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Including Children’s and Adolescent Literature in Social Studies Units by Curriculum Webbing

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"I didn’t know history could be so interesting," a high school junior told the teacher after completing a unit on the American Revolution. Students had been required to read a children’s book about a leader of the revolution. At first they balked at reading a book written for young children, but once they discovered how Jean Fritz described John Hancock, Paul Revere, Sam Adams, George Washington, and others, the exchange of ideas and sharing of books brought an excitement and curiosity about history that most students had not experienced since elementary school.

Too often students and teachers in junior high, middle, and high schools rely on textbooks and adult books for students to read and study. Those teachers, however, who are courageous and creative enough to expand their curriculum to include children’s and adolescent books soon get hooked on these books. The colorful illustrations, interesting anecdotes and stories, and stimulating comments bring life to history classes.

Although many excellent children’s and adolescent books are available on almost all topics in social studies, many social studies teachers have not considered using these books, and many other teachers are not aware of the treasure trove awaiting their students in school and public libraries. One way to help teachers effectively use children’s and adolescent books when teaching history is to use the concept of webbing when designing teaching units.

Webbing is a strategy used at all levels of instruction levels to help students organize and expand information about a general idea or concept. Webbing which provides a visual illustration of concepts, helps students by identifying relationships, promoting comprehension, and enhancing learning. To make a web, (1) draw a circle for the center of the web, (2) write the main idea or core concept in the circle, (3) identify supporting information related to the main idea, (4) place key words on different strands going out from the center, and finally, (5) discuss and modify the web until ideas are exhausted. Each web strand is tied to the core concept with a supporting strand that contains facts or...
information to support the main concept. Each strand represents supporting
details or relationships among strands.

Though webbing is used for teaching many concepts and ideas, webbing
can also be used for planning units for teaching history. Choose a topic like the
American Revolution or World War II. Identify six major aspects of the unit
topic. Many concepts and facts can be identified for inclusion in the teaching
unit. When using webbing to create and expand teaching units, you move from
concepts and facts to including teaching materials on children’s and adolescent
books. Once some major categories are established, rather than expanding them
to identify more facts, instead identify children’s and adolescent books that
students could read to expand their knowledge of the topic. For example,
American Revolution unit subtopics could include causes and events leading to
independence, declaring independence, leaders of the revolution, loyalists and
patriots, women in the revolution, and the battles in the war for independence.
The next step in a regular curriculum webbing activity would be to identify
specific battles, leaders, and so forth. But at this point, instead of identifying
specific facts, identify books that relate to the different subtopics. A similar
approach could be done with more recent topics such as World War II. This
twist in curriculum webbing helps teachers identify books that students could
read to acquire new insights and gain more knowledge about the unit of study.
It is an excellent way to expand all teaching units in history courses, to
introduce more diversity, and to add excitement. History can always be
interesting.

Bibliographies on World War II and the American Revolution follow this
article and demonstrate the diversity of books for young people that could enrich
teaching and learning in the social studies classroom.
World War II Bibliography


4 Brigham Young University


American Revolution Bibliography


6 Brigham Young University


