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ABSTRACT

Social studies teachers must take a role in promoting long-term literacy as part of schoolwide efforts in all subject areas to motivate students' independent reading. This may be accomplished by: (1) including literature as part of the instructional program, to support recurring themes in history (such as "in quest of freedom") or to cover certain historical periods; (2) using a wide variety of materials during class time, such as newspapers, textbooks, anthologies, paperbacks, and magazines--in essence, a mini classroom library; (3) reading aloud to students on a regular basis, using passages that provoke students into listening and responding critically to the ideas presented while reinforcing the joy of reading; and (4) avoiding conditions that dissuade students from reading, including traditional book reports and the teacher's insistence on finding the "correct meaning" of the text. Students will not become lifetime readers unless they frequently experience reading as a pleasurable activity. By providing class time for reading self-selected resources, the social studies teacher encourages the long-term habit of reading. (One figure and 16 references are attached.) (SR)

Creating the Lifetime Reading Habit in Social Studies

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When was the last time a former student said, "I am reading a historical book for pleasure"? What a fantastic feeling to know that something the social studies teacher did in class motivated the lifetime reading habit. Unfortunately, students commenting on their long-term love of historical books is a rarity. Social studies teachers and their content area colleagues must share the blame for this negative outcome because many of them still believe that using class time to encourage reading for pleasure is not their responsibility.

To the contrary, social studies teachers must share a role in promoting long-term literacy. Many language activities occur during social studies lessons, including reading textbooks, discussing ideas, making speeches, writing essays, and studying notes. These activities represent a natural literacy context for supporting pleasurable reading. Positive efforts by social studies teachers may not only encourage students to read for pleasure but also challenge other content area colleagues to use class time for attaining this important goal. The ultimate thrust is to create schoolwide efforts so that virtually all teachers are motivating students' independent reading. (Sanacore, 1988) What, then, can social studies teachers do to successfully promote the lifetime reading habit? The following suggestions are not comprehensive, but they do provide instructional direction.

1. Include literature as part of the instructional program.

Historical fiction, biography, autobiography, and diary help readers to personalize history. According to Wilson (1988, p. 313), "Students can experience history through literature more dramatically, and can often have a more in-depth transaction with the subject, when it deals with characters 'who were there.'" This process supports students' appreciation for an author's historical perspective and imaginary power.

Literary works selected for social studies classrooms should be interesting, and factual content should be blended smoothly with the narration. After selecting sources, the teacher may approach literature by covering recurring themes in history and by motivating students' reading of related titles. For example, the theme concerning "in quest of freedom" can be linked to Dickinson's The Dancing Bear (Byzantium, 6th Century), Haugaard's Hakon of Rogen's Saga (Viking times), Collier and Collier's Jump Ship to Freedom (U. S., 1780s), and Holm's North to Freedom (Europe, 1940s). These and other themes and related literary titles are provided by Huck, Hepler, and Hickman (1987), and the books themselves are especially useful to young readers because they provide insight for problems of the past as well as today. In addition to themes or topics, the teacher may decide to cover certain historical periods

or events and to include appropriate literature. If the American Revolution is the focus of study, then Forbes' Johnny Tremain, Avi's The Fighting Ground, and Clapp's I'm Deborah Sampson: A Soldier in the War of the Revolution are inspirational stories reflecting a variety of perspectives. If World War II is being covered, then Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl and Greene's The Summer of My German Soldier are excellent literary sources revealing poignant aspects of the War. Regardless of the approach taken, using literature in social studies classes increases the potential for enjoying reading and for considering it as a lifetime activity. Students also gain important values from literary activities, and teachers should therefore encourage them as a major complement to the instructional program.

2. Use a wide variety of materials during class time.

In addition to historical literary works, potential lifetime readers need exposure to a variety of resources. Textbooks, anthologies, paperbacks, magazines, and newspapers provide sufficient diversity for accommodating students' interests.

Interestingly, although newspapers are not used often, they have their greatest impact in social studies classrooms because of their current events value. They are inexpensive owing to reduced cost for

students, and they provide readers with a direct sense of ownership. Kossack (1986, p. 769) believes that they support lifelong learning:

> The newspaper is one way to assure application of the tools we teach (decoding, comprehension, study skills) in a resource that helps students in many ways: economically (through used merchandise sales, locating a job), socially (upcoming civic, social, cultural events), and intellectually (current inventions, concerns, politics, books, trends). Best of all, the daily newspaper is a way to ensure lifelong reading, learning, and self renewal.

Newspapers and other materials can support the curricular standards of social studies and simultaneously promote the lifetime reading habit. These resources serve as a mini-classroom library that nurtures instructional lessons and units. For example, if the focus of study is the American Civil War, materials concerning the following areas should be available: slavery, abolitionism, Jefferson Davis, Abraham Lincoln, General Robert E. Lee, General Ulysses S. Grant, the Confederacy, the Union, the Battle of Bull Run, and Fort Sumter. If the supportive resources reflect a variety of reading levels and consist of different formats and lengths, students are more likely

to read them with pleasure. (Sanacore, 1989) Even current events materials can be effective, provided they reveal updated information or present new perspectives concerning the American Civil War.

When the mini-classroom library has been established, the teacher has options of how to cover the instructional unit. An ambitious approach would involve all the students in sustained silent reading every day until the unit is completed. During this activity, the teacher models the appropriate behavior by reading silently at his or her desk. (No clerical tasks are performed during silent reading.) Occasionally, the teacher varies the routine by discussing interesting books, holding individual or small-group conferences, and encouraging students to share insights gained from their books. Sharing insights takes on special meaning because social interaction is as necessary in the classroom as it is in the cafeteria and at home. Carlsen and Sherrill (1988) provide autobiographies or self-reports of individuals who are lifetime readers, and many of them consider reading both a social and a solitary phenomenon.

If time does not permit such an ambitious approach, the teacher may consider a plan that engages students in silent reading for about the last 15 minutes of each class period. Thus, traditional instruction is provided for the bulk of the lesson,

while silent reading is used in a supportive fashion. Again, teacher modeling is essential during silent reading. For both approaches to work effectively, students must have opportunities to select their own materials. This process builds a sense of self-esteem and independence which are necessary for creating the lifetime reading habit. In addition, the teacher does not have to be anxious about students' ability to select appropriate resources since those who gain experience reading for pleasure tend to choose suitable materials. (Nell, 1988)

3. Read aloud to students on a regular basis.

Reading to students frequently is an excellent strategy for motivating them to read. Materials selected for reading aloud should be linked to students' interests and experiences as well as to the social studies curriculum. These resources may be short, appealing magazine articles to be read in their entirety or longer selections of which only segments will be read aloud. Such activities expand students' awareness of the wide diversity of available materials and also tease or motivate individuals to read similar resources on their own.

According to Matthews (1987), reading aloud should reflect the same intimate atmosphere of a parent or teacher cuddling a child during the reading of a favorite story. The teacher does not have to place the

older child on his or her lap, but intimate aspects of lap reading can be recreated. In this warm, trusting context, the teacher selects and reads powerful passages that provoke students into listening and responding to the ideas presented. In social studies, potentially controversial passages are appropriate. Then, the teacher guides students' responses toward critical thinking by asking questions, such as "Why did you not like the treatment?" or "What would have strengthened the author's case?" (Matthews, 1987, p. 411) This type of questioning improves the listeners' attending ability while it builds their interest in the reading material.

The following books do not represent a sacrosanct list, but they do contain passages that can be read aloud effectively during social studies lessons:

Amos Fortune, Free Man by Elizabeth Yates

Beloved by Toni Morrison

Beyond the Divide by Kathryn Lasky

Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady of the New World by Doris Faber

The Faraway Lurs by Harry Behn

The Good Earth by Pearl S. Buck

John Treegate's Musket by Leonard Wibberly

The Light in the Forest by Conrad Richter

Love and Rivalry: Three Exceptional Pairs of Sisters

by Doris Faber

The Memory String by Chester Osborne

Mumbet, The Story of Elizabeth Freeman by Harold Felton

Old Yeller by Fred Gipson

On the Frontier with Mr. Audubon by Barbara Brenner

Sounder by William Armstrong

The Upstairs Room by Johanna Reiss

The social studies teacher may consider these and other materials for reading aloud to students. Choices will probably reflect a number of factors, including the students' abilities and interests, teacher's flexibility, curricular demands, and time constraints. The important thing to remember is that reading aloud is a vital activity for reinforcing the joy of reading and that it is especially needed today since many students are not reading on their own.

4. Avoid conditions that dissuade students from reading. With the best of intentions, teachers sometimes discourage students' reading by requiring book reports. In discussing their findings concerning lifetime readers, Carlsen and Sherrill (1988, p. 154) state: "Book reports were almost universally disliked by the respondents. Book reports did more to kill the young people's interest in reading than to promote it."

To avoid the drudgery of traditional book reports, Criscuolo (1977) suggests creative alternatives. These include:

A. Computerized Dating-- Students attempt to have a date with a book. Volunteers complete a dating application which includes their name, age, hobbies, favorite television program, last book they read, and types of books they enjoyed. This information reveals personal characteristics of individuals, and it helps others be aware of potential books to recommend to these individuals. The applications are posted so that classmates have opportunities to read them and to match the "right" book with the "right" friend.

B. Book a Trip-- The teacher motivates students to read materials concerning travel by asking: "If you had a chance to take a trip, where would you go?" When travel materials are read, volunteers make oral presentations using photographs, pictures from magazines, postcards, and slides. Those making presentations can secure appropriate resources (probably free of charge) from travel agencies.

Criscuolo believes that activities such as these will lead to "enthusiastic results because they double the student's joy and satisfaction in a most pleasurable experience--reading." (p. 895)

In addition to book reports, another condition that can discourage students' reading is the teacher's insistence on finding the "correct meaning" of the text. (Carlsen and Sherrill, 1988) This rigid approach tends to frustrate students because the interpretation of certain books becomes unreachable or incomprehensible. The challenge to teachers is to support students' attempts in constructing meaning based on their prior knowledge which involves cognitive factors as well as affective aspects, such as feelings, personal awareness, and experiences. (Bartlett, 1932) Thus, the comprehension act is viewed as a process involving the interaction of reader and text rather than as an activity focusing on locating the "correct meaning" embedded in text. (Rauch, 1985) Although this reader response view of comprehension demonstrates much respect for the reader's role, it raises serious questions concerning substantive versus shallow interpretation of text. (Sanacore, 1983, 1985) One way of dealing with this problem is to use a response heuristic which helps to set appropriate standards for interpretation. (Bleich, 1978) For example, students write about their understanding of text as they blend aspects of their personality and also of the world as they understand it. Then, individuals are encouraged to engage in a critical discussion that can lead them to analyze their readings as well as the process that informs them. (Bartholomae and Petrosky, 1981)

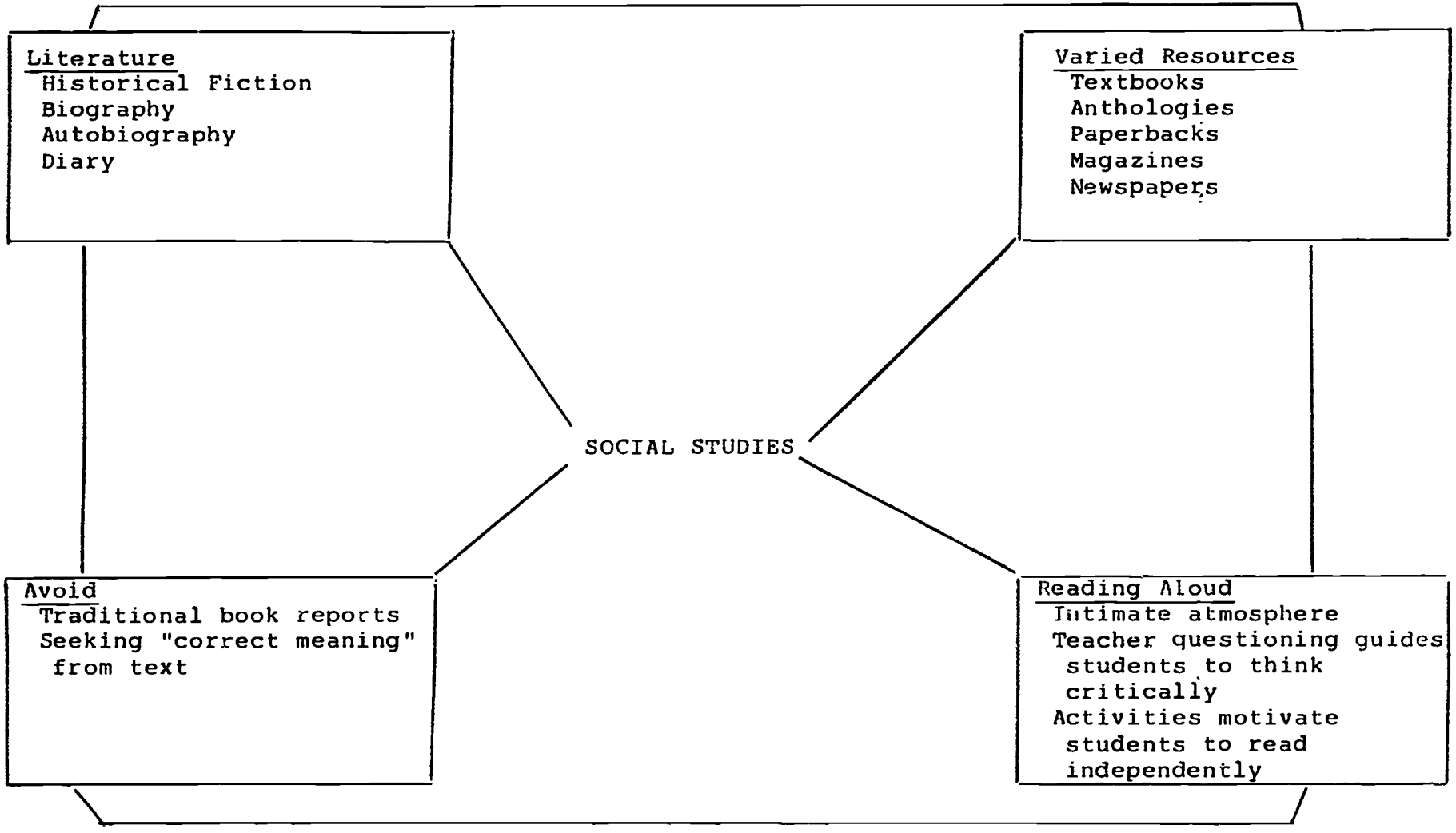
Good responses to literature include clear retellings of the passage, specific connections between personal associations and comprehension of the passage, and generalizations from the discussion. On the other hand, poor responses are sketchy, not focused, narrow, and limited in description and explanation as they relate to the individuals' prior personal knowledge. (Petrosky, 1982) Although using a response heuristic is an important strategy for maintaining standards, excessive use of this strategy (as with required book reports) could negate the joy of reading.

Summary

Students will not become lifetime readers unless they frequently experience reading as a pleasurable activity. By providing class time for reading self-selected resources, the social studies teacher increases the potential for generating the long-term habit of reading. Not only does in-class reading support the importance of reading for pleasure but also gives students opportunities to realize that social studies materials provide both valuable information and much enjoyment. The teacher's basic roles include encouraging the use of literature, using a variety of materials, reading aloud, and avoiding conditions that discourage reading. Although these roles are recommended

for social studies teachers, they can be applied to virtually every content area. The important consideration here is to send a message to all that developing the lifetime reading habit is a major activity. With no naivete intended, this message and its backup activities may lead to a former student saying, "Thanks to your support, I continue to read historical materials for pleasure!"

Considerations for Social Studies as a Context for Supporting Lifetime Literacy



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