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Using Literature in the Social Studies Classroom and Cross Curricular Teaching at the High School Level

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Cross Curricular Teaching at the High School Level**

by

**Katrina Smith
August 2008**

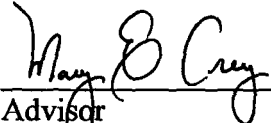
**A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State
of New York College at Brockport in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master in Science in Education**

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Cross Curricular Teaching at the High School Level

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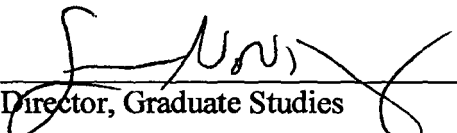
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Introduction:

This thesis was inspired by my desire to push my own school into the 21st century in the way that students are taught and teachers work with one another. The students that are in the classroom today are a generation of ‘multitaskers’ and I feel that the education system needs to be more aware of that. The skills that students have developed by the time they reach high school are quite sophisticated. By the time they reach 9th grade, most students demand real world practicality from the lessons they receive in school. As teachers, we can utilize the strengths that our students come to us with, and guide them in the right direction by modifying the way that we organize our content, and by examining relationships that we have with one another in our own buildings. The organization of the American education system has changed very little in the past 60 years, whereas the world outside the institution has been completely transformed. I feel that there are many opportunities within American High Schools today that are not being taken advantage of. One small change that I have focused on in this thesis is the use of literature in the social studies classroom, and collaboration between ELA and social studies faculty at the secondary level to combine curriculums and teaching resources. If our students come to us being able to listen to music, while completing homework, while chatting on-line, while watching television (all successfully) why should we not take advantage of this skill to combine what they learn throughout the day?

Part 1: Historiographical Research

If history really is a story of the past, it makes perfect sense to teach historical literature in the social studies classroom. With the wealth of material that is readily available today more and more educators are taking advantage of the opportunity to incorporate all kinds of writing into their own curriculums. However, it is a curiosity as to why more literature is not used at the commencement level to teach students. The majority of the current research available centers on the use of literature in the k-8 grade levels. For the purpose of this paper, the advantages described by many researchers will be applied to the high school level. I have found that the incentives to introduce children to literature within the social studies classroom can be used to teach people of any age or ability level. However, the lack of promotion for the high school teacher to use literature is interesting. Increasing imagination, providing differentiation, giving alternatives to dry, stale textbooks are just a few reasons why literature should be used more. The advantages for using literature that experts site for a 3rd grade classroom can easily be transferred to a high school setting.

The overall lack of use could be explained through several obvious reasons; preparation for standardized testing that limits time, lack of resources, lack of knowledge about the process of teaching literature and the need to teach skills that go beyond text comprehension. The existent dichotomy between high stakes testing and abundance of curriculum goes against conventional wisdom to teach in depth rather than cover breadth. Teachers are torn between completing curriculum or teaching so that their students have a real understanding of the content. Outside the social studies community, very little writing suggests teaching literature as a way to bridge that gap.

Using literature in the social studies classroom is anything but a new revelation. In 1962 Leonard Kenworthy published a list of recommended books and their use by grade level.¹ Between 1929 and 1988 there have been 164 articles published in peer reviewed professional journals about using about using to teaching social studies.² Teachers have long had to be creative in finding ways to teach diverse groups of students copious amounts of information with limited time, resources, and support. This paper will examine the current attitudes and feelings surrounding the practice as well as take a brief look at the history behind the use of supplemental materials in the social studies classroom.

With all of the change that has happened in the field of social studies in the past 50 years, few things have remained constant, one that has remained the same is the desire to mold students into “world oriented citizens”.³ Whether it was the end of World War II, the start of the Cold War, or the aftermath of 9/11, social studies educators have seen it as their role to develop positive attitudes within their students about different cultures and groups in an ever changing, ever interconnected world. Even as early as 1948 educators were noting that students needed to be taught in a manner that reflected an era of world consciousness.⁴ After World War II, America became one of the world’s two super powers, and in doing so influenced much of other countries policies. Preparing students to enter a world that was dominated by American foreign policy was essential. This

¹ John F. Sandhern and Alexa Sandman, *Linking Literature with Life* (Silver Spring: National Council for the Social Studies, 2002) 10.

² Susie Burroughs and Jesse Palmer “Integrating Children’s Literature and Song into the Social Studies.” *Social Studies* 93, no.3 (73-79): 2002

³ Edwin C. Carr. *The Social Studies*. New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education Inc, 1965, 249

⁴ Clyde F. Kohn ed. *Geographic Approaches to Social Education*. Mensha: George Banta Publishing Company, 1948. 38

ambition has remained stable throughout the past five decades. However, the attitude toward using literature has changed significantly.

In 1948 the National Council of the Social Studies published its yearbook, commenting on their attitudes toward recent trends in the social studies, Their feelings toward using fictional work to teach history were less than positive.

“No well trained historian would recommend learning the history of our country from reading historical novels. In fact, most historians become agitated at the mere mention of such an idea. Similarly, it is not possible to gain world understanding merely from reading stories about imaginary characters in certain parts of the world. Even at the primary level, the market is flooded with little books about children in other lands. Many of these and others for older children are very attractive, but tend to build incorrect concepts about people and places.”⁵

The belief of solid teaching really centered around the use of text and workbooks.

In 1942, Fredrick Branom published *The Teaching of Social Studies in a Changing World*. This piece acknowledged the use of historical fiction in the classroom, but recommended that its use be limited to arouse interest, not to stress facts.⁶ Branom did not use the term literature in his book, but referred to works other than textbooks as “collateral” materials. He did advocate for their use in the classroom for the following reasons, “to give more meaning to the content, obtain more information, give more interest to the student, give different points of view and allow for students to get better acquainted with books.”⁷ As is the case today, Branom recognized that one of biggest limitations to using “collateral” materials would be the lack of money to provide for their use in the classroom. Books from the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, shared one common factor, which was the agreement on the use of novels and picture books to teach

⁵ Kohn, 103

⁶ Fredrick Branom. *The Teaching of Social Studies in a Changing World*. New York: W.H. Sandler Inc, 1942. 126

⁷ Branom, 126

geography. The NCSS remarked that it would be adventitious to use books to teach geography because it would make far off places more real.⁸ When students are immersed in a book that vividly describes a place it becomes an actual place, not just characteristics on a page to be memorized. From the approval for geography, and as time progresses, using literature became more acceptable and common place.

In 1965, Edwin Carr published *The Social Studies* and in it explained that historical fiction was good to teach with. He explained that fiction would aid students in getting a feel for the era that they were studying.⁹ Carr said if students were to truly understand a problem reading a novel would give them greater meaning. However, progressive Carr may have come across with this type of idea, he was careful to warn teachers that a novel was in no way a substitute for teaching real history. Since the 1960s, attitudes within the social studies community have become more tolerant of using non traditional teaching methods and there is a greater willingness to stray from the textbook. Within the past 15 years differentiation has been the newest trend as teachers try to appeal to different learning styles within the classroom. This new inclination lends itself quite nicely to the use of literature to teach history.

The recent historiography shows several themes for literature within the social studies classroom, these will be evaluated over the course of this essay. These themes match quite nicely with the ten recent trends that Dawn Ferguson describes for what is taking place within the social studies classroom today, according to the Educational Resources Information Center. Trend three finds that more teachers are enriching their courses with the use of fiction and non-fiction literature. Trend six shows that more

⁸ Kohn, 104

⁹ Carr, 87

programs are based around teaching ethics and values that shape our society, and trend seven is that students are learning more about world religions.¹⁰ These movements are indicative of the attitude that teachers have toward literature within their classrooms. Using novels and picture books can accomplish meeting state standards as well as take students in the current direction that teachers want learning to focus on.

Much of what is being published today centers around the positive reasons to use literature in the classroom, how teachers should go about preparing to implement the strategy and the different sources available to use. A criticism for the use of literature in the classroom by critics and advocates alike was that it is time consuming to find quality sources. However, in my personal research almost every journal article I came across (published recently, or 50 years ago) contained a list of recommended books, or websites where teachers could find inclusive lists that scholars had posted containing a plethora of material for teachers to peruse at their convenience.

However positive the research proves toward the use of literature in the social studies classroom there are of course critics who argue literature has its place; in the English/ Language Arts curriculum! Some argue that when teachers go outside the traditional realm of teaching social studies they are side stepping memorization.¹¹ The focus is taken off of the essential who, what, when, where and why and how facts, and is put on reflection and inquiry. Memorization is essential to the study of history as themes are built off of what was studied previously in a classroom. If students are not required to

¹⁰ Dawn Fergusun. "Recent Trends in Social Studies Curriculum." *Curriculum Administrator* 36, no. 8 (200): 19.

¹¹ B. Guzzetti and T. McGowan "Promoting Social Studies Understanding through Literature Based Instruction." *Social Studies* 82, no. 1 (1991): [16-21].

memorize factual information, how will they be able to recall data necessary for tests and making connections to other units of study?

Another objection to the practice of using literature in the social studies classroom would be that students would sometimes be blurring the line between real and fictional information.¹² While there are many quality fiction works available for young adults to enjoy, most are not written by accomplished historians. They are penned by authors interested in a time period, but not necessarily well educated about the topic. This could create problems for students as the truth is exaggerated, or in a manner that is not 100 % accurate. Teachers would have to be careful to delineate between reality and fiction, opinion and fact. Teaching fact versus fiction could become confusing for students who are trying to understand a difficult concept within the work to begin with. These lines could become very gray in a fictional work based on a historical moment.

Others object to the use of literature in teaching history because the reader is forced to accept the author's view of the topic.¹³ Historical issues are multifaceted and reading the experience of one person limits the student to that opinion or account. While the world may be accurate, it is merely one side of a story that could contain countless other perspectives. It would be very easy for example for a student reading the perspective of a soldier during the Vietnam to totally disregard the viewpoint of the Vietnamese civilian. Another example would be the book *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe. The author describes the experience of one African man in his village during the time of European conquest. This work is acclaimed world wide for the author's voice but

¹² Margaret Smith Crocco. "Teaching *Shabanu*; the challenge of using world literature in the US Social Studies Classroom." *II. Curriculum Studies* 137, no. 5 (2005): [561-582].

¹³ Larry R. Johannessen "Making History Come Alive with the Nonfictional Literature of the Vietnam War." *Social Studies* 94, no. 4 (2003): [171-178].

it could hardly be indicative of the entire African continent's experience. When students read the story they would be getting a glimpse into one village's tale. This could create problems if students make the assumption that all people in Africa had the same experience. In any sense the list of positive reasons or outcomes for outweighs the negative to use literature within the classroom.

The inadequacy of textbooks is a major reason that educators are turning to literature to teach content. Textbooks have long had a reputation for being dry, dull and boring. Everett Keach explains in his "Social Studies Instruction Through Children's Literature" that many students list social studies as their least favorite subject in school.¹⁴ When children start using textbooks to learn about history, their interest in the subject drops. They become disconnected from the content, and have no desire to read bland information from the textbook.

Some specific criticisms for the textbook are that they do little for students because they lack meaning.¹⁵ They are merely a presentation of facts to the reader and do little to capture attention. Most critics explain that students would learn more about topics such as war from a literary account, rather than from a chapter section in a text. The desensitization that comes from a textbook description does little to connect students to such a powerful event as war. In addition to not teaching sensitive issues such as war correctly, textbooks have a tendency to anesthetize young adults to the violence of war.¹⁶ Reading, or looking at a chart that shows casualty rates does very little to stimulate the imagination of a 16 year old. However, reading a book such as *The Good War* by Studs

¹⁴ Keach, 100

¹⁵ Guzzetti and McGowan

¹⁶ John Kornfield "Using Fiction to Teach History: Multicultural and Global Perspectives of World War II." *Social Education* 58, no. (1994):[281-286].

Terkel, a collection of accounts from World War II, would paint a much graver image. His anthology of firsthand accounts is very powerful because it puts the students in the frontlines of the battlefield as well. If students were to read the chapter from the selection below, they would come out with a much different perception of World War II.

We weren't able to bring those bodies back with us. The mortar fire became too much. The next morning, our squad was assigned to go back and recover the bodies. It was sunshine and quiet. We were passing the Germans we killed. Looking at the individual German dead, each took on a personality. These were no longer an abstraction. These were no longer the Germans of the brutish faces and the helmets in the newsreels. They were exactly our age. These were boys like us.¹⁷

This type of prose that John Kornfield explains really reaches the students. There is no difficult vocabulary, no impersonal statistics, just one young man describing his experience. This is an experience that no student would be able to learn from unless they read the book.

Textbooks have several inherent flaws that literature does not. They are often too difficult for students to read, even if the student is interested in learning the material.¹⁸ Terry Lindquist writes that textbooks are written on average 2 years above grade level. This poses a serious problem as many American students read at a below grade level. Difficult vocabulary, syntax, and small font size all contribute to the ineffectiveness of textbooks. Many students quickly become frustrated with textbooks and the end result is that they are then turned off by the class in general. When students are appropriately challenged and allowed to experience success, they will be excited to learn more.

¹⁷ Studs Terkel. *The Good War; an Oral History of World War II*. New York: The New Press, 1984. 44

¹⁸ Terry Lindquist. *Seeing the World Through Social Studies*. 2ed. Danny Miller. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002. 31

Sheer amount of content poses a serious problem for textbooks. They must contain a year's worth of curriculum in a single volume. This leaves very little space for individual topics, pictures, graphs and maps which make comprehension more attainable for the reader. In addition there is hardly enough space for more interesting and important topics such as the Holocaust.¹⁹ Typically no more than a page or two is given to this significant event. Teachers currently have to use outside resources, such as literature, to give this phenomenon the attention that it deserves. According to many educators, works such as *Night*, by Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, can provide valuable insight into the genocide. *Night* delves into the lives of the Jewish victims in a way that no textbook could hope to. By being brought into the world of the Jews in to concentration camps, students go beyond dry statistics of fatalities and can feel the terror that the victims lived under while awaiting their fate in the final solution. Other classics such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* provide students with a glimpse into other aspects of the Holocaust that they may not even be aware existed.

These two books are written quite simply and powerfully, both written by people who experienced the Holocaust during their teens. Which brings one of the guidelines for selecting books to use in the classroom. Experts agree that students will get the most out of a book that was written showing the perspective of a character their age. Both *Night* and *The Diary of Anne Frank* accomplish this goal. The students can relate to a character that they share common problems with. Apart from hiding from the Nazis, Anne had problems that any teenager would experience, a desire to be independent from her family, uncertainty about her future, the trap between not being an adult or child anymore. And

¹⁹ Carol Danks "Using the Literature of Elie Wiesel and Selected Poetry to Teach the Holocaust in the Secondary School History Classroom." *Social Studies* 87, no.3 (1996): [101-106]

although students today cannot relate to the Holocaust, they can identify with the problems Elie had with his father. Students of any background are drawn into the worlds of Anne Frank and Elie Wiesel because they can identify with the issues both characters are experiencing.

A third objection to relying on textbooks is that they do not capture the attention of the reader. There is no humor used so the reading is simply not enjoyable. Proponents of the use of literature explain that when reading is fun, students will be more likely to do it, and in the end, learn. The mantra “learn to read, read to learn” should be the adage educators instill within their classrooms. Motivation to learn the material was a theme seen over and over during my research toward the use of literature in teaching social studies. Motivation to read is something that teachers should be giving while students are in school, but creating lifelong readers is a goal that George Marshall reminds educators to consider.²⁰ Reading classical historical literature provides a bridge for students to make so that they will continue to read classics as adults.

A final evaluation of textbooks is that the reader is not required to think critically.²¹ New York State and national standards both require that students develop critical thinking skills. Unfortunately, textbooks stifle the development of this. Textbooks are often seen by students as the ‘holy grail’ for answers and the information provided in them as sacrosanct. They do not see the book as just one version of the truth, if it is the truth at all.

²⁰ George Marshall, “What’s the Big Deal? Integrating Young Adult Literature in the Middle School.” *The English Journal* 90, no.3 (2001): [74-81]

²¹ Guzzetti and McGowan

In our constantly changing world the material in the books is inaccurate at best in many instances.²² For example, if a new text set is purchased every 5 years, the information in them; maps world leaders, current issues, is already 1 to 2 years old by the time they get into the hands of the students. This creates many problems unless measures are taken to teach the students that analysis is necessary even within a textbook. The information is provided in a very black and white context and the reader is not given an opportunity to judge the perspective and intent for the writing. These things would be a natural part of teaching a literary piece. The inquisitive nature that is spurred by the reader is a novel that makes the reader anxious to turn the page, or find out what happened next. This type of excitement is nowhere to be found in the standard history text.

Increasing student motivation to learn was a common theme among proponents of using literature within the social studies classroom. Novels and other non-textbook sources have a way of stimulating interest within young adults that are not possible through traditional methods. The consensus is that history could have a way of becoming something to be enjoyed, not endured, through the use of writings. When students are engaged with a work, learning becomes more of a dynamic process says Marsha Alhers.²³ Making connections is a huge part of the learning in a social studies classroom. Lois Rudnick argues that through literature students will expand their knowledge, stimulate their imaginations and increase their knowledge of an era, such as slang, values and often

²² Everett T. Keach. "Social Studies Instruction Through Children's Literature." *The Elementary School Journal* 75, no. 2 (1974): [98-102]

²³ Marsha G. Ehlers. "No Pictures in My Head": The Uses of Literature in the Development of Historical Understanding." *Organization of American Historians* 13, no. 2 (1999): [5-9]

pop culture.²⁴ A textbook is simply incapable of providing students with an awareness of the cultural quirks of an era. Another way that student understanding is through reading dialogue of a time period. Conversations can be powerful ways to show students emotions that people of a time would have been experiences. Teaching the London Blitz of World War II with facts and figures is one thing, but reading the biographical account of a person that lived through it is entirely another.

The general attitude toward the way in which teachers should go about implementing literature within their own classrooms is quite uniform. Experts such as McGowan and Guzzetti²⁵ explain four simple steps to implementation. First teachers have to make their selections. Will all of the class be reading the same book, or will students be reading different texts about the same theme or topic? No matter the decision, there are a few basic rules for selecting texts. The book or piece should be accurate in historical facts and perspective, should have an authentic voice and be appropriate for students.²⁶ As mentioned previously a book with a teenaged voice will also lend itself nicely to appropriate reading level. There is no point in burdening them with a work that is too far beyond their ability level. Second, the writing should be practical in length. Students should not feel intimidated by a long work if there is a time constraint for the reading. Works such as *Night* by Elie Wiesel are only 103 pages long, however do an outstanding job of delivering the message to its reader. Last, works should be chosen that students can relate to. Children are more likely to enjoy a book that has a character that they can identify with. So often students are presented with information about people,

²⁴ Lois Rudnick "Capturing Student Interest with an Interdisciplinary Approach." *Organization of American Historians* 13, no. 4 (1999): [3-4]

²⁵ Guzzetti and McGowan

²⁶ Danks

places and events that they have never heard of, and have no connection to. Experts agree that if a child can identify with a character they will be more likely to appreciate the book.

After the world has been selected the teacher needs to determine how the context will be delivered to the class. Essentially, how will the books be acquired and how will the kids be motivated to read them?²⁷ In *Linking Literature with Life* by Sandmann and Ahern, the authors recommend that teachers seek out libraries and book clubs to acquire text sets for classroom use.²⁸ While this is an inexpensive, or even free method, it is time consuming and would require months of advanced planning. If these two methods are not possible, the authors recommend being creative with budgetary requests. If monies can be switched from one account to another, or if teachers can plan the same units to be taught at different times, books can be purchased through different accounts.

In whichever manner the books are attained, it is recommended that some sort of pre-teaching strategy be used to pique student interest. This could range from simply making predictions about the plot, or going further in depth to doing research about the author and time period. For example, if the book is set in an unfamiliar geographic region, students could research pictures of the area on the internet. In any sense, the student should have some investment into the learning before the literature is read.

After the reading has begun, teachers need to determine how the knowledge will be constructed. There are several different ways to go about this. Some experts such as Everett Keach suggest that students should be broken up into heterogeneous discussion

²⁷ Guzzetti and McGowan

²⁸ Ahern and Alderman, 28

groups lead by the teacher is the best catalyst for learning.²⁹ In any sense, the students need time to process the information and incubate their learning so that they are getting the maximum benefit from the writing. Guided reading strategies can also be effective for students who will have difficulty in processing what they have read.³⁰ Diagrams, reading journals and writing chapter summaries are all practical ways of producing comprehension for the struggling reader. The extent to which a work will be used is the final step of the process. Formal as well as informal methods of assessment will show just how much benefit the students have received from a work and the decision can then be made as to use further supplements to achieve the intended objectives or to move forward with a new lesson.

Keach reminds readers in “Social Studies Instruction Through Children’s Literature” that picture books should not be limited to the elementary classroom. These sources are valuable classroom resources that are often overlooked.³¹ Specialists cite many reasons for the use of children’s books in the highschool classroom. Bill Costello and Nancy Kolodziej explain that today’s youth is more visually oriented. Through the exposure of television, computer and video games the current generation is more likely to visually process information.³² The pictures alone in a book can teach geographical concepts far more accurately than reading descriptions from a text. Far away places are brought home for students to experience through vivid pictures and story setting. There has actually been a considerable amount of writing about the use literature to teach

²⁹ Keach

³⁰ Wan Guofang “teaching Diversity and Tolerance in the Classroom: A Thematic Atorybook Approach.” *Education* 127, no. 1 (2006): [140-154]

³¹ Keach

³² Bill Costello, Nancy Kolodziej. “A Middle School Teacher’s Guide for Selecting Picture Books.” *Middle School Journal* (2006): [27-33]

geography. Strange environments quickly become familiar, and students are more likely to be able to describe characteristics of landscapes that they read about compared to a list of qualities they are asked to memorize.³³ Students are also introduced to place names, landmarks and flora and fauna that they may not necessarily be introduced into a typical geography lesson. All of these things would add to their overall understanding.

Children's books can serve several purposes beyond exposition to different types of geography. Firstly, they level the playing field. Most high school students are at a variety of reading levels ranging from just learning English to collegiate. Using a picture book to introduce a unit allows all students to participate equally. Using this type of source promotes the natural reading ability and the allegorical elements that many picture books contain can be a catalyst to teaching ethics and ideas.³⁴ Debating the decision to drop the atomic bomb takes on a different tone after the students have read *Faithful Elephants*, by Yukio Tsuchiya a true story about how the animals of Hiroshima Zoo were affected by the bombing of Japan during World War II. The watercolor picture alone of the animals suffering is enough to put a different spin on students' perception of the cost of war.

The picture books of today are far more sophisticated than in previous years. Some books today are specifically written for an older audience. Some popular books, promoted by the National Council for the Social Studies that deal with more mature issues would be *Weapons and Warfare: From the Stone Age to the Space Age*. This work explains the technology of warfare along with providing pictures to accompany each section analyzing the nature of man and warfare. Similarly, Tom Feeling's *The Middle*

³³ John J. Chiodo and Mary L. Flaim, "A Novel Approach to Geographic Education" Using Literature in the Social Studies. *Social Studies* 85, no. 5 (1994): [225-228]

³⁴ Costello and Kolodziej

Passage: White Ships, Black Cargo is anything but your typical picture book. The themes discussed and drawings are far too adult for a young audience. These books would be helpful in teaching units about the arms race or the triangle trade because they provide students with a different perspective of the topic, but are also short. A common complaint within social studies classrooms is that readings are too long, and turn into more of a turn off for kids to learn. Everett Keach Jr., sites that many students list social studies as their least favorite subject.³⁵ Perhaps students would be more likely to enjoy social studies if the content was presented in a different manner. Keach explains that teachers should strive to be the catalyst of learning, rather than the bearer of truth.³⁶

Professionals all agree that students benefit from exposure to different books across different cultures.³⁷ In our increasingly global world, students need to be reminded of the similarities that tie all of us together as global citizens. Wan Guofang explains that respect for other cultures can come through the use of children's literature.³⁸ He goes on in his article to say that the respect learned in the classroom will carry over into the school environment, creating a better atmosphere for learning. As today's youth enter the workforce cultural competence will become increasingly a prerequisite, as the very nature of the term "workforce" is a relative term in our interconnected world.

In an effort to prepare our students, much has been written about the need for students to understand different ethnic groups.³⁹ Advocates argue that literature provides an incredible simple and efficient way to accomplish this goal. Dawn Ferguson explains

³⁵ Keach

³⁶ Keach

³⁷ Gail, Dickinson Kaa Vonja Hinton- Johnson "Guiding Young Readers to Multicultural Literature." *Library Media Connection*, April/ May 2005, [42-43]

³⁸ Guofang

³⁹ Janelle B. Mathis. "Respond to Stories with Stories: Teachers Discuss Multicultural Children's Literature." *SocialStudies* 92, no. 4 (2001): [155-161]

that in our post 9/11 world, literature can be a way for students to discuss ethics and values that shape a society.⁴⁰ By reading books students can actually enter the “hearts and minds” of others, make sense of the issues in the world and understand America’s role in it.⁴¹ Experts agree that it is vital to teach students to act as global citizens and that this should start at an early age.

A common goal among educators is to teach cultures of different nations. Rather than read description about characteristics, why not use a storybook to illustrate the point far more quickly and effectively? Nancy Bluemel has noted that the use of international literature is a far underutilized source in “Integrating International Literature to Enhance the Curriculum”.⁴² When compiling resources teachers should seek out translated works of other countries. This serves several purposes. When reading the classics of other nations, the students will experience a sense of nearness explains Ruth Cox. She also explains that the Hans- Christian Anderson award winners list published yearly would be a great place to start for educators interested in taking advantage of this technique. Even something as simple as reading aloud the Chinese version of the Cinderella fairytale at the start of a China unit would help highschool students make a connection to a culture they know very little about. Of children’s stories are not appropriate, other international media would work equally as well. Foreign website, television programs and film would all show students that more similarities than differences exist.

Literature can also be used as a way for students to connect to family members of different generations. Larry Johannessen, a Vietnam War Veteran course, the results

⁴⁰ Fergusun

⁴¹ Nancy Bluemel, Ruth Clark and Maureen White; “Using International Literature to Enhance the Curriculum.” *Teacher Librarian* 31, no. 5 (2004) : [12-15]

⁴² Bluemel, Clark and White

were far more reaching than he had predicted. Many of his 17 and 18 year old students were wrestling with the same issues as the soldiers their age in stories such as Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War*. Bravery, courage, duty and honor are all concepts that young people grapple with as they enter an adult world that is more gray than black and white.⁴³ By experiencing these moral issues along with the memoir's characters, Johannessen explains that students will be more connected to the war veterans within their own families. After reading about their experiences the students would be more likely to ask questions, and do further research, attaining the ultimate goal for any educator, creating a student with an inquisitive attitude about the world around them, that seeks to learn more.

While literature is an incredible supplement to traditional forms of teaching the social studies, many researchers urge teachers not to underestimate other types of unconventional teaching tools as well. One example is song. Music is something that is near and dear to the hearts of almost all teenagers. They may not even realize the cultural implication of the songs that they have downloaded onto their mp3 players. Many historical events even today and in yesteryears have been recorded through song.⁴⁴ Susie Burroughs and Jesse Palmer describe in "Integrating Children's Literature and Song in the Social Studies" that lyrics really are a remnant of the past. Many students probably do not know the history behind the Star Spangled Banner, or even Yankee Doodle. One of the great things about teaching through song is that the students learn information, but also be reminded of the lessons that they have learned when they hear the music. An example would be to teach the Vietnam War through the use of protest music of the 1960s and 1970s. These songs give a glimpse into the cultural value of the time and show

⁴³ Johannessen

⁴⁴ Burroughs and Palmer

an attitude not always accurately portrayed in textbooks. The authors also explain that with the rapid expansion of technology music for any era or genre is more readily assessable now than ever. From CDs at local libraries to shared drives in the Internet, the sky is the limit when incorporating song into a unit.⁴⁵

Another reason to use literature in the social studies and specifically Global History classroom is that in many circumstances the curriculum neglects the study of women.⁴⁶ For as positive it can be to teach about the contribution of women, precautions must be taken so that unintended side effects do not occur. First and foremost, since the use of literature will only expose students to the life of one woman, or a small group of them this could lead to unintentional stereotyping. Margaret Crocco Smith gives an example of this in her article "Teaching *Shabanu*: the challenges of using world literature in the US social studies classroom."⁴⁷ Crocco explains that the story is a wonderful insight into the life of a Pakistani girl. Shabanu is an abused teenage girl whom at the hands of her father is forced to marry and give up her own dreams. While the story is both compelling and accurate, teaching it to a group of high school students presents a few challenges Crocco warns against. After 9/11 many Americans already have a negative stereotypical view of Muslims, and this type of story would add to the already misunderstood nation and its peoples. While the story is based on actual events, it hardly represents the experience of most Pakistani women. A well intentioned attempt at cultural literacy could quickly backfire and lead to even more stereotyping. However, teachers should not shy away from opportunities to teach women's history for fear of reinforcing

⁴⁵ Burroughs and Palmer

⁴⁶ Crocco

⁴⁷ Crocco

clichés. Experts agree a few well planned discussion questions would go a long way in preventing unwanted consequences.

In 1990 the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) published their list of “essential Social Studies skills”. The list is below.

1. Data-gathering. Learning to:
 - Acquire information by observation.
 - Compile, organize and evaluate information.
 - Locate information from a variety of sources.
 - Extract and interpret information.
 - Communication orally and in writing
2. Intellectual skills. Learning to:
 - Compare things, ideas, events and situation on the basis of similarities and differences.
 - Classify or group items in categories
 - Ask appropriate and searching questions
 - Arrive at general ideas
 - Make sensible predictions from generalizations
3. Decision-making skills. Learning to:
 - Consider alternatives solutions.
 - Consider the-consequences of each solution.
 - Make decisions and justify them in relationship to democratic principles.
 - Act, based in those decisions.
4. Interpersonal skills. Learning to:
 - See things from the point of view of others.
 - Understand one’s own beliefs, abilities, and shortcoming and how they affect relationships with others.
 - Use group generalizations without stereotyping and arbitrarily classifying individuals.
 - Work effectively with others as a group member.
 - Give and receive constructive criticism.
 - Accept responsibility and respect the rights and property of others.

It is plain to see that of the twenty bulleted goals, eleven can be achieved through the use of various literatures in the classroom. The NCSS has even published a book, *Linking Literature with Life* that is an anthology of books and their descriptions suitable for classroom use, and targeted toward the middle grades. Quite a far cry from the NCSS stand toward literature in the 1940s!

When researching the use of literature in the social studies classroom, an abundance of examples and guides to using certain pieces can be found. One such

example is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The book is becoming almost a standard to use while teaching the colonization of Africa by European imperialists. Martha Feldman explains almost a step by step approach in her article "Teaching World History with *Things Fall Apart*". She explains her process of teaching the novel as almost a 'how to guide'. First, she requires that her students read the book independently, then write a paper on a topic surrounding the issues that *Things Fall Apart* presents. After this she starts a series of class discussion. These center around the advantages and disadvantages of traditional societies, Chinua Achebe's goals for his book, comparisons between African and Asian societies, justices and the attitude of the 'white man's burden'. Feldman finishes her article by explaining that by the end of her unit, students have a greater understanding of the colonization of the world, and see that the issue does not exist in terms of black and white, or right and wrong terms.⁴⁸ With examples such as this readily available it adds all the more to go against the reasons some teachers give not to teach literature.

Another example of a popular novel to use in the history classroom is *Night*, written by Elie Wiesel. Carol Dank's article "Using the literature of Elie Wiesel and selected poetry to teach the Holocaust in the secondary school history classroom" provides teachers with a plethora of ideas to teach the Jewish genocide without having to resort to the textbook. She recommends that teachers use a pre-reading strategy before actually assigning the text. By asking questions for students to consider such as "What is important to you as a young person?" and "What dangers do you face as a teenager" she sets the stage for the students to enter the world of a teenage boy in the throws of the Holocaust. Dank also requires that her students answer comprehension questions as they

⁴⁸ Martha Feldman "Teaching History with *Things Fall Apart*" *Teaching History* 20 (1995) 72-75

read such as “What historical events are referred to?” and “What did you learn about Wiesel and his father?”. She explains that by using this method, classroom discussion will be facilitated and discussion promoted. She writes several suggestions for follow up activities after the book has been completed ranging from creating a map that shows Wiesel’s journey through Europe to researching the physiological and emotional ways that the Nazis used to control the Jews as they progressed through the final solution.⁴⁹ Countless other examples similar to Dank’s approach to teaching *Night* can be found online, or in accredited publications. This shows that the standard approach to lecturing about a topic is falling by the wayside as teachers and other professionals are trying a more holistic approach to not only teach the who, what, and where’s of history, but also the whys and feelings of the time.

It is mandatory for students to learn about certain events of past in order to appreciate the present, and understand the way that the world is today. Standards and curriculum are inflexible and standardized testing requires preparation. However, the way in which the past is learned about is one thing that social studies teachers can still control. The movement toward this practice recently is to continue the use of literature within the history classroom to improve comprehension, global awareness and teach the value in other cultures. While the campaign is strong in the elementary classroom, it is gaining momentum in the middle and high school level. With increased attention being put toward meeting the needs of learning disabled and English language learners, literature to teach content will become more and more popular. The use of literature in the social studies classroom meets many state and national standards and appeals to students who have a limited interest in learning the content. Literature and picture books open doors for

⁴⁹ Danks

students who have difficulty understanding social studies taught with traditional methods.
Hopefully, using these two types of resources becomes commonplace and mainstream.

Part II:
Original Research

Few things in the world of education have withstood the test of time. One-room schoolhouses have been replaced with campuses that can accommodate thousands of students, slate and chalk have given way to paper and pencil, then typewriters and now computers. Teaching alone was once a lowly profession only occupied by young and single women, or the “Ichabod Cranes” of a hamlet, but it is now considered an honorable profession with quite a competitive job market. Chalkboards have been pushed aside for dry erase and overhead projectors are now being replaced with “smart boards” and other interactive media. However, some things have remained constant, one of which being the use of literature. Teachers have long employed literature within their curriculums to enhance a variety of learning experiences as well as accommodate standards. Literature can help students practice reading for analysis; examine elements of language, style and more recently, history.

The use of literature in the Social Studies classroom is vital to increasing student understanding and awareness of historical events and time periods. In today’s computer age students are exposed to a plethora of websites that provide them with more information than they could ever hope to comprehend. Unfortunately, quantity has replaced quality of information. Unreliable sources containing biased or grossly incorrect information are beginning to infiltrate what today’s student finds when researching information or facts about a time period. Fortunately, there are alternatives to using web based sources that take careful sifting to find, or boring out of date textbooks.

Presently there is no shortage of acclaimed historically based literature that will enhance a student’s understanding of a time period. Exposure to these forms of instruction provides students information that they would not gain through a traditional

history lesson. Customs are explained in detail, feelings are expressed and the nuances of a time are shown through human interaction and speech. Merely explaining or lecturing to students can teach none of these things. However, through literature, in just minutes, students can be transported back in time, to places thousands of miles away, by just using their imagination as they read. They can be put in the middle of battles during World War I as they read *All Quiet on the Western Front*, or in the assembly line during America's industrialization because of *The Jungle*. Literature in the Social Studies classroom is so much more than reading a book. Reading can provide students with a way to connect to a time period.

The concept of using literature to teach Social Studies is not a new one. Teachers have been taking advantage of this strategy for the past few decades. However, this has not always been the case. In 1948 the National Council of the Social Studies published its yearbook, commenting on their attitudes toward recent trends in Social Studies. Their feelings toward using fictional work to teach history were less than positive.

“No well trained historian would recommend learning the history of our country from reading historical novels. In fact, most historians become agitated at the mere mention of such an idea. Similarly, it is not possible to gain world understanding merely from reading stories about imaginary characters living in certain parts of the world. Even at the primary level, the market is flooded with little books about children in other lands. Many of these and others for older children are very attractive, but tend to build incorrect concepts about people and places.”⁵⁰

The perception of that time centered on the belief that solid teaching meant using text and workbooks to require students to memorize their subjects, and that different disciplines should be kept separate. We understand now of course that teaching across the

⁵⁰ Clyde F. Kohn ed. *Geographic Approaches to Social Education*. Mensha: George Banta Publishing Company, 1948. 103

different disciplines enhances student learning and gives them a deeper understanding of content. The notion that learning has occurred when students have memorized facts and data is now obsolete. Teachers strive to meet objectives that students must be able to evaluate a situation or synthesize information that they have learned, not just merely repeat it. For example, it is far more difficult to analyze the effect of starvation in causing the French Revolution, than to simply list it among the other factors such as the Enlightenment and the American Revolution. The use of literature in the classroom lends itself well to obtaining these types of upper level thinking objectives.

Seventeen years after the NCSS yearbook publication warning literature use for Social Studies lessons, Edwin Carr published *The Social Studies* and in it explained that historical fiction was useful to teach with. He maintained that fiction would aid students in getting a feel for the era that they were studying.⁵¹ According to Carr, for students to truly understand an issue reading a novel would help to give them greater meaning. However progressive Carr may have been with this type of idea, he was careful to warn teachers that a novel was in no way a substitute for teaching ‘real’ history. Since the 1960s, attitudes have continued to improve dramatically toward non-traditional teaching practices.

In 2000, the Educational Resources Information Center published a list of what trends were taking place in the Social Studies classroom. They were as follows:

“Trend 1: Every major curriculum report in recent years called for more emphasis on history. Some argue that history is the single discipline that unites fields within social studies:

⁵¹ Edwin C. Carr. *The Social Studies*. New York : The Center for Applied Research in Education Inc, 1965, 87

Trend 2: Along with history, geography has become a primary foundation of the social studies curriculum.

Trend 3: Teachers find that they can enrich their courses with appropriate fiction and non-fiction literature to teach social studies.

Trend 4: An effective social studies curriculum highlights and celebrates the diversity of our society and focuses on the multicultural nature of American society.

Trend 5: Students should learn about the origin of many of the beliefs and principals that have made the U.S. unique among nations by giving adequate attention to western civilization

Trend 6: Today's social studies programs should discuss the ethics and values that shape our society

Trend 7: Students should learn about the role of religion in the world

Trend 8: Social Studies curriculums should examine contemporary and controversial issues

Trend 9: If students are to acquire the understanding and skills necessary for effective participation as citizens, they must explore topics in depth.

Trend 10: Writing is one of the best ways to utilize the in-depth approach to social studies. It leads to enhanced creativity and helps students connect reading, writing and other subject areas."⁵²

It is quite interesting to see that out of the ten trends, eight clearly show that teachers are using literature within the classroom. It really is not surprising; the use of literature can function to meet many different objectives. Reading novels and other sources, force students to think critically about complex issues. Analysis of a social problem, such as segregation, allows students to understand all of the gray areas that textbooks are incapable of showing, such as different values or opinions of people living in a single community. Also, learning to carefully examine literature for information will develop

⁵² Dawn Ferguson. "Recent Trends in Social Studies Curriculum." *Curriculum Administrator* 36, no. 8 (2000):19

critical thinking skills. Lastly, the simple act of reading books will help to create life long learners. Every teacher hopes that their students will go on in life to continue their education, through informal or formal means.

Much of what is being published today about using literature in the Social Studies classroom centers on the positive reasons for use. Some of the reasons to be: textbook inadequacy, increasing student motivation to learn and providing students with exposure to diverse cultures from around the world. All of these accommodate classroom as well as state and national standards and objectives.

As a teaching tool, textbooks have long had a reputation for being dry, dull and boring. Everett Keach explains in his article “Social Studies Instruction Through Children’s Literature” many students list Social Studies as their least favorite subject in school.⁵³ When children start using textbooks to learn about history, their interest in the subject abruptly drops. They become disconnected from the content, and have no desire to read simply for information. There are suddenly no plots of a story to anticipate, or characters they can relate to. Now, rather than connecting their own lives to the lives and people they read about, they are confronted with distant places and bizarre names. When using textbooks, Social Studies become an abstraction or simply too boring. Unfortunately, Social Studies quickly become a subject that students make no connections to, or see relevance in understanding.

Textbooks have several inherent flaws that literature does not. They are often too difficult for students to read, even if the student is genuinely interested in the content.⁵⁴ In

⁵³ Everett T. Keach. “Social Studies Instruction Through Children’s Literature.” *The Elementary School Journal* 75, no. 2, (1974): [98-102].

⁵⁴ Terry Lindquist. *Seeing the World Through Social Studies*. 2ed. Danny Miller. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002.31

Seeing the World Through Social Studies Terry Lindquist writes that textbooks are written on average two years above grade level. This poses a serious problem as many American children read at *below* grade level. Challenging vocabulary, syntax and small font size all contribute to the ineffectiveness of textbooks. Many students quickly become frustrated with what they are required to read and become turned off by the class in general. When students are more appropriately challenged, as with a piece of literature suited to their ability, they will be more confident and in turn excited to learn.

Increasing student motivation to learn was a common theme among proponents of using literature within the social studies classroom. Novels and other non-textbook sources have a way of stimulating interest within young adults that are not possible through traditional teaching techniques. Many educators are reminding others that history should be something that is enjoyed, not endured. Lois Rudnick, an advocate of interdisciplinary education, explains that through literature students can expand their knowledge, stimulate their imagination and increase their comprehension of an era, such as through slang, and even pop culture.⁵⁵ A textbook is simply incapable of providing students with an awareness of the cultural nuances of a time period the way that literature can.

Literature provides a way for students to attain a degree of cultural literacy that goes beyond just knowing the history of a country or region of the world. Wan Goufang explains in his article “Teaching Diversity and Tolerance in the Classroom: A Thematic Storybook Approach” that students can gain a respect for other cultures through the use

⁵⁵ Lois Rudnick, “Capturing Student Interest with an Interdisciplinary Approach”. *Organization of American Historians* 13, no.4 (1999): [3-4].

of literature, even at a young age with the use of picture books.⁵⁶ He goes on to comment that respect learned in the classroom will carry over into the school environment creating a better atmosphere for learning. As today's youth enter the workforce, cultural competence will become increasingly important in our ever more connected 'globalized' world.

Even though the support for using literature in the social studies classroom is overwhelming, there are of course critics. Many worry that if the focus of Social Studies education is shifted away from memorization of facts, dates and events, has learning of history even taken place? Critics also explain that using even historical fiction would blur the lines of fantasy and reality for students. While many pieces are well written and many contain poignant messages for the reader, not all are written by accomplished historians. This can be a problem; as at times, information given is not 100% accurate, or experiences may reflect only a small minority. This could pose serious problems for teachers who would have to differentiate between reality and fiction, opinion and fact. Understanding a simple historical event could become quite confusing for students. In any case there are drawbacks to using literature, but the general consensus remains that it can be a powerful teaching tool.

Educators seem to be in a general agreement that using literature to teach Social Studies is a practice that teachers should be taking advantage of. The question remains though, are they? Teachers in classrooms from kindergarten to twelfth grade wrestle with having to accomplish so much in just 180 days of instruction. When the "to-do" list seems to get longer each year can extra literature be implemented somewhere in between

⁵⁶ Wan Goufang "Teaching Diversity and Tolerance in the Classroom: A Thematic Storybook Approach." *Education* 127, no. 1 (2006): [140-154]

character education, test preparation, social skills and general standards based instruction? What will have to be eliminated if something new is added to the curriculum map? Will training or materials be available for use? If it is possible, how are teachers doing it, and are they doing it alone? As students move from elementary to middle to high school, how is the process that teachers collaborate and entwine content changing?

These questions can be answered by going to the heart of teaching, the teachers themselves. Through simple surveying, we can gain a glimpse of what is actually happening in the classroom, versus what the experts are saying should happen. There is often a dichotomy between what the experts call for and what is practical given the average obstacles that many teachers are faced with.

This topic is very relevant and deserves to be examined. With increased pressure from the federal government right down to the local school boards, teachers are under scrutiny now more so than ever. No Child Left Behind legislation requires that school districts improve student standardized testing scores or face economic penalties. In New York State, standardized testing results are published so that data can be compared, requiring that all districts continue to improve exam scores. On top of it all, drop out rates have come to be a reflection of the school district's policy, and less so on the community itself. Benchmarks of success are seen as how often graduates continue with higher education. All of these goals seem to be an insurmountable task, what with decreasing budgets, increasing class sizes and wavering support from administration and parents. To fill this tall order, teachers today need as many tricks up their sleeve or strategies as they can gather to improve the amount and quality of student learning and achievement.

In a survey of high school social studies teachers and elementary teachers responsible for social studies in their classroom, educators were asked a few simple questions.¹ The questions related to literature based instruction and overlapping ELA and Social Studies Curriculum. Of the elementary teachers that responded, 100% said that they used Social Studies content to fulfill ELA standards and curriculum. When asked how often do you use literature in Social Studies one teacher wrote:

“Tons! Right now we are studying the US and biographies as well as electricity so we are reading different leveled text[s] on Thomas Edison. We have numerous read alouds for Russia specifically Patricia Palocco books; we have books about Christmas as we are studying Christmas around the world. When we study the rain forest we read *Afternoon on the Amazon* and have guided reading books [that are] fiction and non-fiction.”⁵⁷

Her response was not unique. Almost all of the respondents replied in the same fashion; expressing genuine excitement about creating thematic units for their students.

Integrated units were another commonality that was shown in the results of the survey. One respondent commented that the “primary classroom lends itself to thematic units where different curricular areas are taught simultaneously”.⁵⁸ Another teacher reported “We do a lot of shared reading in Social Studies and I often assess understanding with student’s writing...I try to find and share many books that relate to topics that we’re discussing.”⁵⁹ It seems as though elementary teachers try to give students a well-rounded or multi-faceted view of whatever they are learning, and in the process show students that all content areas are related, as are most topics and issues outside of school. This seems to be a time saver as well. One kindergarten teacher reported:

⁵⁷ Joanne Emerson, email message to author, November 28, 2007

⁵⁸ Rebecca Trank, e-mail message to author, November 28, 2007

⁵⁹ Laura McGowan, e-mail message to author, November 28, 2007

“Social Studies is integrated into my ELA curriculum. Using thematic units, you can cover both areas without having to create separate teaching times. For instance, the students will write a sentence about Martin Luther King Jr., or they will brainstorm a list of their favorite community helpers and write about their favorite.”⁶⁰

Teachers are also using literature to teach content to students with special needs.

One ESOL teacher reported:

“50% of what I do is integrated with the Social Studies curriculum the other 50% is science. Everything that I do is ELA. It is my job to help English Language Learners develop their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. I integrate and make the content comprehensible and ELLs while teaching ELA...I use literature to teach social studies almost everyday. [I use] Children’s picture books both fiction and non-fiction. We try to integrate poetry as well.”⁶¹

If the elementary classroom overlaps curriculum and integrates thematic units as a practice, what is happening then by the commencement level? Are these strategies still being used to facilitate student learning at the high school?ⁱⁱ

Unfortunately, the answer is, sort of. In a survey of high school Social Studies teachers, 86% said that they are currently using literature within their own classrooms to enhance their curriculum, or had at one time. Interestingly enough, of the 14% that said they did not, all were within their first three years of teaching and remarked that they were still learning the curriculum, were not aware yet of any titles to use, or “would like to but some reasons are because I do not have the time [to] plan for it and include it in the curriculum at this moment”⁶². Of the teachers using literature there were some surprising findings.

When asked what titles were being used, there was very little repetition in the responses. Many of the titles reported were very obscure, and possibly rare to even find.

⁶⁰ Trank

⁶¹ Jessica Bruckman, e-mail message to author, December 4, 2007

⁶² Chris Whipple, email message to author, November 15, 2007

“*Sophie’s World, Nectar in the Sieve, PillowBook, The Son of the Revolution, Story of Purna, Ramayana Comic Book Version...* Several children’s books I bought in China, India and Japan...”⁶³

The only titles that appeared for multiple surveys were *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Grapes of Wrath*. The diversity of the titles reported has several implications. First, modifications based on student needs or interests are driving how teachers plan lessons and units; secondly, people are using what resources are available to them. Clearly, educators are using creativity to meet their instructional objectives.

When asked how they feel that literature has enhanced student-learning, responses were all very similar.

“It has brought life to the subject for the students. Puts the worlds of the actual historical figure right before their eyes.”⁶⁴

“Students are able to relate to the story and it helps bring facts to life whether it is fiction or non fiction”⁶⁵

“I do feel that many books help significantly to enhance a student’s understanding at both a content and an emotional level. Many kids are typical suburban teenagers and have no idea that life is like for most of the teens in our world. Reading a book like *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, will help them see the challenges many women face in Afghanistan in a way that will stick with them because it connects to their emotions as well as their intellect.”⁶⁶

This idea of teaching more than just facts can make a Social Studies lesson a far more powerful, and thus lasting experience for the students. Another teacher reported, “I think it [literature] adds another dimension to their understanding of the material. I especially like period fiction”⁶⁷ In actuality the title of the course itself almost stipulates that literature be taught in a social studies classroom. Teachers are not just teaching

⁶³ Larena A. Ortiz, email message to author, October 28, 2007

⁶⁴ Tom Barden, email message to author, November 3, 2007

⁶⁵ Ortiz

⁶⁶ Susan Daly, e-mail message to author, October 28, 2007

⁶⁷ Kimberly Hughes, e-mail message to author, October 20, 2007

history anymore, but psychology, economics, ethics, writing, geography, cultural appreciation and politics. The high school Global Studies and U.S. History and Government course curriculum is not what it once was!

In the survey, teachers responded that they used all types of literature ranging from non-fiction, biographies, memoirs, children's books, fiction, poetry, and even song lyrics. They also reported different types of strategies for using the books. The power of literature is that it taps into interests and experiences students can relate to. It also provides them with the power of choice, something that is restricted at even the high school level. "The first quarter, I assigned a non-fiction book from the "Further Reading" section of our textbook...Students had their choice of *The Great Mortality* by Kelly or *Women in the Renaissance* by M.L. King."⁶⁸ Other teachers reported ways to differentiate instruction such as by letting students select biographies of people that interested them. "I...have students read biographies on their own and then I would interview them about their person"⁶⁹ While many of the works mentioned could be wonderful in their entirety, many had responses such as "I do use selected passages from some literature in my classroom but I do not have time to read whole works."⁷⁰

Time. Time is probably every teacher's common enemy. The longer we spend teaching and mastering our content, the more materials we gather and knowledge we personally gain. However, for as much material as we gain, time is something that we do not. It would be practical to be as efficient as possible with what resources we have to maximize the student learning that takes place during the school year. A question on the survey was 'Do you collaborate with the ELA faculty?' The comments were

⁶⁸ Hughes

⁶⁹ Martin Meyer, e-mail message to author, November 5, 2007

⁷⁰ Daly

unanticipated as not a single response was a yes. Answers ranged from just flat out “NO”, to “I have been working more in the last year but it is far from what I would like. I reference the books they read to the parts of history. Much more could be done”⁷¹, to “I hope to be doing that in the future, but we haven’t had time so far, and I don’t know how receptive they will be- they have a very set curriculum...”⁷² No one that replied seemed to have a solid working relationship with the ELA faculty. This seemed to be very odd, as many people expressed interest in having a network between the two content areas.

If Social Studies teachers are using all types of literature and are receptive to working in conjunction with English departments why is it not happening? Across the state, middle schools have adopted a team teaching strategy where ‘teams’ of teachers share the same groups of students. This organization allows them to create thematic units, often during a shared planning time, across the curriculum and communicate with one another about upcoming tests, projects and even field trips. This has been beneficial to students as teachers are able to reference what is being taught in different content areas during their own lessons. For example, students may be learning about the causes of rainforest destruction because of slash and burn agriculture in the Amazon in Social Studies, while reading a short story about it in English, then learning the environmental implications in science, to examining percentages of the forest lost in math. This technique helps students to connect what they are currently learning to prior knowledge and often gives them a better-rounded knowledge. This also gives the students a sense of a school community as all of their teachers are working toward the same goal simultaneously. So, why is it not happening at the high school level?

⁷¹ Ortiz

⁷² Rachel Hughes, e-mail message to author, October 29, 2007

Do the standards not permit it? Actually the ELA standards lend themselves perfectly to the use of cross-curricular teaching. The ELA Standards are broken into 4 parts, writing, listening, reading and speaking.

“Standard 1: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding. As listeners and readers, students will collect data, facts, and ideas; discover relationships, concepts, and generalizations; and use knowledge generated from oral, written, and electronically produced texts. As speakers and writers, they will use oral and written language to acquire, interpret, apply, and transmit information.

Standard 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression. Students will read and listen to oral, written, and electronically produced texts and performances, relate texts and performances to their own lives, and develop an understanding of the diverse social, historical, and cultural dimensions the texts and performances represent. As speakers and writers, students will use oral and written language for self-expression and artistic creation.

Standard 3: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation. As listeners and readers, students will analyze experiences, ideas, information, and issues presented by others using a variety of established criteria. As speakers and writers, they will present, in oral and written language and from a variety of perspectives, their opinions and judgments on experiences, ideas, information and issues.

Standard 4: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for social interaction. Students will use oral and written language for effective social communication with a wide variety of people. As readers and listeners, they will use the social communications of others to enrich their understanding of people and their views.”⁷³

It is interesting to note that nowhere in the standards are there mentions of specific titles, works or authors. These standards provide a few implications. Firstly, ELA teachers have a much wider scope than many social studies teachers would expect with which to select the literature they teach. Secondly, nowhere is it mentioned when certain works should be taught either throughout the school year, or at grade levels. This degree of flexibility means that ELA teachers have complete discretion when selecting what they teach, how they teach and of course when. Social Studies teachers at the high school level do not have those luxuries. World War I has to be taught after the Industrial Revolution,

⁷³<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/ela/pub/elalearn.pdf> Dec 2, 2007

however, it is up to the ELA teacher to decide when to teach *Oliver Twist* and *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

ELA Standard 1 says that students will collect data, facts, and ideas, discover relationships, concepts, and generalizations. To meet this standard it would benefit English teachers to be able to coincide with the Social Studies faculty. This would enable students to use the data, facts and concepts that they have learned within their history classes in conjunction with the content that they are being taught during English. We are constantly asking our students to engage their prior learning, and to draw connections from what they have already learned, but do we as teachers create opportunities often enough for them to draw these parallels?

Many of the social studies teachers surveyed reported that they use literature or parts of literature in their classroom to enhance learning. Well, who is really the most qualified individual to teach the literature, the ELA or Social Studies teacher? ELA teachers are far more qualified to teach the nuances of a literary piece. While Social Studies teachers are certainly capable of leading a discussion about a novel, the English classroom is a more appropriate setting for a variety of reasons. English teachers have less of an impetus to cover content, allowing for more time to explore issues. The students have also been trained to evaluate works not just for information and context, but also for literary style and critical analysis.

While the ELA teacher has the certification to teach the literary element of a work, this is where close communication between the ELA and Social Studies departments would come into play. Through collaboration, both teams would be able to select works of merit and credibility. Through this process, students would be able to

achieve the full benefit of learning the value of the literary piece, but also the historic context that inspired it.

New York State also publishes a list of “Performance Indicators” which serve as a guideline for teachers to use in developing their curriculums. One element of the Grade 10 Reading Performance Indicator states:

“-Read, view, and interpret texts and performances in every medium (e.g., short stories, novels, plays, film and video productions, poems, and essays) from a wide variety of authors, subjects, and genres
- build background by activating prior knowledge through questioning what they already know about the form in which the story is presented and the period in which it was written”⁷⁴

Already, the ELA curriculum of many schools involves many historically based works ‘from a wide variety of authors, subjects and genres’ such as *Night* by Elie Wiesel, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. If these novels are taught before the students have learned the historical circumstances of the time period they will have less significance to the student. Or, if they have not been taught the context that the work is coming from, they will not be able to have a complete appreciation for the literature. For example, a student would be much more apt to appreciate *Night*, a memoir of a young boy who survived the Holocaust, if they knew of the events leading to the eventual “final solution” and the reasons for the anti-Semitism that plagued Germany in the 1930s. An analysis of race relations in the American South and knowledge of Jim Crow segregation and the early civil rights movement would almost be essential to comprehension of the issues and conflicts in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a novel set during the Great Depression published in 1960. If students were not taught about the history of race relations in the South, or landmark court cases such as

⁷⁴ <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/ela/elacore.pdf> Dec 2, 2007

Plessy v. Ferguson, then would they understand the backlash Atticus received after deciding to defend Tom Robinson?

Another performance indicator for grade 10 is: “Interpret information from media presentations, such as documentary films, news broadcasts, and taped interviews”⁷⁵ For this requirement to be fulfilled, teachers would almost be forced to use historical sources. Who better to seek out suggestions from for quality documentary films than the Social Studies faculty? Film footage from the 19th and 20th century is abundant for educational use. Adolph Hitler would be an excellent case study for 10th grade students to examine. His public speaking ability has been widely studied and students could watch documentaries of his speeches to analyze why people were so apt to believe his propaganda, while discussing the qualities of an effective or riveting public speaker. Students would have a greater appreciation for why he was so supported by the German people if they had the background from their Global Studies course about the impact of the Great Depression and the Treaty of Versailles on Germany.

Commencement Level Standard one requires that students: “interpret...political speeches and debates, and primary source material in their subject area courses”⁷⁶ This standard could alone almost dictate that teachers collaborate when deciding what to teach. It would be completely beneficial for students to analyze Kipling’s *White Man’s Burden* in ELA while learning about imperialism in Global Studies, or to hear Churchill’s *Iron Curtain Speech* while learning about the Cold War in American history. These are two of the most famous works in history, so why are they not getting the attention that they deserve from other content areas?

⁷⁵ <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/ela/elacore.pdf> Dec 2, 2007

⁷⁶ <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/ela/elastandards/ela1a.html>, December 5, 2007

Cross-curricular teaching is the basis of thematic units in the elementary classroom, and team based teaching is becoming more the norm in middle schools. Right now all of the evidence points to it being beneficial in the high school, so why isn't it happening there too? Clearly the standards support the idea, and with so much pressure on teaching for depth rather than breadth, it seems to be common sense that teachers would collaborate to cross two hurdles with one leap. Reasons why not are merely just speculation, but could range from a variety of causes. Many schedules lack common planning time for faculty, or there may be no pressure or support from administration to teach across the curriculum. Or reasons could be as simple as a general unawareness of the possible benefits by teachers themselves.

From the research that I have done, it seems clear that literature is an effective teaching tool that is actually being used in Social Studies classrooms right now. There really is no question that teachers are constantly looking for new ways to make information more meaningful and accessible to students. Contrary to popular opinion, many teachers are open to suggestions, and willing (although at times through baby steps) to try new things. Many may be open to the proposition of collaboration with other faculties if the idea were broached.

My work has contributed to educational research by showing that teachers are using literature within their classrooms to teach Social Studies at a variety of levels and in a plethora of ways. The studies show that literature is an effective teaching tool and educators seem to whole-heartedly agree! Teachers often need to be reminded that they are not alone in struggling to try new techniques, and there never seems to be enough

opportunity for staff development involving talking to peers or colleagues about what they are currently doing in their classrooms, and of course swapping ideas!

From my research it can be concluded that Social Studies teachers want to collaborate with the ELA faculty. Furthermore, after analysis of the ELA standards, there is no prohibition preventing it from happening. The New York State Standards require only that skills be taught, not certain works, authors or genres. The standards do not dictate a timeline that says which skills need to be introduced or mastered. These lead to one conclusion- ELA teachers have total flexibility. Flexibility is something that Social Studies teachers are not afforded, as history needs to be taught to a certain extent on a timeline. Which leads to one last conclusion, the decision to collaborate and tie curriculums really lays in the decision of the ELA teacher. They are the ones that will need to alter their curriculum plans, budget for new books and prepare new units, which they have never taught. Perhaps, if high schools started small, possibly just collaborating for just one unit, the task would not seem as intimidating.

This research could be continued in many different avenues. It is my goal to encourage other teachers to explore the idea of collaboration at the high school level, and not be afraid to explore new ways of teaching. This could be done through a variety of ways. Opening discussion in workshops during staff development, publication of articles in both Social Studies and ELA magazines or journals could also reach both intended audiences. There is a strong possibility that many people have never considered using a cross curricular approach to teaching. Another way to encourage others to start dialogue about teaching across the curriculum would be to introduce the concept at an undergraduate level in teacher preparation programs. If students were prepared to seek

out other content area teachers when developing unit plans, they would carry that training into their first teaching jobs, where as new staff it would benefit them greatly to seek out colleagues.

Teachers are constantly asking their students to work collaboratively, try new things with an open mind and keep a positive attitude. However, how often do we really embrace those ideals? Leading by example is possibly one of the ways that we most indirectly teach and influence our students. Kids are aware when teachers are keeping their lessons current with new gimmicks and projects. In an age when effort and creativity matter, using literature in the classroom can help both teacher and student.

**Part III:
Application**

Presently in the world of education there is no shortage of obstacles that teachers face. Increasing class sizes with decreasing budgets, declining parental involvement especially at the high school level, increased curriculum requirements and pressure to perform on standardized testing all seem to make the multitudes of tasks in a mere 180 days almost impossible. To be successful, a teacher needs to be constantly adding to their bag of tried and tested tricks and techniques, short cuts and time savers, which are acquired through the years.

Although there is a level of comfort for many with the compartmentalized organization of high schools, studies and experts suggest that there are some important reasons why cross-disciplinary teaching can and should work. Perhaps it's time to look to what our peers in the elementary schools have long ago discovered; combining content across the curriculums and using literature to supplement the teaching of social studies. Elementary level teachers have been using literature to teach social studies for years, effectively killing two birds with one stone, and the movement has spread to the middle school level with the concept of team based instruction. These strategies allow students to learn about a topic from several different genres and even teachers. This article will explain why it should and can work at the high school level, how to go about implementing it, and strategies to use literature within your own classroom.

For those skeptics that feel that certain content should remain in the hands of specific teachers, studies and experts show that there really are quite a few reasons why it would and can actually work. The use of literature can dramatically increase the amount of understanding that students can gain about a topic. Since the 1960s, specialists have been encouraging teachers to use literature within social studies classrooms to enhance

learning. In *The Social Studies*, educators are informed that even fictional works would aid students in getting a feel for the era that they were studying.⁷⁷ That was in 1965, since then, more and more discussion has been spent on using literature in the social studies classroom and cross curricular collaboration at the high school level.

Much of what is being published today about using literature in the social studies classroom centers on the positive reasons for use. Some of the reasons are textbook inadequacy, increasing student motivation to learn and providing students with exposure to diverse cultures from around the world. All of these accommodate classroom as well as state and national standards and objectives.

The use of literature can function to meet many different objectives. Reading novels and other sources will help students to comprehend complex issues. Analysis of a social problem, such as segregation, allows students to understand all of the gray areas that textbooks are incapable of showing, such as different values or opinions of people living in a single community. Also, learning to carefully examine literature for information will develop critical thinking skills. Lastly, promoting the habit of reading books will help to create life long learners. Every teacher hopes that their students will go on in life to continue their education, through informal or formal means.

Textbooks have long had a reputation for being dry. Everett Keach explains in his article "Social Studies Instruction Through Children's Literature" many students list social studies as their least favorite subject in school.⁷⁸ When children start using textbooks to learn about history, their interest in the subject abruptly drops. They become

⁷⁷ Edwin C. Carr. *The Social Studies*. New York : The Center for Applied Research in Education Inc, 1965, 87

⁷⁸ Everett T. Keach. "Social Studies Instruction Through Children's Literature." *The Elementary School Journal* 75, no. 2, (1974): [98-102].

disconnected from the content, and have no desire to read simply for information. No longer are there plots of a story to anticipate, or characters they can relate to. Now, rather than connecting their own lives to those they read about, they are confronted with distant places and bizarre names. When using textbooks, the social studies become an abstraction or simply too boring, and nothing that students see relevance in learning.

Textbooks have several inherent flaws that literature does not. They are often too difficult for students to read, even if the student is genuinely interested in the content.⁷⁹ In *Seeing the World Through Social Studies* Terry Lindquist writes that textbooks are written on average two years above grade level. This poses a serious problem as many American children read at below grade level. Challenging vocabulary, syntax and small font size all contribute to the ineffectiveness of textbooks. Many students quickly become frustrated with what they are required to read and become turned off by the class in general. When students are more appropriately challenged, as with a piece of literature suited to their ability, they will be more confident and in turn excited to learn.

Increasing student motivation to learn was a common theme among proponents of using literature within the social studies classroom. Novels and other non-textbook sources have a way of stimulating interest within young adults that are not possible through traditional teaching techniques. Lois Rudnick, an advocate of interdisciplinary education, explains that through literature, students can expand their knowledge, stimulate their imagination and increase their comprehension of an era, such as through

⁷⁹ Terry Lindquist. *Seeing the World Through Social Studies*. 2ed. Danny Miller. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002.31

slang, and even pop culture.⁸⁰ A textbook is simply incapable of providing students with an awareness of the cultural nuances of a time period in the way that literature can.

Literature provides a way for students to attain a degree of cultural literacy that goes beyond just knowing the history of a country or region of the world. Wan Goufang explains in his article “Teaching Diversity and Tolerance in the Classroom: A Thematic Storybook Approach” that students can gain a respect for other cultures through the use of literature, even at a young age with the use of picture books.⁸¹ He goes on to comment that respect learned in the classroom will carry over into the school environment creating a better atmosphere for learning. As today’s youth enter the workforce, cultural competence will become increasingly important in our ever more connected ‘globalized’ world. Perhaps one of the easiest ways to help students prepare for a globalized workforce is to use literature along with more traditional teaching methods at the commencement level as is done at the elementary level.

While the list of reasons to use cross disciplinary teaching is extensive and addresses many points that critics make, caution should be used when implementing it. One critique in particular made by Margit MacGuire in “What Happened to Social Studies?; the Disappearing Curriculum”, is that when social studies is taught in conjunction with ELA, only a “superficial treatment of the subject” is provided to the students.⁸² She argues that as students are reading social studies content in an ELA setting, they will only be practicing reading strategies and exploring simple cause and

⁸⁰ Lois Rudnick, “Capturing Student Interest with an Interdisciplinary Approach”. *Organization of American Historians* 13, no.4 (1999): [3-4].

⁸¹ Wan Goufang “Teaching Diversity and Tolerance in the Classroom: A Thematic Storybook Approach.” *Education* 127, no. 1 (2006): [140-154]

⁸² Margit E. McGuire, “What Happened to the Social Studies; The Disappearing Curriculum” *Phi Delta Kappan* April (2007) : 620-624.

effect relationships. In a reading lesson, students would not be participating in activities centered on civics and citizenship. These are two central goals of the social studies curriculum that would fall by the wayside in favor of reading comprehension. Teachers who wish to undertake the task of integrating curriculum should take heed to not teach social studies “as a literacy endeavor”.⁸³

Using literature to teach the social studies is not a new concept in the elementary classroom. In a survey of 12 elementary school teachers, 11 responded yes when asked about integrating social studies and ELA curriculum. One teacher replied “ Social Studies is integrated into my ELA curriculum. Using thematic units, you can cover both areas without having to create separate teaching times.”⁸⁴ When asked if they use literature to teach social studies another teacher responded with “Tons! Right now we are studying the US and biographies as well as electricity, so we are reading different level text[s] on Thomas Edison...” Elementary teachers seem to have found a way to combat the time crunch that plagues all educators by doubling up content with skill building that is required by grade level.

This trend has begun to seep into the middle schools. With ‘team teaching’, groups of teachers collectively plan and meet to align curriculums so that there is a common thread that students experience throughout their different content areas. This enhances understanding and allows the kids to make connections between what they are learning in different subjects. For example, learning about the Great Depression in Social Studies while reading *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* in ELA, learning how inflation and stocks operate in math, examining photography of the Depression in art, and learning

⁸³ McGuire

⁸⁴ Trank, Rebecca, email to author, 11/28/07

about agriculture during the Dust Bowl in science. While Middle School scheduling lends itself more to this type of interaction, there is no reason that it cannot happen on a smaller scale at the high school level. Believe it or not, the standards actually encourage it! Of the twelve national ELA standards, most center on reading, writing, listening and speaking for information from a variety of genres and resources. Standard 2 even states “read from a wide range of literature from many periods”. Standard 9 goes further to encourage collaboration with social studies faculty: “Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles”⁸⁵

While more specific requirements will vary state to state, many social studies teachers may be surprised to find that very rarely any standards dictate what types or titles of literature there are to teach at specific times, or grade levels. This provides several implications, first of which being- there are no legitimate reasons why collaboration cannot occur between social studies and ELA faculties.

ELA teachers have a much wider scope with which to select the literature they teach. This degree of flexibility means that ELA teachers have complete discretion when selecting what they teach, how they teach and of course when. As we’re all aware, social studies teachers at the high school level do not have those luxuries. World War I must be taught after the Industrial Revolution, however, it is up to the ELA teacher to decide when to teach *Oliver Twist* and *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

ELA Standard 1 says that students will collect data, facts, and ideas, discover relationships, concepts, and generalizations. To meet this standard it would actually benefit English teachers to be able to collaborate with the Social Studies faculty. This

⁸⁵<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm>

would enable students to use the data, facts and concepts that they have learned within their history classes in conjunction with the content that they are being taught during English. We are constantly asking our students to engage their prior learning, and to draw connections from what they have already learned, but do we as teachers create opportunities often enough for them to draw these parallels? What might happen if social studies teachers went one step further and tried to forge a bridge between faculties so that literature and social studies context were connected for the students?

Many schools across the country can report that yes, it is happening and that although it is time consuming and exhausting, they can see the changes made in their schools and feel that it is well worth it. In her article "School Reform: A Reflective Essay" teacher, Gerilee Nicastro describes the struggles and sacrifices that her school has made in an effort to implement more cross curricular teaching. The strategy at her district has been a series of early release Fridays where grade level teams meet to plan grade level activities and programs.⁸⁶ She explains that progress has been made, be it slow and at first difficult.

Many teachers who responded to a national surveyⁱⁱⁱ made similar remarks about the success rate when attempting cross-disciplinary teaching. Comments seemed to fall into three categories when asked about problems with implementation. Teachers said that it can only work if there are no scheduling problems. This would be for students, as well as teachers who would need common planning time. Teachers would also need to have similar teaching styles, pedagogies and of course personalities that mesh. Administration

8. Gerilee Nicastro, "School Reform: A Reflective Essay." *English Journal* 86, no. 5 (1997): 54-56.

also plays a key role. A building that is experiencing a high turn over rate with principals would have more obstacles to overcome in building a program than in a school with stability. Lastly, the type of class or grade level would impact a success rate. One respondent replied that “[cross-curricular is] more helpful in AP classrooms because of the non-fiction portions of the A.P. United States exams [that students have to be prepared for]”⁸⁷ Naturally, students capable of Advanced Placement programming would be more successful in any type of setting than average students.

For teachers willing to undertake the challenge of starting a program in their building, there are many resources available to help. Keith Younker goes as far as to provide educators with a list of to-dos to get the ball rolling on a cross curricular movement within a high school. He advises in his article, “Facilitating the NCTE Reading Initiative across the High School Curriculum” to start with grant writing to provide training. He then explains that it is essential to select the person with the right set of criteria for a team leader, and even explains the importance of staying in communication with parents, school board members and even the press.⁸⁸ With so many resources available, and so much research pointing to why curriculum integration can work at the high school, why is it not happening more?

In my own national survey of social studies teachers, many responded that they were utilizing parts or whole works of literature. However, when asked, “Do you collaborate with the ELA faculty, the comments ranged from flat out “No”, to “I have been working more in the last year, but it is far from what I would like. I reference the

⁸⁷ Debbie Brininstool, email message to author July, 2008

⁸⁸ Keith Younker, “Facilitating the NCTE Reading Initiative across the High School Curriculum.” *The English Journal* 92, no. 3 (2003): 18-20.

books they read to parts of history. Much more could be done”⁸⁹ Of the 17 respondents, 100% said that they were not actively collaborating with the English department in their building, however, 86% said that they were utilizing works of literature in their own classroom.

While social studies teachers are certainly capable of leading a discussion about a novel, the English classroom is a more appropriate setting allowing for more time to explore complex issues introduced in many works. The students have also been trained to evaluate works not just for information and context, but also for literary style and critical analysis. ELA teachers have less of an impetus to cover content, allowing for more time to explore literary elements rather than historical context.

Cross-curricular teaching is the basis of thematic units in the elementary classroom, and team based teaching is becoming more the norm in middle schools. Currently, evidence points to this strategy being beneficial in the high school, so why isn't it happening there too? Clearly the standards support the idea, and with so much pressure toward teaching for a depth rather than breadth approach, it seems to be common sense that teachers would collaborate to cross two hurdles with one leap. So why isn't it happening more often?

Reasons why not are merely just speculation, but could range from a lack of common planning time in the schedule for faculty, no pressure or support to from administration and just a general unawareness of the possible benefits by teachers themselves. It is important to note that many respondents said that they would be willing to work with the ELA faculty, or were already using literature within their own classrooms and would welcome the opportunity to use more. With social studies teachers

⁸⁹ Ortiz

having a generally positive attitude toward the concept of cross curricular teaching at the high school level here are some simple suggestions if you've been inspired to try in your own school.

Try combining department meetings. We always ask our students to 'work collaboratively' with others; maybe we should too! The key to making a thematic unit may be as simple as the ELA department deciding to swap the time they teach two different novels, or add in some specific titles to an already established poetry unit. Not a possibility? Hook up with a willing ELA teacher and work on writing a grant together that would provide funding for new books, and possibly money to take a few classes on a field trip, possibly to a local museum or war monument. Start small, maybe your success will be infectious!

Another possibility would be a 'top down' strategy. Approach administration about centering your next staff development day around creating cross curricular units. Contact your local or state level NCSS chapter about recommendations for guest speakers or free literature at their website: www.ncss.org/local; or the National Middle School Association at www.nmsa.org

Another avenue to examine is a new strategy for your special education population. Students who will not be receiving specialized (baccalaureate, honors, etc.) degrees often have a different ELA curriculum to follow that may be more flexible than the general population. Why not suggest to Special Education teachers specific titles that would benefit the students in their social studies classes? There are many fiction and non-fiction works that are written for a younger audience, which would be totally appropriate for students with learning disabilities. The NCSS even publishes a book *Linking*

Literature with Life which suggests new titles for the social studies classroom, organized by topic, genre, age level and provides a brief synopsis of each.

If cross-curricular teaching is simply out of the question don't discount the use of literature on your own in your classroom. Here are some simple ideas that take very few resources:

1. Have students read chapter 2 from James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*. The chapter gives a more accurate account of the role of Columbus in the "discovery" of the Americas, the treatment of the Arawak people and subsequent slavery of the Americas. After students have read the chapter, compare that to a typical children's book you read aloud to the class about Columbus. Have students discuss what they feel is appropriate for young children to learn and know about Columbus, or hold a debate about the appropriateness of Columbus Day.

2. Read aloud *Terrible Things* by Eve Bunting. This is a children's picture book that is an allegory of the Holocaust. Have students research the Martin Neimoloer poem that inspired it. Discuss with the students the importance of teaching ethics and morality at the elementary, middle and high school grade levels.

3. Read aloud *The Butter Battle Book* by Dr. Seuss, have students list as many Cold War references as they can, then as a class examine some of his history as a *political* cartoonist. An excellent website with Dr. Seuss cartoons is:

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/politicaldrseuss/>

4. Read chapter 10 of *The Jungle*. Discuss if the intent of Sinclair was really to expose the meat packing industry, or to show the plight of immigrant workers. Have students compare the book to modern day 'muck raking' television programs such as *Dateline*.

5. Have students read a biography about the experiences of someone their own age.

Night, Elie Wiesel

* A story of a young boy who is taken to a concentration camp with his family during WWII.

Dancing under the Red Star, Karl Tobien

* A story about an American teenage girl who moves with her family to the Soviet Union, who is later sent to a gulag as a political prisoner for questioning the government.

First They Killed My Father, Loung Ung

* The story of a girl from a middle class family who survived the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia

Long Way Gone, Ishmael Beah

* The story of a young boy forced into the civil war in Sierra Leone, then later rescued by the UN

Son of the Revolution, Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro

* The story of one young man growing up during Mao's Cultural Revolution and the struggles of being a child of a branded "counter-revolutionary"

6. Have students read two historical juvenile books. In groups have students decide if the books would be most useful in a social studies or ELA classroom. Have students give examples of paragraphs or chapters that support their decisions.

7. Have students research critiques of videos watched in class that are based on novels.

Which videos received accolades for correctly interpreting the novel, which were criticized? Why?

Examples: *Oliver Twist*, *Animal Farm*, *Tale of Two Cities*, *Devil's Arithmetic*, *The Scarlett Letter*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Grapes of Wrath*, *The Natural*, *My Brother Sam is Dead/ The Patriot*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*

8. Have students analyze an *American Girl* book. These are the books that have spurred the multi-million dollar industry behind the dolls and upcoming Hollywood film *Kit Kittredge: An American Girl*. The books are stories of 8-12 year old girls in different historical periods that experience a variety of adventures based on their situations with

people or their environment. Is there historical accuracy? Is it reflective of most young women of that time period?

9. Have students in groups act out the plot of a book in the style of "Shakespeare's Shortened versions". For inspiration check out:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/60secondshakespeare/watch/>

10. Use Poetry. It is relatively easy to find simple poems to supplement your units. One of the great things about using poetry is that you can find examples written by people that were the age of your students. Many kids today use poetry or song writing as a form of expression, so reading the feelings of people their own age during specific time periods may be something that they can identify with and then in turn take more interest in. Try <http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/plansHome.do> for poetry that students can actually listen to, as well as accompanying lesson plans.

While there seems to be a limitless supply of resources and methods available for using literature within a social studies setting, teachers may still feel apprehensive because of the need to prepare for assessments. Perhaps a better way to look at assessment is to view it in the form of retention. Most teachers do not want their students to regurgitate information for an exam, only to forget everything that they have been taught minutes later. Literature would provide the perfect antidote to this situation. The goal to provide a richer historical understanding of events is more easily attained through all forms of literature, biography, historical fiction, poetry, and song. Students are more likely to recall details about a time period if they have connected to a character in a story that lived through the historical event. For example, students may not remember details about slavery in the American South from a textbook, but they will remember the

punishment that John endured after being caught teaching the slave children to read in *Nightjohn*.

The learning of facts and statistics is easily done through traditional textbook or workbook learning. Students can quickly be made to recite dates, names and simple cause and effect relationships. While this information is important for students to remember, it does little to prepare them to be active citizens in society. Literature can prove to be inspirational, and show students why it is important to honor and remember those that came before them, as well as what their role in society should be. When students read about the impact of one or a few dedicated individuals, and the sacrifices that they have made for their cause, a greater depth of learning has taken place. Students may read about the dropping of the first atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the devastation that they caused, but reading *Hiroshima* by John Hersey will remain with them for much longer as they see the images in their minds that he paints, images that death toll charts in a textbook are incapable of creating.

It is imperative for students to learn about the certain events of past in order to appreciate the present, and understand the way that the world is today. Standards and curriculum are inflexible and there is no way to get around standardized test preparation. However, social studies teachers still control the way that curriculum is presented in their own classes and how students are prepared to demonstrate their learning. The use of literature in the social studies classroom meets many state and national standards and appeals to students who have a limited interest in learning the content. Literature and picture books open doors for students who have difficulty understanding social studies taught with more traditional methods. For those students who are successful in a more

typical setting, literature will provide a higher retention of historical themes. By selecting the right pieces, students will be able to recall pieces of these works for years, as powerful images that stay in their minds. Above all, teachers should seek out their colleagues so that student learning is integrated across disciplines. As we prepare our students for an evermore-connected workforce, we should be providing them with an evermore-connected school environment. When students can translate what they learn among different content areas, everyone benefits.

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