

Work in Progress

Linking Children's Literature with Social Studies in the Elementary Curriculum

Abstract

The author shares information related to integrating quality children's literature into the teaching of social studies at the elementary school level. Research within the past decade informs educators of the strong impact of curriculum standards for the social studies as developed by professional organizations. Teachers today are expected to teach the social studies content defined by these standards. The most noted standards are those developed by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). The NCSS advocates the use of children's literature in the teaching and reinforcing of social studies content. In this paper, instructional methods for sharing quality children's literature aligned to the NCSS Standards will be explored.

## Integrating Social Studies Education with Children's Literature

Complex vocabulary, unfamiliar writing styles and organization, topics with which students have had little experience, and abstract concepts can make textbooks dealing with economics especially challenging for students to read. One solution to this situation is to use trade books in the classrooms to supplement the assigned text. Quality children's literature can provide the depth and coverage missing in the core textbook. As social studies concepts are taught within the context of literature, students realize that social studies is a real and interesting part of the world around them (Day, H.R., Flotz, M., Hayse, K., Marksberry, C. Sturgeon, M. Reed, S., 2002). Writers of trade books have more flexibility than textbook writers. They can bring to the pages of their books richness of background, originality of style, and creativity that is often missing in textbooks (Gunning, 2012).

Since students and teachers enjoy stories, using literature is a very motivational teaching technique. When using trade books, teachers are challenged to develop activities that are interactive, reflecting the belief that students learn best through active, highly personalized experiences with economics. The goal of instruction should be the application of social studies understanding to real-world situations in trade book lessons (Flowers, B.J., Kugler, P., Meszaros, B.T., Stiles, L., & Suiter, M.C., 2005). Van Fossen (2003) recommends using stories in trade books to examine the impact of social studies on the lives and actions of people, families, groups and nations. Several resources are available to teachers who are interested in incorporating children's literature into social studies education. The National Council on Economics has published the following documents which address literature integration into the study of economics at the elementary grade level:

1. The Classroom Mini Economy by Harlan Day and David Ballard,
2. Teaching Economics using Children's Literature by Harlan Day, Maryann Flotz, Kathy Hayse, Callie Marksbery, Mary Sturgeon, and Suellen Reed,
3. Social Studies through Children's Literature by Anthony Fredericks,
4. More Social Studies through Children's Literature by Anthony Fredericks,
5. Much More Social Studies through Children's Literature: A Collaborative Approach by Anthony Fredericks,
6. Social Studies Instruction Incorporating the Language Arts by Joy Anne Hauge Morin,
7. The Power of Picture Books in Teaching Math, Science, and Social Studies by Lynn Columba, Cathy Kim, and Alden Moe;
8. Linking Literature with Life: The NCSS Standards and Children's Literature for the Middle Grades by Alexa L. Sandmann and John F. Ahern.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has had a long standing commitment to the use of children's literature and to providing resources to teachers. Each year they publish the annual annotated listing of "Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People." A number of publications related to integrating literature into the social studies is available through the website.

#### References

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