, 2009, p. 24).

It should go without saying that most students won't optimally learn facts (much less care about them) without abundant opportunities to read, write, and talk. As McConachie and colleagues (2006) write, "Students can develop deep conceptual knowledge in a discipline only by using the habits of reading, writing, talking, and thinking which that discipline values and uses" (p. 8, my emphasis).

The benefits of making literacy central to social studies are legion and essential to both the preservation and improvement of culture. As Wineburg and Martin write, "Our democracy's vitality depends on . . . teaching students to be informed readers, writers and thinkers about the past as well as the present" (2004, p. 45).

We don't appreciate deeply enough the outsize value of social studies. If we did, we would do more to preserve its soul: literacy, analysis, and argument. As with language arts, we must rescue social studies from "readicide" and the titanic forces marshaled against literacy, which has been pushed aside in favor of activities that leave students "engaged but illiterate" (Wineburg & Martin, 2004, p. 45).

Skits, Posters, and Social Studies Illiteracy

Wineburg and Martin found that analytic, argumentative reading and writing have been replaced by activities aimed at addressing popular notions about "multiple intelligences or learning styles." To their dismay, they found students performing skits, making posters, and doing an excessive number of PowerPoint presentations (2004, p. 45). More teachers should know that Howard Gardner himself is dismayed by such nonsense in the name of multiple intelligences (Traub, 1998). Such practices supplant our efforts to prepare students for careers and college, ensuring that they will never learn to read deeply and write about social and historical issues—like "defending an argument on why the U.S.S.R. disintegrated" (Wineburg & Martin, 2004, p. 45). We would rather entertain students than teach them.

Wineburg and Martin would instead take us back to the future—to the *old* stuff that ought to inform the *new* core of 21st century social studies.

An "Old-Fashioned" Message

Wineburg and Martin urge a highly unfashionable version of teaching and learning: "We are aware that we have crafted a decidedly old-fashioned message for a technologically savvy world" (2004, p. 44). Social studies educators must break free from fads and embrace what we never implemented in the first place: courses that cultivate students' abilities to participate in "the literate activities that our society demands. This means teaching students to be *informed*

readers, writers, and thinkers about the past as well as the present" (p. 45, my emphasis).

Wineburg and Martin recognize that this old-fashioned message is as appropriate now as ever: "The place to teach students to ask questions about truth and evidence *in our digital age* is the history and social studies classroom, and we should not delay" (2004, p. 42, my emphasis).

This emphasis on finding "truth and evidence" in our reading, talking, and writing actually makes social studies simple to teach. It revolves around task, text, and talk. And these are rooted in content—in an organized schedule of essential topics and standards.

Good curriculum should approximate the following:

- Essential topics and standards to be taught, divided by unit and grading period (to ensure roughly common pacing and depth).
- *Selected* textbook pages (*not* the whole book or all of every chapter) aligned with units and topics.
- About 35 (or more) supplementary or primary source documents, including current magazine and news articles, to be read and discussed about once a week. (We'll look at a variety of rich, available resources and opportunities for this at the end of the chapter.)
- Some prepared interactive lectures for each unit to reinforce or supplement the textbook. (See the interactive lecture template on p. 68.)
- Overarching/essential questions for each unit.
- End-of-unit papers or essay question assignments.
- Routine use, for all of the above, of something like the literacy template on p. 74.

That's basically it. Any team of social studies teachers could assemble the topics and textbook pages, the units and questions, and then begin to implement them without much delay. Even a few hours per course can give you enough structure to begin. Of course, once built, refining these standards and their delivery must become the team's active priority: the focus of all professional development, faculty, and team meetings.

We'll start by looking at (always problematic) social studies standards, and then look at how to teach them using the literacy and lecture templates. The last section of this chapter provides an extensive look at the exciting possibilities for supplementary sources—from primary source documents to newspapers, magazines, and online resources.

Overabundant, Poorly Written Standards

> *Offered a list of standards, we should scrutinize each one but also ask who came up with them and for what purpose. Is there room for discussion and disagreement?*
>
> Alfie Kohn

In Chapter 4, we saw the damage that can be done by standards documents. To be fair, social studies standards have done less harm than those in language arts. That said, we are wise to have a healthy skepticism for them as well.

Once again, these documents were never field-tested; not a single pilot group of teachers ever tried to *construe, organize, and teach to these,* and then use the findings to refine the initial set of standards. If that process had taken place, every set of state standards would be about half its current size and be vastly clearer and more useful to boot. And there would be a less haphazard connection between these standards and the state exams that purport to assess them (Fuhrman et al., 2009).

As I recommended earlier, start by stripping away most of the verbiage and focus instead on the raw content and topics in the

social studies standards documents. After you have selected your essential content standards, replace the verbiage with your own language, questions, and prompts, perhaps reflecting Conley's (2005) habits of mind or the upper end of Bloom's taxonomy. (Remember, if we teach content to Conley's habits or the upper end of Bloom's, the lower end will take care of itself.)

The work always begins with reducing the standards. Once again, I'm looking at a set of standards given the highest rating by a prestigious, nationally known agency. I count 41 topics for the Civil War. That's way too many if we want to teach them in sufficient depth. Take heart in knowing that we have better odds of succeeding on state assessments if we teach far fewer carefully selected standards than if we attempt to teach too many (Ainsworth, 2003a; Marzano, 2003; Reeves, 2003).

The detailed process for reducing the number of standards is found in Chapter 2. In essence, we would have groups of teachers

- Review prescribed standards for a course/grade level, as well as what will be taught above and below their grade level.
- Select their favorite 50 percent of the standards (give or take).
- Use a simple method like dot voting to identify the group's favorite standards—the 50 percent on which the group has highest agreement.
- Prominently post a preliminary set of these "power standards" (Larry Ainsworth's useful term [2003a]).
- Discuss additions, deletions, and modifications.
- Try to come *as close as possible* to the target reduction (50 percent).
- Lay the standards out by grading period and units and determine approximate number of class periods to devote to each, allowing ample time for reading, discussing, and writing.
- *Leave some room* for each teacher to implement some independent assignments.

Once these steps are complete, the document should be finalized (yet always remain subject to adjustment over time) and used as the basis for the team to create all lessons, reading assignments, questions, and writing assignments. Again, it is a good idea to leave about two weeks "free" each semester for individual teachers to pursue their favorite topics or interests (DuFour et al., 2006, p. 65).

Let's now look at how we would work from this initial curriculum map to develop units and overarching questions.

Organizing Around Task, Text, and Talk

Once we have selected and organized our curriculum topics, then what? I find Stephanie McConachie and her colleagues' (2006) simple formula for content area reading very helpful here—their notion of "task, text, and talk." Once we have our curriculum, units, and topics organized by grading period and unit, the authors recommend that we develop two or more questions for each unit. The task is for students to respond in writing to "overarching questions for the unit using evidence from the analysis of primary and secondary sources" (p. 2). Note the emphasis on argument and analysis, recurring themes in the best descriptions of a good education.

Of course, students must be taught, explicitly, how to answer these questions. We must "*apprentice them* into each discipline's way of thinking" (McConachie et al., 2006, p. 2, my emphasis). The term "apprentice" nicely reinforces the elements of good teaching—where the teacher demonstrates analytic reading for the student-apprentice, then observes and offers guidance until the student can do the work independently. These teaching and learning processes are applied to all three parts of the "task, text, and talk" formula.

The "task" in their scheme is akin to the "purpose" for the reading (and talking and writing) in the literacy template. This should include some background on the topic and some

to help students to see why the task is interesting (think "anticipatory set").

Let's suppose, for instance, that our elementary or middle school students will be learning about the three branches of state and national government. Their task would be to take notes and summarize the three branches and then argue for why they do or do not think this is an effective way to run a government. (Older students could argue that this system solves or creates certain problems—or both.) The teacher would also provide some background on this topic to pique interest. (Teams should always be sharing both general and topic-specific strategies for creating interest in the common tasks and readings.)

Next, the "text" that supports the task would be, for instance, certain pages from the textbook, selected by the team, describing the branches of government and a newspaper article or primary source document about the separation of powers.

Before having students read either text independently, the teacher would review any potentially difficult vocabulary terms and model critical reading with underlining, annotation, or note taking. Then the teacher would provide guided practice in these processes as students demonstrated their readiness to perform them independently. (We'll look at these steps in detail in a moment.)

The "talk" in the scheme occurs during the modeling and guided practice, as students pair up to discuss and compare their notes and impressions or the teacher decides to call on random students to check for understanding. "Talk" also occurs if, after completing the reading, there is a formal or Socratic discussion. (See the "discussion of text" step of the literacy template in Chapter 3.)

Let's look at one more example in high school world history.

Task, Text, and Talk in World History

Let's suppose that the curriculum topics have been allotted by grading period and that during one of them, the following three units will be taught (as they are in a district I am now working with):

- Renaissance and Reformation
- Encounters and Exchanges
- Age of Revolution

Each unit is about three weeks long. Let's also suppose it is the beginning of the quarter and we will now be teaching the Renaissance. The major topics to be covered are the rise of humanism, prominent Renaissance writers and artists, and conflict between the church and science.

The work would be identical to what we do in the lower grades, as described above. First, the team would develop a task—a question—for the rise of humanism. The task might be: "Write a paper three pages long evaluating the merits and impact of the humanism movement, being sure to cite its origins, key events, and major players. Be sure to share your thoughts and opinions freely, and make connections and comparisons to other historical periods, including our own."

The text could be something like pp. 417–422 of McDougall-Little's *World History*, some samples of art (by da Vinci and Raphael), and writings of the period, including selections from Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Castiglione's *The Courtier*. Students could compare these works to George Washington's "Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation" (circa 1744; available online at www.nationalcenter.org/WashingtonCivility.html). Or ask them to read Froma Harrop's 2010 opinion piece "Slobs and American Civilization," which is about modern manners and the decline of civility. From upper elementary on, students would find these documents readable and fascinating.

The talk in this case comes as pairs and small groups compare and share their notes, underlinings, and perceptions derived from their engagement with the art, readings, and lectures. McConachie and colleagues (2006) recommend that teachers *circulate throughout the discussions*, listening in to gauge students' understanding (p. 11). These would prepare students for whole-class discussions and

debates (church vs. science; medieval vs. Greco-Roman values and culture; Machiavelli's cynical-sounding recommendations in *The Prince*—there is plenty of controversy in each).

All of this reading and discussion becomes the basis for the paper the students write—perhaps even short research papers where students simply find and integrate a specified number of sources on their own (like the sources we'll see in the last part of this chapter).

• • •

The simple framework just outlined demystifies the organization and delivery of simple, high-quality social studies curriculum. It starts with selecting (only) the most essential standards; dividing the standards by grading period and then into instructional units; coming up with engaging questions or tasks that establish the purpose for the reading, talking, and writing (in line with Conley's [2005] four college-prep criteria); finding suitable texts for these purposeful tasks; and then employing the simple steps in the literacy template for each reading or set of readings. You would supplement this work with interactive lectures using the template in Chapter 3. That's all you need to teach perhaps 60 to 80 percent (or more) of the social studies curriculum.

Any team could implement this simple framework. And students would find such activities far more engaging than typical social studies, which seldom challenges their intellect or includes opportunities for students to discuss and share their thoughts and opinions frequently as they read and learn. As I mentioned earlier, discussion is perhaps students' favorite way to learn (Azzam, 2008).

We can use this framework for any course at any grade level as we prepare record numbers of students for 21st century careers, college, and citizenship. In a moment we'll review in more detail *how to teach* the above—how to incorporate modeling, guided practice, and formative assessment into actual lessons built around the lecture and literacy templates. But first, to demystify this process further, let's look at a few more examples of "tasks" from U.S. and world history, geography, economics, and civics.

Social Studies Tasks: The Student as Expert

Students will enjoy tasks and questions if we encourage them to write and respond to them as experts, with the confidence that comes of having read texts closely, listened, talked, and taken notes. All of these activities prepare students to address, with some authority, questions and tasks like the following:

- Evaluate U.S. behavior during the westward movement, including the War with Mexico, the Louisiana Purchase, and the acquisition of Oregon (argument, inference, drawing conclusions from conflicting views/source documents).
- Give your informed but *personal evaluation and opinions* of Roosevelt's handling of the Depression and the major New Deal programs vs. Harding's handling of the depression of the early 1920s (a *very* interesting comparison).
- Give your informed but *personal evaluation and opinions* of the ethics of walking away from an "upside-down" mortgage. (Lots of pro-con articles on this topic are available online.)
- Give your informed but *personal evaluation and opinions* of life among the ancient Mayans, Aztec, or Incas.
- Give your informed but *personal evaluation and opinions* of which African, Asian, or European country you deem to have the highest quality of life, based on readings and demographic statistics.
- Come up with a realistic post–Civil War Reconstruction program based on your own ideas and a synthesis of the plans you learned about in your textbook and other readings.
- As a public official, defend a system of government—or a combination of systems—with reference to each of the major economic systems: socialism, communism, and democratic capitalism.

• As an expert on a historical period (the Reformation, World War I), write an abbreviated history of that period, with complete freedom to offer your opinions, interpretations, or personal musings about people and events along the way. (This one could be used and repeated liberally, for any unit or historical period at *any* grade level.)

For any of the above, you might add the requirement that students

• Make connections to past or previous periods and events already studied;
• Make connections to current issues, people, or events; and
• Do some independent research to supplement the common readings.

All of the above address Conley's (2005) standards and all rely on readily available or accessible texts—textbooks and supplemental sources that are easy to access online.

But what about all this writing? Does it mean that social studies teachers have to become virtual English teachers? No.

Writing in Social Studies

In social studies, I would love to see students writing end-of-unit papers that are essentially responses to the unit questions—about 10 to 12 short papers per year. These would be based on readings and lectures and would constitute much if not most of the assessment for each unit. Most of the writing should be done in class, in an "open book" environment. This is the kind of truly "educative assessment"—which is itself an educational experience—that we should have embraced years ago (Wiggins, 1998).

In addition, students might further develop one unit paper each grading period or each semester. It would include some independent research (to include a specified number of articles) and would have

to meet somewhat higher expectations for length and quality. I'm thinking of these papers as being roughly in the range of two to five pages long, or about 800 words in the earlier years and approaching 2,000 or more as we move toward high school. This amount of writing, done every year, would have life-changing implications for student preparedness for college or careers. And the paper grading load need not be burdensome. Here's why.

As pointed out in Chapter 3, most of the work for these papers would be done in class (with supervision and guidance), in stages, with teacher modeling and checks for understanding occurring multiple times *before students ever hand work in to be graded.* Designated exemplars would be used for every writing assignment, greatly increasing the odds that students will understand and master the essential structure of good papers (which are easier to grade). In addition, students would use the exemplars along with checklists to do their own checks for understanding before ever turning in their papers.

Brief, everyday writings don't always need to be handed in. The teacher can scan them as he or she walks around the room conducting a check for understanding and give credit for adequate completion of the task (for example, for adequately supporting an argument or two with textual evidence).

Again, social studies is not English; English has the primary responsibility for teaching students the finer elements of a writing rubric. In social studies and other subjects, I think it is enough to use a versatile, scaled-back rubric like the following:

• In addressing the question or task, provide a certain number of reasons/citations/direct quotes for each major portion of your argument.
• There must be clear, readable, logical explanations for each citation, linked clearly to the question/argument/learning target.
• You must address major objections to your argument.

If we're smart, we'll teach students not to turn in their papers until they and a peer can attest that they have evaluated it against the exemplar and it meets all the criteria. (For more suggestions on how to increase writing even as we greatly reduce time paper-grading, see the article titled "Write More, Grade Less" on my website.)

As with any assignment, students produce better work (always easier to grade) when we provide full-blown lessons for each phase of the work with modeling, guided practice, and formative assessment.

Let's look more closely at how to do this when we are teaching students to read a text in social studies.

Close Reading in Social Studies

For McConachie and colleagues, the capacity for "genuine historical inquiry" can only be imparted "by *modeling and making explicit* the ways [teachers] want students to argumentatively and analytically read, interpret, and talk about the documentary evidence before them" (2006, p. 12 , my emphasis). This needs to be done continuously. For what it's worth, most educators tell me that we should model how to read, talk, and write "argumentatively and analytically" at least two times per week, every week, at every grade level.

Let's now look at two examples of how a teacher would "model and make explicit" these simple processes for two assignments.

Suppose, in the first case, that we gave 5th or 6th (or 11th!) graders the following task—their purpose for reading the assigned textbook material: "As you read about the Mayans and Aztecs, write an argument for why you would prefer to have been a member of one tribe/group or the other."

The texts would be pages 60–69 (only about six pages total, because of illustrations) from *Adventures in Time and Space*, an upper elementary textbook. (Again, I believe we are smart to have students read no more than half of most textbooks—parts of it slowly and

purposefully. That leaves more time to read primary and supplementary source documents.) Start by reading the first paragraph of the section—out loud—as your students read along with you (as you scan the class to ensure engagement). You read that upon entering the city of Tikal 1,800 years ago, the buildings look like a "snow-capped mountain range." You tell students to look at the picture in the textbook of a stunning Mayan temple in Guatemala. Then you read that the city "had a population of 50,000." Stop to "model" your thinking, like so:

> All this is very impressive. That was about AD 200. Such a large city with beautiful architecture tells me they were a very advanced civilization for their time. I will briefly jot this down [which you do, on an overhead projector or Smartboard]. I will look for the answer to this question when I read the next section about the Aztecs.

A few sentences later, after reading some material that is less germane to your task—and you tell them this—you read that the temples were built "to ask their gods for success in battle and for good harvests." You might stop and say something like this:

> This tells me that the Mayan were religious and that they may have been a warlike people. I wonder how warlike, or if they were more or less warlike than the Aztecs? I would have less admiration for a culture that devoted too much of its time and resources to unnecessary wars or wars of conquest.

The intellectual benefits of doing this regularly are invaluable. Make no mistake: this is *how students learn to think*. And it is just as important in high school.

High school students could be given a task like the following: "Evaluate the Progressive Era (1890–1920). Do you agree with,

disagree with, or have a mixed opinion of the Progressives' agenda?" (This period is loaded with interesting controversy.)

First, you would give students some background on this very interesting period and compare it to current issues (such as the increasing income gap between rich and poor, homelessness, unemployment, and health care). Then students would read three pages from a textbook like *The American Pageant* (pp. 684–686) as well as one or two online articles. You would do the same kind of modeling we just saw as you read the first few paragraphs about the muckrakers, the Progressive Era journalists. Then you would stop to tell students something like this:

> I like the fact that the muckrakers were looking out for the poor and those without a voice in the early 20th century. I admire that. But it says here that there were "fierce circulation wars" and competition between newspapers during this time. Editors paid a lot of money to writers who could dig deep for "the dirt that the public loved to hate." I'm going to jot that down on my notes [which you would then do, modeling how you usually only jot down brief phrases, not whole sentences]. I'm wondering—are you?—if the money wouldn't cause some of the writers to exaggerate, because their bosses were demanding lots of such stories so their papers would sell. This reminds me of today's tabloids that we see in the checkout line, where the writers are willing to bend the truth because they know it sells. Could some of the muckrakers have done more harm than good? If the textbook doesn't tell me, I may need to seek information from other—maybe online—sources. Now, in the next five minutes, I want all of you to read and annotate/take notes for the next paragraph or two and see what opinions you form or if certain questions occur to you. Then I'll have you pair up and share.

You get the idea. You could conduct the same processes for virtually any reading task that involves note taking, underlining, or annotation. We've seen the value of textbook reading in earlier chapters. But you could also model and provide instruction for how to read current articles, opinion pieces, primary historical documents, or demographic tables on various countries, states, or cities. We'll discuss their promising possibilities in a moment.

When we routinely "model and make explicit" how we as adults read, think, and make connections, students learn to do it too. Furthermore, they will see that such close, insightful reading *is within their reach*—that all of them can do such reading and thinking, which is central to an education.

Let's look now at how the remaining elements of good instruction are employed in this simple read, talk, and write template.

Checking for Understanding

Modeling, however invaluable, is never enough. We have to follow through with the other routine components of good lessons—guided practice and checks for understanding. For example, after you model your thinking for the Mayan/Aztec assignment, you would let students read the next two paragraphs alone while you circulate and observe (guided practice). Look for patterns of strength or weakness: Are students recording important information (like the fact that one of the tribes had mastered very sophisticated farming methods)? Do they know how to abbreviate their notes and annotations to save time—but in a way that they can make sense of later? Do they need more modeling right now? Or are they ready to "pair up" and share what they have underlined or written in their notes? After they pair up, you can call on pairs of students randomly to see how well they can explain the connection between their notes and the demands of the task (to argue their preference to have lived as a member of one

tribe or the other). They may need more help and modeling in how to make and record these connections—followed by more guided practice and formative assessment.

At the right point, you would let students finish the document independently and then write their informal papers. This, too, would be taught and modeled, working from an exemplar of such writing (see the literacy template in Chapter 3). It could be graded quickly for logic and content using a rubric like the one above—or possibly by just walking around. Thus is a worthy education acquired—the result of using variations on the same simple template frequently and redundantly.

By design, this template shares the same elements as those of effective interactive lectures, which we'll look at now.

Interactive Lectures in Social Studies

As noted in Chapter 3, lecture, done right, is a "marvel of efficiency" (Silver et al., 2007). It allows us to impart copious amounts of content knowledge in the subject areas and productively supplement what is lacking in the textbook. But, as we saw, lecture too often devolves into "a waste of precious classroom time" (2007, p. 26).

To be effective, interactive lecture must also incorporate the routine components of good lessons so often referred to in these pages. Here, too, I recommend that you visit the more detailed and very helpful summary of interactive lecture found on p. 68.

In essence, effective interactive lecture in social studies requires that we do the following:

- Begin the lecture by providing essential or provocative background knowledge and a task, usually in the form of a question students will respond to.
- Ensure that the lecture stays closely focused on the task.

- Ensure, through guided practice and formative assessment, that students are on task and learning; do this by circulating, observing, and listening as students take notes and pair up to process each chunk.
- Avoid talking for more than five to seven minutes without giving students an opportunity to connect learning to the essential question or task—to review their notes and pair up to compare their connections and perceptions with others.
- Ensure, in discussions, that all students respond multiple times during the lecture (Marzano, 2009).
- Reteach or clarify whenever a check for understanding indicates that students have not mastered the material in the previous chunk of the lecture—and only move on when we feel they are ready.

Such a template, like the literacy template, could be used frequently and liberally, having a positive impact on a generous portion of the curriculum. In combination, the majority of instruction in social studies could be built around these two templates.

Again, the use of these simple strategies is contingent on our commitment to a severely reduced, viable diet of standards and topics, which creates time for students to digest, discuss, and write about what they are learning, to discern historical patterns, and to make connections between past and present (Marzano, 2003).

And, once again, *none of the above must be done perfectly* to have an immense and immediate impact. Social studies education will be vastly more interesting for students the moment we adopt these simple activities so rich in content, literacy, *and verbal interaction.*

Perhaps the most promising development in social studies is the effort to more routinely incorporate documents that supplement—and often undermine (as they should)—the textbook: primary source documents, newspapers, magazines, and articles, all of which are so

readily available online. All of these documents would be taught using the same simple literacy template found in Chapter 3.

Primary Sources and Current Events

I honestly believe that social studies could be on the cusp of its greatest moment—that it could soon be a subject students come to love and look forward to. But to ensure that happens, we must infuse generous amounts of current and historical texts into students' weekly social studies diet. Such documents should include primary source documents, alternative histories, and also current issues and events found in newspaper and magazine articles. These should be introduced no later than the upper elementary grades.

Such supplemental texts could be a real game-changer, with a profound impact on students' sense of what history is and how it connects to their personal lives, culture, and communities. For all the value of the textbook as a conventional overview of history, students need plenty of opportunities to read and argue about what they find in a variety of source documents, past and present. Such an education is both personally and intellectually empowering and would accelerate their education by several years. I believe it could have a marked impact on general maturity levels.

There's a real breakthrough awaiting us here. To make these good things happen, teams of teachers must become avid, systematic collectors of documents (and good, field-tested questions). Many should be tied to instructional units, but any good or timely document will provoke curiosity and interest in the world. Some of these texts and questions should be shared within the school, district, region, and even state.

All we need are good texts that give students a chance to ask or discuss versatile questions like the following, which could be endlessly adapted:

- Do you agree/disagree with the author?
- What inferences, interpretations, or connections can you make using the text?
- Do you approve or disapprove of this past or present policy, person, or movement? What lessons can we learn from it/them?
- What problem(s) does the study of this person or policy help us solve?
- What can we infer from this text about this particular time, place, or culture?

I have seen what happens when students have the chance to closely read, talk, and write about historical documents and current articles, how it stirs their curiosity or outrage, their sense of fairness as they see how the world works—and how to make it better. We have to stop indulging in the fantasy that students don't care about ethics, human rights, war, climate change, global trade, and the best and worst of popular culture. They care—greatly—if given the opportunity to tackle a good text, knowing they will have a chance to talk, listen, and respond to others.

Write on the Text!

Any true education must include something woefully lacking in the majority of classrooms: regular opportunities to mark up, annotate, or highlight one- to three-page articles and documents. Writing *on the text itself* is a primary, essential intellectual experience—and it is mystifyingly rare in K–12 schools. (My daughters each had *one teacher* who took close reading and annotating seriously.) Students can't do this with textbooks. But we need to teach them, ceaselessly and at ever-higher levels of sophistication, how to annotate and underline and form arguments from their reading.

To those who say there isn't time, I can only say: Yes, there is. If there doesn't seem to be, then we are trying to teach too many

standards—or we are relying excessively on worksheets, movies, or ill-conceived projects. There is time to read and discuss current and primary source documents every week or two at the very least—enough to transform social studies education.

I have divided the following supplementary documents into my own somewhat arbitrary categories—and only as suggestions. The categories overlap. I will try to explain the function of each category and how it fits into the overall scope of social studies and history courses.

Historical and Primary Source Documents

About once a week, at most grade levels, students should have the chance to read from eyewitness or contemporary accounts, or from official or notable documents from the historical periods they are studying. Only this can give them an up-close, unfiltered sense of what people thought and did at the time the pieces were written. This deepens our understanding of people and institutions of the past in a way that no textbook, by itself, can do.

For instance, every student should have the chance to read General Sherman's letter to the mayor and council of Atlanta—sometimes titled "War Is Hell." In it, Sherman forcefully explains the reasons for his scorched-earth tactics. There is no better way to get into the mind of a 19th century warrior, or to evaluate the logic of the argument for total war that applies to Sherman's time as well as ours.

When studying the early explorers, students can read selections from Columbus's personal diary, which is written in clear, concrete language (4th or 5th graders could read it). These provide us with excellent opportunities to make inferences and draw conclusions about Columbus himself as well as the late 15th century European mind-set. Students could defend or debate those values against our own, or against the backdrop of his era. Or we might have them analyze the conflict between the sometimes

damning contents of the diary and Dimitri Vassilaros's (2008) article, "Columbus Was a Hero."

When students are studying the rise of industrial America, they could read an excerpt of Harriet Hanson Robinson's account of life as a mill worker in Lowell, Massachusetts, where even 10-year-old girls worked *14-hour days*. (A two-page excerpt of Robinson's text can be found, along with many other fascinating historical documents, at Fordham University's Internet Modern History Sourcebook, available online at www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook.html.) A good question for this and similar texts: What differences and similarities do you see, between then and now, in our attitudes toward women and girls—or people in general?

Lincoln's second inaugural address abounds in rich implications about just war and the case for the Northern cause. We could have students write an argument against the address and its message, from the perspective of a Confederate official.

The Analects of Confucius make very interesting reading: Confucius's simple aphorisms had a profound, enduring impact on China's history, culture, and development. *They could be read by most 3rd or 4th graders*. There is no way to understand their rich appeal without reading a few of these eloquent teachings, available online at http://eawc.evansville.edu/anthology/analects.htm. Students can argue about their merits and compare Confucius's perspective to current or less ancient notions of wisdom.

There are limitless opportunities to match such documents to periods we are studying, which would deepen understanding of human nature and enhance students' global perspective and understanding. Some examples for U.S. history follow:

- President Jackson's message to Congress "On Indian Removal" (1830), which led to the Trail of Tears. No textbook summary can capture the mind-set of Jackson's era like a one- or two-page selection from this address to Congress.

- Selections from President Reagan's "Tear Down This Wall" speech.
- Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."
- Supreme Court decisions: These primary source documents are rich in history and can be taught if we provide some background, vocabulary, and guidance to optimize student understanding. I had great luck teaching *Plessey v. Ferguson* to 7th graders.

Primary source documents are an obvious, critical supplement to textbook reading, but there are other secondary source documents that would greatly enhance social studies: short biographies and excerpts from alternative histories, current events articles, and other accessible sources.

Short Online Biographies

These readable, one- or two-page documents give us a deeper look than the textbook provides. For each, we could have students carefully read and annotate short online biographies as they answer questions like, "What do we learn from this person's life about their time and place and/or our own lives, time, or current issues?"

Clara Barton, John Brown, Genghis Khan, Akbar the Great of India, Helen Keller, and Aristotle are fascinating people, but only if we carefully teach, model, and apprentice our students into how to read brief biographies for the implications and connections they have for their time and ours. Reading about, writing about, and discussing such figures would be highly engaging for students.

Alternative Histories

There is a rich variety of alternative views of history, in short or long forms:

- Thomas E. Woods Jr.'s writings about the Great Depression would be fascinating to high school students—particularly the first few pages, in which he compares the depressions of the 1920s and the 1930s with our more recent "Great Recession" (see online at www.campaignforliberty.com/article.php?view=275).
- James W. Loewen's book, *Lies My Teacher Told Me,* is packed with provocative interpretations of U.S. history (1995). Or go online to see his fascinating study of Helen Keller, whose ardent adherence to communism is seldom contained in traditional history books (see www.ibiblio.org/pub/electronic-publications/stay-free/archives/18/loewen.html).
- Michael Medved's books and online articles offer very well-written views on cultural issues from a right-leaning perspective.
- From the left, Howard Zinn's famous *A People's History of America* (2003) has now been published in a form appropriate for elementary and middle school (with Rebecca Stefoff, 2007/2009).

Here I must pause to suggest how books like Zinn's or Medved's would make it simple to teach U.S. history effectively, from 3rd grade up, and would address the perennial controversies over which standards to teach and which viewpoints should predominate. Many people rightly note, for instance, that conventional textbooks tend to avoid controversial information and perspectives in our history. Why not have students read Loewen's book or Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (or its elementary-grades version) alongside the textbook—or either of these books alongside the conservative *A Patriot's History of the United States* by Larry Schweikart and Michael Patrick Allen (2004; an elementary version is now being written of it as well)? All of these books would provoke lively discussions.

Even if our curriculum focused mostly on close analysis and discussion and writing about the treatment of U.S. history in (1) textbooks and (2) two conflicting texts like Zinn's or Medved's, the experience would be transformative. Though Zinn's book can be

found in many high schools, I seldom find that its contents and arguments (like our textbooks) are read carefully, analyzed, debated, or written about.

Current Events and Late-Breaking News

Reading about and discussing current events and late-breaking news would be very exciting for students. We need to consider making such assignments a weekly routine.

Not long ago, Haiti's earthquake and recovery effort was the big story. Students should have had a chance to read articles like the one I read this morning, explaining why some Haitians have mixed feelings about the U.S. military even as it provides needed aid to their troubled country. This is the "hook" that makes it possible to discuss U.S. involvement in third world countries over the centuries. Many Haitians resent this involvement, which they believe has had negative long-term effects on their development.

History, as we know, is always repeating itself—*with differences*. Students need to develop a sense of such patterns and differences; they will soon enough be our voting citizenry, and their views on military matters will be shaped mightily by what they know about past and present military involvements. The same goes for domestic issues like health care, where to cut state budgets, or how to regulate Wall Street banks without harming them or our long-term economic health.

All of these issues would enliven social studies and can be easily shown to connect richly to the past. They are tomorrow's history—just as the current health care debate can only be understood if you know something about the 1994 attempt to launch a national health care system (overseen by our current secretary of state, Hillary Clinton).

There is so much opportunity here for analysis and discussion: elections, people in the news (Harry Reid, Sarah Palin)—these are the "hooks" for enjoining students in the kind of reading, annotating,

discussing, and writing that students need to prepare for the world they are entering.

And this doesn't only apply to middle and high school students. TIME for Kids and similar publications feature current events written at 2nd and 3rd grade reading levels. I'm looking at one such article about the reasons for the plummeting population of tigers in the world and the implications this has for their ecosystems. It contains statistics, information on efforts to save the tigers, and interviews with scientists. Great stuff. Other articles include "Reaching Out to Haiti" with information about comparative earthquake magnitudes, population, and poverty rates. "The State of America's Kids" has graphs and statistics about health (like child obesity trends). "A Shift in the Senate" is about the balance of power, historical perspective, and the impact of a Senate shift on current legislation. And all of these articles are full of what is increasingly important to the social studies: percentages and statistics, many of them featured graphically in charts and tables. All of these articles are written in 2nd and 3rd grade language. Is there any defensible reason not to make such documents a staple of instruction in social studies?

Again, I offer an important caution: *Please ignore the ever-present questions, activities, and worksheets that accompany such materials—they are seldom worth your time. Instead, simply have students read carefully to argue, infer, and make their own connections and conclusions as they read.*

Resources for Ongoing Issues, Controversies, and Culture

In this category, we find writings on more enduring if somewhat less timely issues:

- Allan Bloom on rock music; you can't miss with excerpts from *The Closing of the American Mind* (1988). Or read Stanley Kurtz's 2007 article on Bloom and rock and roll, "*Closing,* Still Open," in which Mick Jagger denigrates rock music. I *guarantee* an interesting discussion.

• The *New York Times*'s Nicolas Kristoff (2009) on microloans. "Sparking a Savings Revolution" is a simply written article about the outsize economic impact of helping third-world citizens to set up even small bank accounts.

• "Best. Decade. Ever." by Charles Kenny (2010). This fascinating *Foreign Policy* article argues that the first 10 years of the 21st century were humanity's finest—even for the world's bottom billion. It is a provocative and highly readable piece.

• "The Pros and Cons of Globalization," *BusinessWeek* (2000).

• "Mass Transit Hysteria" (2005) by P. J. O'Rourke has compelling stats arguing *against* the expansion of mass transit.

Of course, any of the above can be matched with an opposing view and debated. To that end, the website ProCon.org is a cornucopia of information on both sides of numerous enduring issues (more on this in the science chapter). FactCheck.org is an excellent source for resolving conflicting views and source documents on a variety of current and ongoing issues. For innumerable issues, it shows how both sides distort facts for political reasons. Indexmundi.com has a variety of demographic and quality of life statistics for nations, states, and cities. These sites offer rich opportunities for students to compare and evaluate the not-so-visible factors that affect people's lives.

On video, I love shows like *Fareed Zakaria GPS* on CNN, or ABCs *This Week*—especially the roundtable. Short, occasional clips would stimulate discussion and provide good models of clear, logical expression. If not overused, these can be a rich resource.

Lastly, students' own historical writings can be a fascinating resource for other students. We should collect good examples of student papers that are worthy of our analysis and discussion. Since 1987, Will Fitzhugh's quarterly *The Concord Review* has published the best examples of high school historical writing (any writing!) you'll find anywhere. Get a subscription to *Concord Review* at www.tcr.org.

There is nothing entirely new here. What *is* new is the emphasis teams would give such documents: to searching for them and then making them a much higher priority in social studies. All we would need is maybe one good text per week—about 35 documents in all. Course-alike teams could do much of the up-front work during scheduled team times or be paid to do this in the summer. It would be well worth it. Even one weekly experience would assure that students had abundant opportunities to practice deep, line-by-line reading and annotation. It would enliven students' interest in both the present and the past and reveal their seamless connections.

Add it up: This alone, done about once a week for 10 years, would lead to students having discussed and written about 300 such articles or documents by the time they leave high school.

A Whole New World

Social studies is the study of the world.

Teacher Eugene Simonet (played by Kevin Spacey) in *Pay It Forward*

Let's take stock. If students read, wrote, and talked as I suggest they do in this chapter—and if they closely read, argued, and wrote about the issues they encountered in textbooks, primary source documents, newspapers, magazines, and online articles every year—the cumulative benefits would be unparalleled. Average students in the United States would be more intellectually attuned, informed, articulate, and ready to make their way in the world than any previous generation.

We can make this happen. Right now.

Let me end by sharing two brief stories that convince me of this. Not long ago, I was teaching in a middle school history class. I decided to have students read the majority opinion in *Plessey v.*

Ferguson, in which Justice Henry Billings Brown writes his reasons for believing we should not allow people of color on the same trains as white people. Here we have a bright, educated man explaining, on behalf of several other highly educated men, why we should separate the races on trains and in public places in general.

After reviewing some vocabulary, sharing some background, and *modeling my own reading of the first couple of paragraphs,* I had the students closely read a selected portion of the text. As they read, I walked around to make sure they were on task and to see how well they were doing. After a few such iterations of reading, pairing, sharing, and modeling, they read the rest of the document on their own. Then we had a very productive, stimulating discussion; every student participated. In the heat of all this controversy, I had them write their arguments, which they did eagerly, as I walked around monitoring their efforts.

I did nothing exceptional—nothing any teacher couldn't do. But when the class was over, *the students clapped.* Not (believe me) because of anything I did, but because students really do enjoy these kinds of activities.

A while later I was in a high school leading a similar discussion about a controversial document with 11th graders in a U.S. history class. Again, every student seemed to deeply enjoy the opportunity to read slowly, underline, annotate, share thoughts in pairs, and then discuss the issues as a class. Everyone participated—eagerly. I later found out that most of them *had never done anything like this before.*

We are sitting on a real opportunity here. And the same opportunity awaits us in science.

6

Redefining Inquiry in Science

Inquiry science occurs when students use reading, writing, and oral language to address questions about science content.

Susanna Hapgood and Annemarie Sullivan Palincsar

* * *

Hands-on . . . activities may have overshadowed the importance of developing science content ideas.

Kathleen Roth and Helen Garnier

Like English and social studies, science curriculum is in need of significant revision, based on what I believe is an emerging consensus: that science, too, is best learned through an emphasis on content presented through intellectually engaging, age-old literacy practices. If we combine these with the right kind (and the proper amount) of hands-on labs and activities, then high-quality, effective, engaging science instruction will be within any teacher's reach.

The simple, essential ingredients for the majority of effective science curriculums are

- Close reading of selected portions of science textbooks;
- Regular reading and discussion of current science articles;
- Interactive lecture;
- Writing—from short, almost daily pieces to longer, more formal pieces; and