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Integrating News Media into History Classes to Teach both Content and Civic Literacy Skills

In many Social Studies classrooms across the United States, a reality is that a substantial amount of instructional time is allotted to providing additional support for state-mandated standardized testing of reading and writing. Such a reallocation of instructional time for teaching literacy may reduce the time used for teaching for Social Studies-specific content and skills, thereby resulting in a deficit in students' Social Studies education. However, high-stakes testing's focus on literacy has presented Social Studies teachers with the opportunity to identify methods for merging Social Studies content with activities that can strengthen students' literacy skills, and vice versa. Such strategies engage students to increase their comprehension skills by determining, applying, and synthesizing meaning. They also enable students to organize and articulate what they have learned.

One technique to accomplish this goal involves literacy activities that use current news media related to the content covered in U.S. and global history classes. This article provides a practical guide for middle and high school Social Studies teachers to use to this end. Teachers will ultimately be able to develop at least one activity for every unit covered in the course. The selected news article should be accompanied by questions designed to help students develop their reading for information skills, and skills necessary to organize information from the article to write a critical writing piece or essay. Social Studies teachers can therefore take an integrative approach to the use of current news articles to develop their students' civic literacy skills (reading for information as well as interdisciplinary writing), while enriching the teaching of content in their U.S. and Global History classes.

Teaching students to use news and information media is an important aspect of civic education. In a global society, citizens need a set of literacies that will enable them to think critically, communicate effectively, and ultimately act conscientiously (Breakstone, Smith, Wineburg, Rapaport, Carle, Garland, & Saavedra, 2019; Wineburg, McGrew, Breakstone, & Ortega, 2016). The NCSS's College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework focuses on preparing students for their post-secondary futures, including not only "the disciplinary practices and literacies needed for college-level work," but also "the critical thinking,

problem solving, and collaborative skills needed for the workplace.” Consequently, this framework encourages curriculum and instruction that supports students in developing the skills they will use “in their roles as student, employee, and most importantly as informed and engaged citizen of the world” (NCSS Position Statement: A Vision of Powerful Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies, 2016, 180). Information literacy is required in several state standards, and it is also frequently defined as an important “21st-century skill” (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2019). According to a study conducted among Social Studies teachers in Western New York State, all respondents surveyed included among their primary goals the need to develop “critical-thinking skills,” while 64% identified the importance of developing “content knowledge” (Serure, 2018). The integrative approach for implementing current news articles suggested in this article provides students with the opportunity to work on both of these teacher-valued goals while learning Social Studies content.

The activity that is the focus of this article is but one step toward achieving these broader, complex goals. Moving from a general to an increasingly more specific focus, Part 1 provides a “big picture” context for making the literacy-Social Studies connection, particularly in terms of directing these skills toward civic literacy. Part 2 provides various approaches to incorporating news articles in Social Studies classes, which is one broad approach to doing this. Finally, Part 3 provides steps for how to develop and implement a specific strategy of tying contemporary news articles that would be particularly useful for ELL students and native speakers, given the language often used in primary sources in Social Studies and history courses, to engage students, and increase reading comprehension and critical thinking, thereby promoting literacy skills that will ultimately help them become better informed citizens and decision makers. Social Studies teaching and learning “requires effective use of technology, communication, and reading/writing skills that add important dimensions to students’ learning” (NCSS Position Statement: A Vision of Powerful Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies, 2016, 181).

1. Making the Literacy–Social Studies Connection for Teaching Civic Literacy

Studying language is the foundation of all learning, for students cannot construct any meaning or understanding of the world without using language. In other words, many of the language arts—such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening—cannot be separated from the

content areas (such as Social Studies) because these are the skills through which students learn the content of other disciplines. In learning the content of other disciplines, students primarily learn each discipline's academic language. This type of language is often used in textbooks, classrooms, and assessments (Marlatt, 2018; Spires, Kerkhoff, Graham, Thompson, & Lee, 2018; Sweeney & Townsend, 2018). Therefore, while Social Studies classrooms will include activities that support discipline-based literacy, teachers should also incorporate "multi-disciplinary awareness, information gathering and analysis, inquiry and critical thinking, communication, data analysis and the prudent use of twenty-first century media and technology" (NCSS Position Statement: A Vision of Powerful Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies, 2016, 181).

Since 2010, with the rise of the Common Core (as a general set of skills-based standards) and the push to make students career- and college-ready, Social Studies teachers have increasingly been encouraged to teach Social Studies through reading and writing, and vice versa. The Social Studies curriculum has always included components that overlap with teaching literacy skills (Monte-Sano, 2011). Consequently, adapting Social Studies to the Common Core required more of a reconceptualization of the purpose of Social Studies and what Social Studies teachers do, rather than wholesale curriculum redevelopment (Stoll, 2018; Kenna & Russell, 2014; Johnson & Janisch, 1998; Waters & Watson, 2016; Lee & Swan, 2014). The Common Core standards' inclusion of an emphasis on informational texts to teach reading provided an opportunity to re-position and revitalize Social Studies education (Sharp & Purdum, 2019; Wineburg, Martin, & Monte-Sano, 2012).

In a participatory democracy, we expect citizens to make informed decisions. In order for students to become informed decision makers, they need to develop the literacy skills necessary to be able to research and read critically. Many grades 9-12 Social Studies frameworks at the state level include literacy standards based on the Common Core that focus on determining the central ideas of a written source, analyzing how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation, comparing points of view in their treatment of the same or similar topics, identifying bias, assessing the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support its claims, and developing one's own position while citing specific textual evidence to support it (for example, see: New York State Education Department and the State University of New York, 2015).

News/media articles (particularly online news channels and sources, including social media) are among the main sources from which students obtain information. A strong familiarity with this type of writing and the ability to read it critically is a key component of civic literacy in contemporary society. As the NCSS reaffirms, “an excellent education in Social Studies is essential to civic competence and the maintenance and enhancement of a free and democratic society...[Consequently, teachers should incorporate] activities that engage students with significant ideas, and encourages them to connect what they are learning to their prior knowledge and to current issues, to think critically and creatively about what they are learning, and to apply that learning to authentic situations” (NCSS Position Statement: A Vision of Powerful Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies, 2016, 180).

Civic literacy activities, or literacy activities with the broader purpose of enhancing students’ civic competence, includes students’ ability to read and analyze news and other media articles. Social Studies teachers are well-positioned to help teach these skills, and headway has already been made in this area. For example, promising results have been obtained in terms of teaching students about the role of social media and showing them how to identify factually inaccurate civic information. Research has also shed light on the factors influencing the ability to discern the accuracy of such information (Mihailidis, 2018; Middaugh, 2019; Shulsky, Baker, Chvala, & Willis, 2017; Hodgins & Kahne, 2018; Paquette & Kaufman, 2008). However, such strategies have fallen short of integrating the teaching of civic literacy skills with Social Studies content, particularly while teaching U.S. and Global History.

Moreover, school populations across the U.S. have experienced a growth in English Language Learners (ELLs). Educators have developed various instructional models for teaching ELLs that unite the dual goals of language learning and content learning (Haager & Osipova, 2017). An approach commonly referred to as “sheltered instruction” is one example of such an approach. Therefore, for Social Studies teachers with a large ELL student population, civic literacy activities that combine the learning of civic literacy skills with Social Studies content are a means by which to further these types of instructional models within a general classroom. Many of the skills learned through primary source documents can also be learned as part of the civic literacy activities, using news articles described in more detail later in this article—such as reading for information, identifying points of view/bias/etc., identifying competing arguments

and their supporting evidence, and developing a position/stand on an issue and supporting it logically with text-based evidence.

Social Studies teachers often encounter unique challenges when implementing primary sources in classrooms with large numbers of ELL students (Akinyele, 2017; Patterson, Weaver, Fletcher, Connor, Thomas, & Ross, 2018). Primary sources in U.S. History are often written in antiquated or professional types of English, which can be challenging for native English speakers to comprehend, and even more so for those who are new to the language. Global History primary source excerpts often have the added disadvantage of being taken from outdated (free/public domain) English translations of historical texts, in order for textbook companies to keep their publishing costs down. Examples abound in various source books. *The human record: Sources of global history* (Andrea, 2001) includes excerpts from a multi-volume book published between 1879 to 1910 for selections titled “The classic of history,” “The Upanishads,” “The Bhagavad Gita,” and “The book of good conduct” (pp. 26–28, 67–70, 70–74, 74–76, 495); excerpts from a 1913 translation for “Gathas” (pp. 85–88, 495); excerpts from an 1893 translation for “The analects” (pp. 99–102, 495–496); excerpts from an 1881 translation for “The history of the Peloponnesian War” (pp. 113–119, 496); and excerpts from an 1886 translation for “Travels in India and Ceylon” (pp. 164–169, 496). *Aspects of Western civilization* (Rogers, 2003) contains excerpts from a 1901 translation of Voltaire (pp. 66–69), while *Readings in world history* (2000) features an excerpt from a 1926 translation for “Beethoven’s Heiligenstadt Testament” (pp. 167–169, 328). Meanwhile, *Sources of the West* (Kishlansky, 2003) includes excerpts from a 1915 translation for “The creation epic (ca. 2000 B.C.)” (pp. 6–11, 351), excerpts from an 1888 translation of Plato (pp. 57–65, 351), excerpts from an 1866 translation of Aristotle (pp. 66–69, 352), excerpts from a 1910 translation of Virgil (pp. 74–78, 352), excerpts from a 1908 translation of Plutarch (pp. 85–88, 352), and excerpts from a 1900 translation of the Magna Carta (pp. 174–177, 353). Finally, *Discovering the global past* (Wiesner, Wheeler, Doeringer, & Curtis, 2002) features excerpts from a 1929 translation for “Usamah ibn-Munqidh describes the Franks” (pp. 191–193), and excerpts from a 1914 translation for a section titled “Book of description of countries, ca. 1320s” (pp. 280–282).

Such excerpts can be difficult for students, especially ELLs, to relate to and understand, and in many cases, help develop impractical reading skills. For example, students are not likely

to encounter the type of language used in many of these sources after completing school. On the other hand, students likely will encounter the type of writing used in news/media articles. This is certainly not to say that Social Studies teachers should abandon the incorporation of primary source materials, as historical thinking activities are valuable in helping students obtain a better understanding of the interpretive nature of the discipline. Indeed, a survey of Social Studies teachers in Western New York revealed that 82% ranked the examination of primary sources as the most valuable instructional practice (Serure, 2018). However, adopting news articles to develop critical thinking skills can supplement, or take the place of, some of Social Studies classes' traditional emphasis on historical primary source activities meant to promote literacy and critical thinking skills (Bunch, 2014; Segovia, 2017; Piazza, Rao, & Protacio, 2015).

In an era of increased diversity and globalization, teachers across the U.S. are increasingly encouraged to develop culturally responsive instruction, learning about the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the students in their class and adapting instruction accordingly (Hess, 2008; Martins-Shannon & White, 2012; Enright, 2012). Indeed, the NCSS encourages all Social Studies teachers to be “reflective in planning, implementing, and assessing meaningful curriculum.” (NCSS Position Statement: A Vision of Powerful Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies, 2016, 181). Integrating news articles into History classes to teach both content and civic literacy skills has the potential to help develop culturally responsive instruction, to great benefit for Social Studies teachers with large ELL populations. Social Studies teachers should always think purposefully about their instructional choices and their students' unique learning needs and backgrounds to devise meaningful lessons that will support the development of students' cognitive learning skills to better prepare them for the future and develop a set of literacies that will enable them to think critically, communicate effectively, and ultimately act conscientiously.

2. News Articles in Social Studies

The use of news articles in Social Studies curricula is not new in itself (Schmidt, 2007). Walter Parker has identified three general approaches to using news/current events in Social Studies: a) Teaching current events in addition to Social Studies, b) Using current events to supplement or reinforce the regular Social Studies content, and c) Using news/current events as a

basis for teaching Social Studies content. As summarized in **Table 1**, there are benefits and drawbacks to each of these three broad approaches (Parker, 2012, pp. 206–212).

The first approach, which involves teaching current events in addition to the Social Studies curriculum, would include such activities as a homework assignment requiring each student to find an interesting news article and bring it to class and share. Other examples might include setting aside some portions of classroom instruction to use special news magazines developed for school use. Such magazines, including *Scholastic News*, *Junior Scholastic*, and *Upfront* (from *The New York Times*), all attempt to spark students' interest in the world and present articles written in a format targeted toward upper elementary or secondary students. Such an approach can create regularly scheduled time for news/current events, help build awareness of events, promote literacy skills, and offer a “break” from the regular Social Studies curriculum. However, it can also separate the news/current events from the main topics of the Social Studies classroom, potentially making these activities seem less relevant or significant in comparison to other work done in the class.

The second approach is to use current events to supplement or reinforce the regular Social Studies content. Activities falling under this approach also include students (or the teacher) finding and bringing news that specifically engages classroom concepts to the class to share. This approach involves an attempt to relate the news story to an area of history the class is studying and drawing parallels. The benefits of this approach include more explicit connections between the curriculum and the news/current events. The news story will be more focused on what students are learning, and it can generate greater interest in the curriculum and help clarify its contemporary relevance. However, as the news story must connect to the Social Studies content in some way, this approach inevitably places a restriction on the range of news stories that would be appropriate.

The final approach, using news/current events as a basis for teaching Social Studies content, involves teacher-created units based on news/current events (which can be used as a springboard for learning). Such units can be highly motivating, help bridge school learning with life outside school, and advance valuable knowledge about the world. However, the development of such units requires flexible unit planning, further restricts the range of appropriate news stories, and may pose difficulties in terms of covering all curriculum topics.

Table 1*Approaches to Using News/Current Events in Social Studies (Parker, 2012)*

Approach	Examples	Benefits	Drawbacks
Teaching current events in addition to Social Studies	Homework: Bring an article to class to share; <i>Scholastic News, Upfront</i>	Regularly scheduled time for news/current events; Builds awareness; promotes literacy skills; “refreshing” break	Separates news/current events from the main topics of the Social Studies classroom
Using current events to supplement or reinforce the regular Social Studies content	Having students find news/current events that relate to the topics of study; Teacher brings in news/current events that relate to the topics of study	More explicit connections between curriculum and news/current events; News more focused on what students are learning; Can generate interest in curriculum and clarify its contemporary relevance	Restricts the range of news stories that are appropriate
Using news/current events as a basis for teaching Social Studies content	Units based around news/current events (used as a springboard for learning)	Can be highly motivating; Bridges school learning with life outside school; Builds knowledge base about the world, etc.	Can require flexible unit planning; Further restricts the range of appropriate news stories; May be difficult to cover all local curriculum topics

Civics and Government courses are conducive to the use of news articles, partly because of a logical connection of the curriculum to civic literacy. This preference, however, has been influenced by the association of “news” with “current events.” This strong association has limited the use of civic literacy activities using news articles in the teaching of U.S. and global history content, since history content focuses on past events. However, Social Studies teachers can use current news articles in such categories as “archaeology” and even “scientific news” (which often covers news in both the natural and social sciences) to find articles that relate directly to past events and figures to help teach U.S. and global history topics. Such news articles can then be used through either the second or third approach outlined above.

3. *Developing the Activity*

The first step in developing a civic literacy activity using news articles to also support the teaching of U.S. and global history is to find appropriate news. It is often easier for the teacher (rather than the student or students) to find the news articles that will be used. Various websites, such as those in **Table 2** include a suitable selection of news articles related to new archeological and social scientific discoveries.

Table 2

Suggested Websites
https://www.archaeologica.org/NewsPage.htm
https://www.archaeology.org/news
https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/Archaeology
https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/c1038wnxyy0t/archaeology
https://www.foxnews.com/category/science/archaeology
https://www.livescience.com/topics/archaeology
https://www.sciencedaily.com/news/fossils_ruins/archaeology/
https://phys.org/science-news/archaeology-fossils/
https://www.nytimes.com/topic/subject/archaeology-and-anthropology

The second step, after finding a selection of potential news articles, is to select which one(s) to use. When choosing an article, the following are helpful considerations: a) What unit/content topics could the article help teach? b) How does the news topic help relate Social Studies content to the present? c) Why might the content of the news article be interesting to students? and d) Does the news article contain a debate/challenge to traditional interpretations of past events or include varying opinions/points of view? Articles should relate to the history content that will be taught, as well as present a way to connect the past to the present. As the news article will be used to engage learners and initiate the learning experience, the articles should also revolve around topics of interest to secondary students. Finally, articles that include varying opinions/points of view and/or a debate/challenge to traditional interpretations of past events are particularly beneficial, because they can also be used to help demonstrate how the study of the past is dynamic rather than static. **Table 3** provides some sample headlines of the types of articles that could be used to help reinforce global history or U.S. history content.

Table 3

Sample Headlines
“Scientists find 3.3 million-year-old toddler, youngest human ancestor” (Associated Press, September 31, 2006)
“4,000-Year-Old Game Board Carved into the Earth Shows How Nomads Had Fun” (Tom Metcalfe, December 10, 2018)
“Writing: An Egyptian invention?” (https://whyfiles.org/079writing/2.html , 1999)
“Tomb raiders lead to discovery; grave of noted [Egyptian] dentists secret for 4,200 years” (Sierra Millman, Associated Press, October 23, 2006)
“Introducing the boy king; for first time, King Tut unmasked for public” (Anna Johnson, Associated Press, November 5, 2007)
“Ancient grave found in Greece” (Associated Press, August 29, 2009)
“Phoenicians live on in DNA” (Associated Press, October 2008)
“A riddle of Ancient Greece solved?” (Associated Press, October 29, 2005)
“Roman shipwreck yields treasure: Fish bones” (Daniel Woolls, Associated Press, November 2006)
“More crystal skulls deemed fakes” (Richard Ingham, AFP, July 9, 2008)

<p>“Ancient Mongol warrior women may have inspired legend of Mulan” (Jennifer Ouellette, April 25, 2020)</p>
<p>“Buddhism: Time-tested tranquility” (Steven Barr, March 31, 2005)</p>
<p>“Treasure hunter strikes gold; find sheds light on medieval England’s Anglo-Saxon world” (Associated Press, September 25, 2009)</p>
<p>“Reconstruction puts a face to Viking warrior woman who died in battle 1,000 years ago” (Emily Webber, November 2, 2019)</p>
<p>“Robin Hood’s Sherwood Forest in need of a rescue; part of Britain’s national identity, home to old oaks” (Kate Schuman, Associated Press, November 5, 2007)</p>
<p>“El Nino may have helped Magellan” (Randolph E. Schmid, Associated Press, May 19, 2008)</p>
<p>“Scientists say Copernicus’ grave found” (Associated Press, November 2008)</p>
<p>“Rare ghostly image of Mary Queen of Scots discovered hidden beneath artwork” (David Keys, October 27, 2017)</p>
<p>“Hunt for lost Da Vinci painting to resume in Florence” (Ariel David, Associated Press, January 14, 2007)</p>
<p>“Scientists reconstruct Dante’s face” (Marta Falconi, Associated Press, 2007)</p>
<p>“Granddaughter of last jailed witch [in the UK] seeks pardon” (Sue Leeman, Associated Press, January 2007)</p>
<p>“The Thanksgiving before the 'first' Thanksgiving: An excavation provides tantalizing hints about a little-known group that celebrated Thanksgiving two years before the New England Pilgrims” (Andrew Lawler, November 19, 2018)</p>
<p>“[American] Civil War led abolitionists to summer camping” (Kristen Domonell, Republican-American, June 17, 2009)</p>
<p>“Yale plays a role in legend of Geronimo’s missing skull” (Sean Murphy, Associated Press, 2009)</p>
<p>“Capone hideout up for sale, site may have aided in bootlegging” (Associated Press, September 20, 2009)</p>

After selecting an article, the next step is to develop corresponding questions that will generate the types of discussions/learning that you want your students to have (Parker, 2012, pp.

342–347). Read the article and reflect on what you want students to know. Based on what you have identified as important, devise questions that can serve as bridges to get them to where you want them to go. Questions should typically include three levels of progressing complexity.

First-level questions should be focused on developing an understanding of the text. These are essentially “Who,” “What,” “When,” and “Where” questions. *Second-level questions* should focus on pinpointing the significance (“Why” questions) of the content and arguments made in the text, including the identification of points of view and evidence. Finally, *third-level questions* should ask students to evaluate the different points of view or evidence presented in the text and determine their own positions. Using three of the sample articles above (“Yale plays a role in legend of Geronimo’s missing skull,” “Writing: An Egyptian invention?” and “Robin Hood’s Sherwood Forest in need of a rescue; part of Britain’s national identity, home to old oaks”), **Table 4** provides some sample first-level, second-level, and third-level questions.

Table 4

Article	Sample First-Level Questions	Sample Second-Level Questions	Sample Third-Level Questions
“Yale plays a role in legend of Geronimo’s missing skull”	Where do historians say Geronimo’s skull is buried?	Who is Towana Spivey and what is her opinion on Geronimo’s skull? What evidence is there to support the theory that Geronimo’s skull was stolen? What evidence does David Miller provide to counter the theory that the skull was stolen?	Considering the evidence, do you think that Geronimo’s skull was stolen? Explain how you arrived at this conclusion.

<p>“Writing: An Egyptian invention?”</p>	<p>When did writing begin in ancient Egypt?</p> <p>When did writing begin in Mesopotamia?</p>	<p>Why does Guenter Dreyer claim that Egypt had the first form of writing?</p> <p>According to Robert Englund, how is writing further developed in Mesopotamia in comparison to Egypt?</p> <p>Does John Baines agree or disagree with Dreyer? Why?</p> <p>What are Dreyer’s responses to Baines’ arguments?</p>	<p>Where do you think “writing” first emerged, Egypt or Mesopotamia? Write a response stating your position, using at least three supporting details from the article.</p>
<p>“Robin Hood’s Sherwood Forest in need of a rescue; part of Britain’s national identity, home to old oaks”</p>	<p>Why would Robin Hood have a hard time hiding out in Sherwood today?</p> <p>Looking at the graph, what are some of the actions used to preserve ancient oaks in Sherwood?</p>	<p>Why does Austin Brady think Sherwood should be saved? Is his opinion biased? Explain.</p> <p>What is the tone of the article toward Sherwood’s preservation? Explain.</p>	<p>How does a site become part of a community’s national identity? What does this mean?</p> <p>Is there a greater public obligation to preserve sites that are part of a community’s national identity?</p>

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Teachers can also ask students to make explicit connections between the content of the news article and the history content that they are studying. Questions to help students make these connections would revolve around either how the news article expands on the information in the course materials (such as a textbook) or link what is being studied to the present. An essay or other extended, constructed response based on such connections can be used to extend learning. If the news article is being used as a hook to launch a unit, teachers should provide students with questions or activities with the news article that will foster further inquiry-based learning, such as developing a list of what they would like to know about the past as a result of the news article, or a list of critical issues or debates about the past brought out in the article that require further research and learning.

The use of such activities using news articles to teach U.S. and global history content while teaching civic literacy skills can serve as scaffolded instruction for larger activities or projects (Ciullo & Dimino, 2017). Different types of literacy-based Civics projects can be used to develop further effective learning experiences that foster students' engagement with the community and the world around them (Rosario-Ramos, Johnson, & Sawada, 2016; Abdulkarim, Ratmaningsih, & Anggraini, 2018; Ramirez & Jaffee, 2016).

4. Conclusion

The teaching approach outlined in this article was developed from practical experience gained while serving as a Social Studies teacher in an urban district in Connecticut with many ELLs. With a focus on teaching literacy and practical skills that would help my students become informed decision makers, I sought to locate a news article for every unit covered in my U.S. and global history courses. The articles were accompanied by questions designed to help students develop their reading for information skills and/or skills necessary to organize information from the article to write an essay, arguing a position and using evidence from the article. These activities could then be used as part of, or the starting/guiding point for, a unit.

At that time in Connecticut, sophomore students took reading and writing tests as part of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT), administered by the Connecticut State Board of Education, as a standardized means for monitoring student progress. One of the two tests for reading, Reading for Information, required students to read various news articles and respond to open-ended and multiple-choice questions. The two writing tests, Interdisciplinary Writing I and Interdisciplinary Writing II, required students to read two news articles on a divisive issue and take a clear stance on it, writing a persuasive letter that used evidence from the two sources. Social Studies teachers were assigned primary responsibility for the Interdisciplinary Writing tests and secondary responsibility for the Reading for Information test (Higgins, 2012; St. Onge, Scalia, & Vega, 2008). As a result, the Social Studies curriculum included an emphasis on teaching skills rather than just content. Therefore, there was a concern not with what students should know, but with what they could do. With the prevalence of the Common Core, such a focus has only become more relevant and widespread across the U.S. (Schmoker & Jago, 2013). Instead of moving toward a skills-only approach, I decided to integrate.

While there were some challenges in finding relevant articles and it took time for me to accumulate enough articles to make such activities a regular feature across my units, these activities were successful in building my students' non-fiction literacy skills crucial for becoming reflective citizens. The essays or other extended constructed responses to further connections around either how the news article expands on the information in the course materials (such as a textbook) or link what is being studied to the present showed progress as we moved through the school year. These assessments used the same rubric so that I could more clearly identify each student's strengths and weaknesses and develop individual feedback. I kept these assessments as a portfolio for students to look back on and see the progress they were making. ELL students in particular were more engaged with these activities and found them more relevant and more comprehensible to understand; this in turn boosted their academic confidence in the classroom. Moreover, most students enjoyed the various ways the articles connected the historical topics we were studying with something going on in the present day, often helping extend or reinforce this historical content. It allowed them to see examples that history is worth reporting about and not irrelevant (thereby suggesting that it was not just their teacher who had an interest in history). Consequently, this approach to the use of current news

articles was effective in developing my students' civic literacy skills—reading for information as well as interdisciplinary writing—while enriching the teaching of content in our history classes.

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