

TO BATTLE!
Or perhaps
a dialectical
discussion
would suffice?

mll
middle level learning



Also in this issue:

- *Breaking News! Ten Tips for How to Make Current Events Work for You*
- *History of Washington, D.C. (Book Review)*

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Dialectical Discussion: A Method at the Heart of Our Democratic Process

James Massey

It is safe to say that the 2016 presidential election cycle, and the events leading up to the inauguration of the 45th president, were both unconventional and dramatic. We have seen old divisions in the nation once again rise to the surface. Mediums like Facebook and Twitter seem to have encouraged people to communicate with others who mostly echo their own perspectives. Thus, instead of working to build bridges to span the divides and increase meaningful conversation, many entrench themselves and lob insults and disparaging remarks at those with whom they disagree. This does not bode well for the future of our American democratic experiment. We need to talk with and listen to our fellow citizens, even those with whom we disagree. Although our political affiliations and policy proposals may fall at opposite ends of a spectrum, we can find common ground in a desire for a better future for our country.

Educators of history, civics, geography, and economics are in a particularly powerful position to offer an alternative approach that recognizes this common ground. They can explicitly teach and model meaningful discussion methods that are at the heart of a successful democracy. One model, the dialectical discussion method, invites students to listen actively, think deeply, and develop articulate understandings grounded in inquiry. Middle school students are not too young to begin participating in dialectical discussions.

Thanks to Hegel

The dialectical discussion method is grounded in the “Hegelian dialectic.” Students begin by stating an assertion, or belief—a *thesis*. Then they engage in conversation that invites them to confront problems with and contradictions to that thesis—forming an *antithesis*. As students delve into rational discussion, they can be encouraged to incorporate new information and

ON THE COVER: Detail of “The Alexander Mosaic,” Pompeii, ca. 100 B.C.E. National Archaeological Museum, Naples, Italy. Photo by Berthold Werner at commons.wikimedia.org.

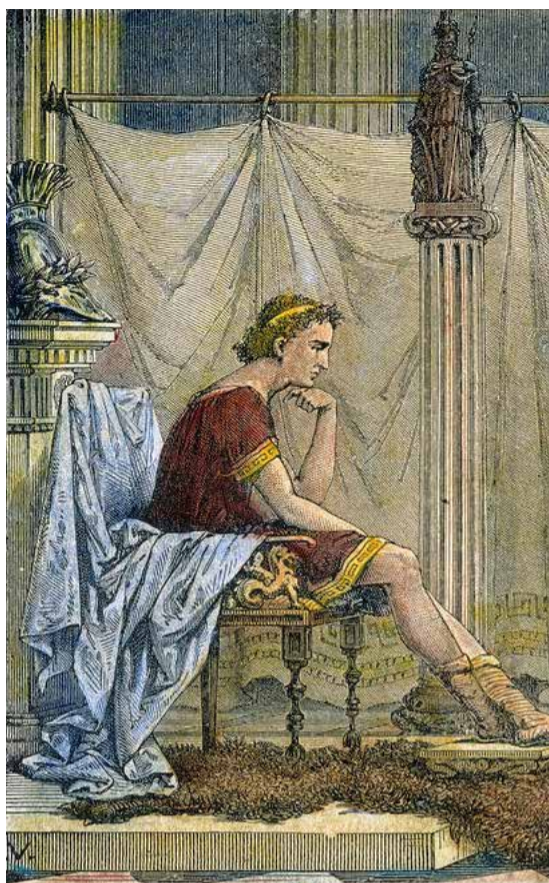
Who was Hegel?



Born in 1770 C.E. in the city of Stuttgart, at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel attempted, throughout his published writings as well as in his lectures, to elaborate a comprehensive and systematic philosophy from a logical starting point. During the ten years before his death in 1831 Hegel enjoyed celebrity in Berlin as a widely published philosopher and academic lecturer. The movement commonly known as German idealism effectively ended with Hegel’s death in 1831, but his work influenced the thinkers and philosophers who followed, including Karl Marx.

“Hegel’s dialectics,” like other dialectical methods, relies on a contradictory process between opposing sides. Whereas Plato’s “opposing sides” were people (Socrates and his interlocutors), what the “opposing sides” are in Hegel’s work depends on the subject matter he discusses.

SOURCES: “Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel,” and “Hegel’s Dialectics,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2016), plato.stanford.edu.



Alexander III, the student.

adjust their perspectives to reach a *synthesis*, or a deeper, more balanced understanding of reality—a *synthesis*.

Dialectal discussion provides students a model for democratic participation that emphasizes listening and reflecting, rather than strict adherence to ideology at the expense of the common good. Unlike debates, where students must defend their position at all costs, a dialectical discussion

allows the participants to conduct research, engage in meaningful conversation, listen to and consider the positions of their peers, and develop their individual perspectives within the context of democratic inquiry. Perhaps this dialectic is at the heart of the maturation process. Considering how polarized today's politics and politicians have become, this method offers students an alternative model of discourse, one that strengthens (rather than fragments) their sense of being part of a community of free-thinking individuals.

The Hegelian dialectic is also reflected in the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards, which guides teachers and curriculum writers to teach according to a four-step Inquiry Arc. (**Sidebar: Inquiry Arc**, p. 4) These similar models are all variations on a theme that began, perhaps, with the ancient Greek philosophers confronting their students with question upon question as they strolled about the paths of Ancient Athens. For example, Alexander III, son of the King of Macedonia, was a student of Aristotle. Historians would call him Alexander the Great.

A. Establishing Content Foundations

The first step in my approach to executing a dialectical discussion requires establishing a foundation of content knowledge. Students are grouped and given a topic that they must research. If this is the first time the students are dealing with the information, the teacher can select readings to help guide

and focus the students. By starting the students with foundation materials, the teacher can introduce multiple perspectives or positions, which can introduce controversy, inspire inquiry, and ultimately enhance the discussion phase. Teacher-driven grouping also supports the diverse needs of the students. Teachers can create homogeneous groups supplied with leveled readings or heterogeneous groups with supports that afford meaningful interaction

and contributions by all members. Either way, the teacher crafts the learning experience by selecting appropriate groupings and materials based upon knowledge of his or her students.

B. Generating Questions

After students have established a foundation, encourage them to generate specific research questions, “supporting questions” in the language of the C3 Framework, and to seek out answers from sources beyond those provided by the teacher. (**Sidebar: Compelling and Supporting Questions**, p. 4) This step empowers students to delve deeper and seek out further information to inform their understanding of the topic at hand. Students can use databases provided by their schools or access reliable sites on the Internet. Group members can generate questions together and then divide them up during the research time. They can then share their information and discuss their emerging perspectives. In doing so, students begin the process of learning as a community.

C. Delving into Discussion

Present students with a compelling question, one that generates discussion and research, but is not easily or conclusively answered. An example might be, “Should President Truman have dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?”;



Aristotle, the teacher. Handout on page 7 shows the whole engraving from 1866.

Inquiry Arc

1. Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries
2. Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools
3. Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence
4. Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action.

NCSS, *Social Studies for the Next Generation: Purposes, Practices, and Implications of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (Bulletin 113, Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2013). A free PDF of the C3 Framework is at www.socialstudies.org/c3. Or buy the paperback book (with explanatory essays) at www.socialstudies.org/store.

Compelling and Supporting Questions

A “**compelling** question like ‘Was the American Revolution revolutionary?’ is both intriguing to students and intellectually honest. Such a question can be vigorously explored through the disciplines of civics, economics, geography, and history...”

Supporting questions assist students in addressing their compelling questions. For example, questions like “What were the regulations imposed on the colonists under the Townshend Acts?” will help students understand the many dimensions of the war as they form their conclusions...

These descriptions are from page 17 of NCSS, “The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History” (Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2013), free at www.socialstudies.org/c3.

Sample Applications in a Unit of Study

Compelling questions about leadership might be “What are the most valuable contributions that a leader can make? What are the qualities of good leadership?”

A **supporting** question might be, “Why have historians called Alexander (356–323 B.C.E.) ‘the Great?’”

“Was Alexander the Great a hero or a villain?”; or “Could the United States have avoided an economic hardship (such as the Great Recession of 2008) by adhering to lessons learned from an earlier event (such as the Great Depression)?” Although some of these questions may seem to have either/or answers, there is vast room for shades of grey. When addressing a compelling question, students may even share similar conclusions, but their reasons may vary greatly. (Again, see **Sidebar: Compelling and Supporting Questions**)

The discussion phase must begin with the groups sharing the information from the readings they were provided and their self-directed inquiry. Again, this establishes a knowledge foundation for the discussion. Once groups have reported their thoughts, students are then encouraged to move to a location in the room with a written and posted position that most closely aligns with their own. Depending on their familiarity with the process, students can craft and post part of the discussion phase. Students can then share their reasons in support of their perspectives at that moment. New positions may arise as the discussion ensues.

After students listen to their peers and consider their views, give them the opportunity to adjust their positions, if they so desire, and move to a different location in a room that most closely aligns with their revised position. Allow the discussion to continue with ample time allowed for students to explain their actions when they have switched their positions and changed their perspectives. It is also important to also allow those who have not changed their perspective to clarify and restate their reasoning so as to take into consideration what they have heard discussed up to that point. This process is monitored by the teacher and repeated multiple times. The teacher can draw the discussion phase to a close once the conversation becomes repetitive, if the information has been thoroughly explored and analyzed, or if new and divergent questions have been generated that would require a whole new round of research (to be clear: that is a *good* thing if it happens!).

D. Devoting Time for Reflection

The students then move into the final phase, reflection. Students are asked to write out their final position and explain the development of that point of view. They are also encouraged to reflect on the entire process and assess their learning experience. This gives introverted students a chance to demonstrate that they were actively involved in the learning process, even if they offered limited verbal participation.

The entire dialectical process can be guided with the use of handouts that encourage students to map out their questions, record evidence and lines of reasoning and argument, and illustrate the path leading to an individual decision. (**Handout: Alexander the {perhaps} Great**, p. 6) The teacher can shepherd the discussion, allowing students to fill in parts of the handout as a means of encouraging individual processing. Remember that this discussion method is fluid and requires adjustment based upon content, purpose, and the interests and abilities of the students in the room. Teachers can use this method as a means of helping students develop compelling and supporting questions. They can lengthen the research process as a means of instructing students how to identify helpful resources. Students are encouraged to gather evidence in order to better inform their position. They then are required to explain their reasoning, both in verbal and written form.

Building (not Burning) Bridges

Since this method is not subject specific, it can be used across the disciplines that make up the social studies, as well as other

academic disciplines. The dialectical method can be adapted to almost any topic that inspires inquiry. The joy comes from watching students take ownership of their learning, develop questions, search for evidence, wrestle with variety of opinions, and then work as a class to develop and refine new understandings. Although we may not share the same perspectives, we can use this discussion model to build bridges that will allow us to span our differences and work towards new understandings. These new understandings can manifest themselves into new public policy that various factions, working and thinking apart, would not have thought to create. Having the patience and commitment to work through a dialectical process might even nurture a functioning democracy that can withstand periods of drama and uneasiness. 🌍

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Answer Key (see quiz on page 8)

1. MYTHICAL FIGURE: **Artemi** was the daughter of gods Zeus and Leto. Centuries later, the Romans gave this goddess the name Diana.
2. REAL PERSON: A high priestess called the **Pythea** would enter a trance on the seventh day of each month. She would listen to questions posed by visitors and give answers that were inspired by the god Apollo. His temple was right next door to Delphi.
3. REAL PERSON: Wealthy parents living elsewhere in Greece sent their daughters to the island of Lesbos to be taught by the famous poet **Sappho**.
4. MYTHICAL FIGURE: **Diotima** was a fictional character in Plato's *Syposium*. In this famous book, Diotima is one of the characters having a friendly debate with Socrates—who was a real person. But the author of the book, Plato, might have based the character of Diotima on a REAL PERSON, **Aspasia**, and Aspasia really was a friend to Socrates. It all happened so long ago that it is hard to know for sure whether Diotima and Aspasia were one and the same, but it's fun to think about.

Resources for Teachers

Lefkowitz, Mary R. and Maureen B. Fant. *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 4th ed., 2016.

León, Vicki. *Uppity Women of Ancient Times*. Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 1995.

Pomeroy, Sarah. *Goddesses. Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*. New York: Schocken/Knopf Doubleday, 1995.

This handout is by MLL editor Steven S. Lapham

Alexander the {perhaps} Great

This worksheet will help you map a dialectical discussion as it happens.

Your name: _____ Your teacher: _____

1. Before the Dialectical Discussion. To begin, you will demonstrate your opinion by literally “taking a stance”—standing along a “line of opinion” on the classroom floor. Where will you place yourself on the Hero—Villain spectrum regarding Alexander the Great? Place an X on the line below to show where you will stand.



2. Briefly explain your own reasons for taking that stance.

Example: *I think Alexander was a great hero because he was an expert equestrian.*



Detail of the “The Alexander Mosaic,” representing the battle of Alexander the Great (shown) against Darius (III) the Great. Artifact from Pompeii, ca. 100 B.C.E. See the whole mosaic at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Battle_of_Issus.jpg.

National Archaeological Museum, Naples, Italy. Photo by Berthold Werner at commons.wikimedia.org.

3. In the Moment of Dialectic Discussion.

What arguments did other students make that supported your position? Give each statement a score along this scale: give a weak argument only 1 point, give a strong argument 5 points. Example: *At age 12, Alexander tamed an unruly horse that even adults could not control. Later, he would ride this horse into battle again and again. (worth 3 points)*

4. What arguments have others made that **opposed** your position? Give each statement a score along the scale, weak = 1, strong = 5.

Example: *Alexander and his armies wrought horrible destruction upon the Greek City of Thebes, plundering, burning the city, and killing civilians as well as soldiers. (worth 4 points)*



A monument for a fallen soldier (possibly after the battle of Chaeronea, 338 B.C.E), showing a footman being killed by a Macedonian horseman.

Archaeological Museum of Piraeus, Athens. Photo by Giovanni Dall'Orto, 2009.

5. Reflecting on the Dialectical Discussion.

After the dialectic discussion with your classmates, add up the pro and con points. Then think about the whole discussion. Show where your opinion now rests by placing an X on the line below.



6. Did your stance change? How would you summarize this experience? What did you learn about Alexander the Great? About heroes and villains? About having discussions and sharing opinions and observations with your peers?



Engraving by Charles Laplante from *Illustrated Lives of the Wise Men* showing young Alexander III and his teacher, Aristotle. (Paris, 1866).

commons.wikimedia.org

Women in Ancient Greece: Mythical Figure or Real Person?

Although Ancient Athens was the “cradle of democracy,” only Athenian men were considered full citizens. Women did not vote or take part in governance. Ancient Greece was also a slave society. Men, women, and children from people that the Greeks defeated in battle might be taken as slaves.

Despite such limitations, some women were able to become influential thinkers, writers, and leaders in Ancient Greece. In Greek myths, goddesses had all sorts of unusual powers. Which of these five characters were real historical persons, and which were mythical figures?

1. **Artemis** [ARR-TE-MISS] was a very good shot with her bow and arrow, and thus she was an excellent hunter. Statues and drawings on pottery show her with bow, arrow, and hunting dogs.
2. **Pythea** [PIE-THEE-AH] lived in a cave at Delphi, the center of the world. She told oracles, which were mysterious statements about the future.
3. **Sappho** [SAFFO] wrote poetry about love and beauty on an idyllic island in the Mediterranean Sea.
4. **Diotima** [DEE-OH-TEE-MAH], a priestess and philosopher, had deep conversations with the youthful Socrates, who grew up to be a famous philosopher.



Marble bust of Aspasia. Writing carved into the statue reveals it to be a Roman copy of a Hellenistic original.

Where to find answers:

Don Nardo, *Women of Ancient Greece* (World History Series). New York: Lucent Books, 2000.

Haydn Middleton, *Ancient Greek Women* (People in the Past). Chicago, IL: Heinemann Library, 2003.

Fiona Macdonald, *Women in Ancient Greece* (the Other Half of History). New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1999.

Vicki León, *Outrageous Women of Ancient Times*. New York: Wiley, 1997.

(Teacher's Key on page 5)

Breaking News!

Ten Tips for How to Make Current Events Work for You

Sean McBrady

Driving to work, I heard a radio news report that exposed a significant, and sure to be controversial, issue that was unfolding our area. I listened intently and couldn't help but think about all the possibilities for the social studies teachers and students in our area schools. As a social studies consultant for the district, I work with teachers and administrators to support social studies teaching and learning, so when I arrived at work I immediately emailed teachers in the community affected by the breaking news. I was excited to share the news and offer support to help them as they prepared to explore the issue with their students.

In our district, educators have been working on integrating more inquiry-based learning into the curriculum, and I saw this news item as a vital opportunity for an authentic and relevant investigation in the classroom.

Here I offer ten tips that resulted from thinking and working with teachers about how to best guide students along a path of inquiry in light of breaking news—which is a renewable resource for social studies educators.

Tip #1 Act Fast!

A breaking news story is most exciting to follow when it's fresh, when people are talking about it on the radio, in public places, and at the dinner table. Plus, it's exciting (and helpful) for students to see how the story plays out in real time. Most aspects of the school curriculum are static (issues from the past with few new developments or shifts) and students know this. That predictability can lead to disinterest or a lack of urgency. A breaking news story evolves, and the storylines can be mapped as the investigation follows each new lead. Tap into this excitement to help get students engaged.

Tip #2 Share the Original Source (and Experience) with Students

How did you become aware of this news yourself? Try to recreate that experience for your students as soon as possible. It's helpful for students to see how authentic inquiry gets started in the real world. You can do this by "setting the stage" to mimic where you were and what you were doing at the time

you heard the news, and then share the original source of the story as you learned about it. If you read about it in a printed newspaper, bring in the actual paper to show as well as copy and print the news article for students to read it as you did. If you heard the story on the radio, use the radio's website to find an audio recording of the show and play it for students (or cup your hands over your mouth and play the part of the broadcast reporter). Recreating the experience will help connect the story to students in the same personal way you connected to it in the first place.

Tip #3 Use Your Teaching Strategies

Although you will be eager to get to the facts and discuss the issue with students, remember that you must employ the procedures and scaffolds for reading as you normally would. Reading comprehension will certainly be improved if the news is of interest and students have some background knowledge (if it's a local story, they may be familiar with the setting and other key details that will aid comprehension), but there will be some readers needing those reading strategies they've been learning and practicing to help access and comprehend the text. If you skip over those strategies in this case, students may think that reading "in real life" doesn't require those strategies they've learned in school. This is a great opportunity to show students how those reading strategies you've been working on come in handy when you really need them. Keep in mind, this might not be the best time to introduce a new reading strategy unless it is of particular importance to the inquiry.

Instead, guide students to read using the strategies that are tried and true in your class.

Tip #4 Write Everything Down (Up Big on the Board)

After reading the news article or playing the radio or video clip, gather initial responses from students verbally in a whole-class format. Then, read the story again or play the clip a second time through, pausing to clarify confusing information (students might not know some of the important background mentioned). Don't offer lengthy explanations or lecture in your response, just define terms and clarify points of fact.

Once discussion begins, everything your students say and ask may be important. Consider assigning some note takers to stand at the board and take notes while the class discusses the issue and asks questions. One student could write down questions that are asked while another student summarizes and writes down comments that come from further study and discussion of the issue. All these notes should be put on the board as would happen during a brainstorming session: all comments, questions, information, opinions, etc. go on the board—for later reference and use.

Tip #5 Nurture Student-Generated Questions

While discussing the original news story, model how to pose useful questions. Avoid prejudging any question as unrelated to social studies, unimportant, or even unanswerable. The goal should be to create a list on the board of many different things that students bring up.

Once you have a good batch of questions, begin to classify the notes using different colors, circling comments and questions that may be related using the same color. Here are some possible categories for this classification activity: Do some questions relate to the causes of the event? Are some questions about the people involved? Are there questions about how people might react to the news? Is there an institution (e.g., government agency or a business) that should respond to the situation? Look through the lenses of the four main disciplines of social studies—history, geography, economics, and civics—to perceive questions that might apply to this news item.

What questions are students most interested in exploring? How is this news story connected to the larger issues of our moment in history? If students don't voice any compelling

questions, take some time to guide students through a process to create some. Compelling questions (**Sidebar**) should focus on "enduring issues." For example, questions could be formed that connect the breaking news story to issues about race and equality, environmental concerns, or the rights and responsibilities of individuals and governments.

Once a compelling question has been generated and selected by the class (or student groups), supporting questions can be written. Supporting questions will help define the direction the inquiry will take in trying to answer the compelling question. Supporting questions lead to specific answers that help clarify the issue, provide important definitions or descriptions, and help explain the facts and events relevant to the issue.

Compelling and Supporting Questions

A "**compelling** question like 'Was the American Revolution revolutionary?' is both intriguing to students and intellectually honest. Such a question can be vigorously explored through the disciplines of civics, economics, geography, and history....

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Sample Applications in a Unit of Study

Compelling questions about a current local news report might be, "When it comes to a local utility, what is the proper degree of oversight by state government agencies?" "By federal government agencies?"

Supporting questions might be, "Which city agency is responsible for alerting the public if municipal drinking water is contaminated?" "What state and federal agencies have responsibilities when it comes to clean drinking water?"

Tip #6 Plan with Students

The planning phase of generating questions should not be rushed or skipped. Too often, lessons are designed to provide information to students and culminate with students repeating what they've remembered. Inquiry is as much about planning and thinking during the process as it is about finding answers. In fact, most inquiries lead to further questions more than definitive answers, and that is ok! The planning in class continues as students determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering the compelling and supporting questions.

Tip #7 Use Multiple and Contrasting Sources

Guide students in considering the need to gather information from multiple and diverse sources. Different types of sources present information in different ways and offer multiple points of view. Perhaps small groups could brainstorm many possible sources of information and then share their ideas with the class. Breaking news is likely to have been covered by a number of different news sources, and reading multiple accounts of the initial story will be useful for corroborating information. This routine should be repeated regularly as the story continues to unfold in the news. Are all the sources reporting the same information? Are they reporting from different perspectives? Are all sides being considered? Are columnists and other commentators beginning to weigh in with their opinions? Are there any voices—a minority or marginalized perspective—being left out of the discussion? Students should pay attention to the authors and dates (even times) of publication. How does one writer develop the story over time? Which source seems to be first to print? Last? Does this matter? Which source do you trust the most? This is a great opportunity to dig into the concept of sourcing and corroboration with a relevant and authentic topic.

Television and radio sources should be considered too, as they can often report on live events in ways that print sources are not able to do. Perhaps put a few students in charge of regularly checking different stations and websites for updates, and then reporting to the class about fast-developing events.

One important source that a local breaking news story is likely to provide is a living human being who is geographically close to you. Who might you contact to interview to help answer some of the questions that students generate? Students should look for contact information for anyone who might be able to help answer their supporting questions or even weigh in on



This article features Michigan photographs and art. “Broken Boy,” a 2006 photo by Michigan resident Sarah Spaulding, recalls the children’s rhyme that begins “Sticks and stones”

their compelling question. Call local civic leaders, community groups, talk to people in different neighborhoods, even family members and relatives, to get a wide range of perspectives on the topic. Consider contacting a reporter to get further details on information they might have uncovered that is relevant to you but didn’t make it into their article or broadcast (as these are often shortened and edited versions of larger reportage).

Contacting university professors or professionals whose field is related to the big picture issue would be a great way to get some important background information or at least a broader perspective on an issue. For all of these people, phone numbers and email addresses (or twitter accounts) should be available with just a little online digging. Teachers can contact potential sources to request that they visit the class to answer questions, meet with the class virtually (with a video connection like Skype or audio using a speaker phone), or communicate via email.

Tip #8 Embrace Interdisciplinary Connections

What will likely result from beginning to tap sources will be an interdisciplinary mix of information that students will need help organizing and understanding. This is where brief civics lessons will be useful to help make sense of everything. If it turns out that local government sources play a large role in exploring and understanding the issue, then lessons about how civic institutions are organized or how decisions are made may help. If the issue involves local businesses or has a financial impact on people in the community, then lessons on economic

decision making or how resources are allocated may come into play. Along the same lines, if the issue has historic origins that require the use of sources from the past, then students may need help locating and working with historical materials. Lessons about contextualizing and sourcing historical documents would be an important prelude in that case. If there is a spatial or cultural aspect to the issue, then exploring maps and the movement of people and things through a geography lens may be needed to help students understand the role played by location and connections between places.

Tip #9 Demonstrate How to Quote and Cite Sources Accurately

Now, perhaps more than ever—with fake news pervading our online information sources—it is vital that students have the skills to analyze a source, check facts and assertions, and make judgments based on the author’s credibility and trustworthiness. For example, if my neighbor and the mayor provide conflicting accounts, how can I go about trying to verify the assertions made by each person? If a major newspaper reporter and a local blogger provide different accounts of a conflict, how can I evaluate their statements and corroborate their reports or claims? Today, teachers have resources to help them teach critical thinking and “media literacy.” (Sidebar)

Toward the end of their investigation, students should begin crafting a statement that relates to the compelling question. They will likely benefit from some whole group instruction on

MEDIA LITERACY

Providers of Lesson Plans and Other Resources

National Council for the Social Studies (enter “media literacy” in the search box), www.socialstudies.org/publications/archives

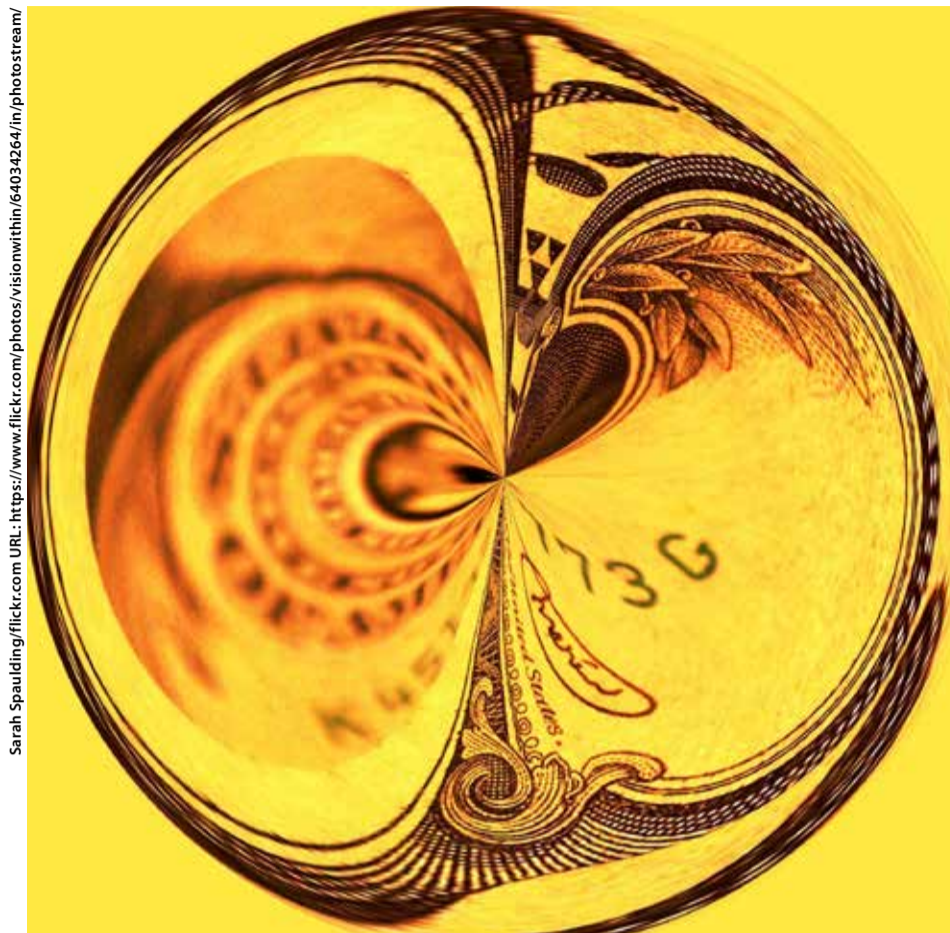
National Council of Teachers of English, www.ncte.org/lessons/media-literacy

News Literacy Project, thenewsliteracyproject.org

Newseum, www.newseum.org/tag/media-literacy

Schooljournalism.org, www.schooljournalism.org/news-literacy-lesson-plans

Stanford History Education Group, sheg.stanford.edu/evaluating-sources



“USA Mint,” a 2005 photo by Sarah Spaulding, suggests the ups, downs, and distortions of economic trends.

what a claim statement might be in response to their question. Have students provide some opinions and then craft an exemplar claim statement that addresses one of their compelling questions. Give them time to practice writing their own claims. For example, if the compelling question at the beginning of this investigation was

“When it comes to a local utility, what is the proper degree of oversight by state government agencies?”

“By federal government agencies?”

then a student’s claim statement, made after reading, research, and discussion might be

“There was polluted drinking water in Flint, Michigan in 2016. Reporters found examples of public servants at all levels (local, state, and national) not performing their jobs responsibly.”¹

If students worked in groups or pairs while studying an issue, now they can work with those same peers to review each other’s statements, providing feedback to each other. Teachers should also provide feedback on these claim statements.



Photo by William J. Hebert/Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park

“Julia” by Keith Harding, Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Visit the collection of images at www.meijergardens.org/attractions/sculpture-collection.

With a claim statement in hand, students can now revisit the evidence from their sources to create a supporting argument. Students should identify the strongest evidence from multiple sources, while also noting potential counterclaims and their limitations.

Tip #10 Take Action and Revisit the Issue

Communicating conclusions is the fourth and last step in the Inquiry Arc of the C3 Framework, and it should not be considered optional or an extension activity.² Students should see that to be civic minded means to be engaged in local issues and active in sharing information and ideas. Part of this responsibility is communicating the results of any investigations or inquiries about public issues. Students could again brainstorm to think about the ways to do this. Again, get the note taker up to the board and begin listing ideas that may include presenting to the city council at an open meeting, writing to the mayor or a local legislator, publishing an article in the school newspaper or blog (and sending it to the local newspaper as well), or making a flyer or poster to display in a public space (around school, the public library, etc.). Evaluate the options with students and invite them to suggest the one that best suits the situation. Then they can take action. If students get a response from a letter or email

recipient, share it with the whole class so they can see and appreciate the results of their efforts.

Look for ways to link this investigation with your formal curriculum. (Linking example above with a study of the Ancient World, you might ask, “How did the ancient city of Rome get drinking water for its thousands of residents?”) This process of studying a local new story is likely going to be something your students will not forget and will include some of the most powerful learning opportunities you can offer.

Doing authentic inquiry on an issue of local relevance and importance is what social studies teaching and learning is all about. Talk to colleagues about what you’re doing and get their input and support to try it out. Give yourself the freedom to engage with your students in this type of experience, and you will not regret it. Following a new learning path through inquiry and dialog is teaching and learning at its most authentic. Embrace the challenge, expect bumps along the way, and enjoy the experience. 🌍

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Notes

1. This was the conclusion reached by several reliable reporters, policy commentators, and is the opinion of plaintiffs in court cases still pending. See, for example, CNN Library, “Flint Water Crisis Fast Facts,” www.cnn.com/2016/03/04/us/flint-water-crisis-fast-facts.
2. NCSS, *Social Studies for the Next Generation: Purposes, Practices, and Implications of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (Bulletin 113, Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2013).
 - * Free PDF of the C3 Framework at www.socialstudies.org/c3
 - * Buy the paperback book (with explanatory essays) at www.socialstudies.org/store.

Not Yet Fully Illuminated: African American History and Washington, D.C.

Richard Panchyk, *Washington, DC History for Kids: The Making of a Capital City (with 21 Activities)*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2016. 136 pages: paperback \$12.

Reviewed by Dawn Chitty

Welcoming nearly 20 million visitors each year, our nation's capital city is brought to life in this recent addition to the "For Kids" series from the Chicago Review Press. Author Richard Panchyk says it beautifully when he describes the city's story as "a fascinating tale" unfolding over three centuries. Indeed, the author highlights some of the city's most noted historical moments in a straightforward manner with beautiful graphics and engaging activities throughout. While this book will be a worthy addition to many children's bookshelves, it hits some—but then also misses some—of the key moments that illuminate the unique history and character of Washington, DC's African American population.

Each of seven chapters highlights a period of the city's history, from "A Capital is Born" (1600–1792) to "Modern Washington" (1930–Present) and includes one or more related hands-on activities (e.g., "Make a Cornerstone Box"). Occasional sidebars offer interesting details. Some important events in African American history are well acknowledged. For example, *Twelve Years a Slave*, Solomon Northrop's account of being kidnapped in D.C. and enslaved in the South, is noted on page 49, as well as the 2013 movie based on the book. The *Pearl Riots* are well summarized (pp. 49–53), and the author notes that the District was "a key slave trading hub" (p. 49).

Sadly, however, the author missed several opportunities to highlight some of the city's historically and culturally significant events that would have further illuminated the full range of human experience in our city. For example, chapter 1 describes the city's beginnings and Pierre L'Enfant's design for the streets, but omits Benjamin Banneker's contribution. Banneker, a free black American, was a member of Andrew Ellicott III's commis-

sion to survey the site of the future capitol, which was then primarily a swamp. In a book for youth, this was a missed opportunity to correct the usual text book image of Banneker operating a theodolite (a surveyor's scope). In fact, Ellicott

placed his Maryland neighbor, Benjamin Banneker, in charge of the astronomical clock, which was the foundation of all the geographical measurements taken during the survey, and the most advanced scientific instrument of its time for that mission. Banneker, an astronomer and future publisher of a best-selling almanac, took "readings of the sky every hour throughout the night" so that measurements taken the previous day "could be taken up accurately on the

following morning."¹ Soon after finishing his work for the survey commission, Banneker wrote a letter to Thomas Jefferson (then U.S. secretary of state), challenging Jefferson's stance on the institution of slavery.²

In *Washington, DC History for Kids* there is a wonderful description of the Statue of Freedom that rest on top of the U.S. Capitol



Dome (p. 64), yet no mention of Philip Reid, the skilled slave who helped cast it in a foundry in 1860–62, or even that Reid gained freedom under the District of Columbia Compensated Emancipation Act of 1862, passed by Congress eight months before Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation.³ In that early emancipation (which is described on pages 70–72), about 3,000 enslaved Americans were freed. Some of their descendants still live in Washington, D.C. today.⁴

Curiously, the author discusses the Battle of Fort Stevens without mentioning Elizabeth Thomas, the woman whose land was seized by Union Army for building the fort. Thomas, a free black, was never compensated for her loss of property, taken from her in the name of patriotic defense of the city. “According to Thomas, at the time her house was being demolished [by Union soldiers], she was holding her six-month old baby and weeping beneath a sycamore tree.”⁵

Finally, chapter 5 is devoted to the Civil War, but it does not mention the 1st United States Colored Troops, a regiment organized in Washington, D.C., one of more than 150 predominantly African American regiments serving the Union Army. Today at the African American Civil War Memorial, the Wall of Honor “lists the names of 209,145 USCT, drawn from the official records of the Bureau of United States Colored Troops at the National Archives, on 166 burnished stainless steel plaques arranged by regiment.”⁶

Lonnie Bunch, the Director of the new National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., said African American history is “a wonderful lens for all Americans to understand issues of resiliency, optimism, social change—things that mean something to all of us.”⁷ Our knowledge of (or lack of knowledge about) these historical events shape who we are as a nation today. We are all, regardless of race or region, shaped and touched by the past. African American history is an important American story. The first step in sharing the story is making sure it makes its way into the history books.⁸

Notes

1. Charles A. Cerami, *Benjamin Banneker: Surveyor, Astronomer, Publisher, and Patriot* (John Wiley & Sons, 2002: 128–129, 134).
2. John Moore, “Benjamin Banneker’s Letter to Thomas Jefferson,” *Middle Level Learning* 55 (January/February, 2016), www.socialstudies.org/publications/ml.
3. Eugene Walton, “Philip Reid and the Statue of Freedom,” *Middle Level Learning* 24 (September 2005), www.socialstudies.org/publications/ml.
4. “DC Emancipation Day” (Government of the District of Columbia), emancipation.dc.gov.

5. “Elizabeth Proctor Thomas” (National Park Service), www.nps.gov/articles/featured_stories_thomas.htm.
6. African American Civil War Museum, www.afroamcivilwar.org. The museum tells “the largely unknown story of the United States Colored Troops (USCT).”
7. Sally Acharya, “Lonnie Bunch Leads New African American Museum,” *American Magazine* (American University; February 22, 2012), www.american.edu/americanmagazine.
8. A useful reference book of 707 pages that aims to cover African American experiences and perspectives is *City of Magnificent Intentions: A History of Washington, District of Columbia*, 2nd edition, by Keith Melder with Melinda Young Stuart (Washington, DC: Intac, Inc., 1983/1998).

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Key to Discussion Questions

(see poem on page 16)

- A. Banneker might have shortened the word “Africa” to “Afric” in line 2 for reasons of rhythm and meter. Read the poem aloud while pronouncing “formed” in two syllables (“form-ed”) in line 2, and slavery in three syllables (slay-ver-ee) in line 6. If you do so, then the whole poem adheres to a poetic form called iambic pentameter (Ta-da, Ta-da, Ta-da—is the rhythm). Read the poem forcefully, like a rap. Does it work?
- B. People born in Africa are “formed free” with hopes and feelings similar to humans born anywhere else. Might one of “Nature’s bounties,” in addition to health and strength, be the unalienable rights mentioned in the Declaration of Independence?
- C. Words that Banneker uses to hammer home his belief that slavery is wrong include “cruel,” “force,” “doomed,” “remorse,” and “relentless.”
- D. Why would Banneker repeat the word “act” twice? Stating a word twice—at the very end of a poem—marks it as important. Also, Banneker did not consider slavery to be a natural *condition*, like being born with brown or blue eyes, or curly or straight hair. Slavery was an *act*, an invention of human society, and as such it could be banned and abolished.

A Poem about Slavery

Benjamin Banneker, a free-born African American, was a self-taught naturalist, astronomer, and mathematician who created intriguing mathematical puzzles as well as puzzle poems.¹

An American patriot, Banneker often discussed the injustice of slavery in his best-selling almanacs of 1792 through 1797. For example, he reprinted his letter to Thomas Jefferson, who was then U.S. secretary of state. In that 1791 letter, Banneker eloquently pleaded with Jefferson to change his mind about the institution of slavery.²

Banneker, who lived near Baltimore, Maryland, “knew he was putting his life on the line with every one” of these public statements. He recorded several frightening incidents in his personal journal—encounters with people who hated him for what he was writing and thinking.³ He decided to print this poem, written in 1791, in one of his almanacs. (We added line numbers for easy reference and discussion.)⁴

1. Behold ye Christians! And in pity see
2. Those Afric sons which Nature formed free.
3. Behold them in a fruitful country blessed.
4. Of Nature’s bounties see them rich possessed.
5. Behold them herefrom torn by cruel force,
6. And doomed to slavery without remorse.
7. This act, America, thy sons have known
8. This cruel act, relentless they have done.



Questions for Discussion and Analysis⁵

- A. Why did Banneker shorten the phrase “African sons” to “Afric sons” in line 2?
- B. How were the sons of Africa “formed free”? What are some of “Nature’s bounties” enjoyed by free persons? (Lines 2 and 4)
- C. Underline the words that Banneker uses to hammer home his belief that slavery is wrong. (Lines 5 through 8)
- D. Why do you think Banneker repeats the word “act” twice at the conclusion of the poem? (Lines 7 and 8)
- E. What questions do you have about this poem?

Notes

1. One of Banneker’s math puzzle poems can be found through a National Humanities Center webpage, nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/identity/text6/text6read.htm.
2. John A. Moore, “Benjamin Banneker’s Letter to Thomas Jefferson: Using the C3 Framework Inquiry Literacies,” *Middle Level Learning* 55 (January/February 2016): M2–M11, www.socialstudies.org/publications/ml.
3. Charles A. Cerami, *Benjamin Banneker: Surveyor, Astronomer, Publisher, Patriot* (New York: Wiley, 2002).
4. This handout is by MLL editor Steven S. Lapham.
5. See the Discussion Key on page 15.