

Pennsylvania Council for the Social Studies

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PENNSYLVANIA
COUNCIL

FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES

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Mission Statement

The Pennsylvania Council for the Social Studies promotes quality Social Studies Education from kindergarten to higher learning by:

Advocating the Social Studies at all levels of education in Pennsylvania.

Promoting the analysis, dissemination and valuation of Social Studies materials.

Examining and recommending certification requirements for teachers.

Assisting educators in organizing local Social Studies councils for professional development.

Cooperating with schools, districts, intermediate units and other interested parties on Social Studies projects.

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A Message of Peace for Today and Tomorrow

By Michael Healey

Adviser, UNAI ASPIRE

East Stroudsburg South High School

As the adviser of the United Nations Academic Impact ASPIRE Chapter of East Stroudsburg South High School, it is a great honor to share the opportunity of attending United Nations Conferences and discussions with my students who will become our future local and global leaders.

Through our partnership with UNAI, we have received master class lessons from Dr. Jane Goodall, Stevie Wonder, and Leonardo DiCaprio, among many others. Through their words and through their actions, these Messengers of Peace shared stories of hope, strength, and social justice. ASPIRE South students Mya Guillaume and Francesca Nyakora share their reflections on the impact of attending The International Day of Peace Conference on September 16th, 2016.

On September 16 2016, 70 miles away from our small community of East Stroudsburg, our ASPIRE group arrived at the United Nations for International Day of Peace. We traveled from the Pocono Region of Pennsylvania to Manhattan, departing at 5:30AM to serve as flag bearers for the Peace Bell ringing ceremony. Our twenty-five students that attended experienced an eye-opening event. Beginning the day as flag bearers for member states that many of us descend from, to attending speeches and presentations in the historic General Assembly, Peace Day was truly impactful beyond words.

— **Michael Healey, Adviser, UNAI ASPIRE East Stroudsburg South High School**

I, Mya Guillaume, a 15-year-old Sophomore at East Stroudsburg South High School carried the flag of Haiti, which was an enormous honor as I am Haitian-American, and have family who live there today. Throughout the day, I met and spoke with people from places outside of the United States. Through these discussions, I

realized that no matter what I challenges I face, I have the privilege of a free education and democracy that many continue to advocate and fight for every day of their lives.

It takes many people to make change in the world, and I've learned that there is no harm in trying to help. Seeing people who have been inspirational to me since I was a little girl such as Stevie Wonder and Leonardo DiCaprio was something that I will never forget. I hope that everyone who attended this event realizes the privilege we shared in as a whole, to be come together and realize that we can be a change in the world, and that the change begins with us.

--Mya Guillaume, 15 year old, Haitian-



American

Being able to attend such a distinguished event and to be around people of such high global esteem, I could not help but be astonished throughout the day. Listening to the speeches reinforced the belief in me that as humans, it is our job to make the world a better place. As individuals, we have to call upon ourselves and one another to put words into action; because only through action can we affect change and only through change can we make a better world.

We do not have to be revolutionaries or even make an impact on a grand, global scale. You do not have to travel far to see poverty, injustice, and inequality...doing things to help improve our own community contributes globally.

After the conference I took back many things that I look forward to enacting in our high school and community...new knowledge, new memories and a new mindset. Through listening to all of the speakers I learned one very important lesson: no matter how impossible and negative things may seem, you can make a positive impact in this world. United Nations Messenger of Peace Stevie Wonder did not see his visual impairment as a burden but rather showed us that he embraces his other gifts. This man has won over 20 Grammy Awards for his musical talents and has become a champion spokesperson for people with disabilities. Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Leymah Gbowee of Liberia, witnessed

her country's civil war and lived in poverty as a refugee, but went on to be a peace activist that helped bring an end to the second civil war in her country.

Each speaker had a different story to tell, but they all had the common theme of being in an extremely difficult place. They persevered, fought against incredible odds, and never lost the hope that they could make a difference. Whether these Peace Messengers may live with what others view as a disability, witnessed civil war in their home-

land, or lived in an occupied country, their determination and resolve were unbreakable.

Their stories served as a tremendous source of inspiration for not only me, but to all of the youth who were fortunate enough to attend the International Day of Peace Conference. We are the future of the world and it is important that we do our part to improve it for the generations to come just as the excellent people of past generations have done for us.

--Francesca Nyakora, 15 year old, Kenyan-American

Messages of Peace

from United Nations Academic Impact ASPIRE Chapter of East Stroudsburg South High School

Students Mya Guillaume and Francesca Nyakora, members of the ASPIRE chapter at East Stroudsburg High School in Pennsylvania, USA share their reflections on the impact of attending The International Day of Peace Conference on 16 September 2016.

Watch the related TV news story here: https://youtu.be/JkfhZrgaF_0

“

On 16 September 2016, 70 miles away from our small community in East Stroudsburg, our ASPIRE group arrived at the United Nations for the International Day of Peace where we served as flag bearers for the Peace Bell ceremony.

As a Haitian American I had the honor of carrying the flag of Haiti. Throughout the day, I had the opportunity to interact with people from all over the world and listen to global icons like Stevie Wonder and Leonardo DiCaprio. I learnt that I am one of the lucky few with access to free education and democracy. My personal message to the world is that it takes many hands to enact change, and that change begins with us.

”

— Mya Guillaume

“

Throughout the conference, I realized that as human beings, it is our job to make the world a better place. This change can only be achieved by putting words into action within our communities before going global. After listening to speakers like Stevie Wonder and Leymah Gbowee, who had each experienced tremendous suffering in their lives, I understood that despite how impossible and negative things may seem, you can still make a positive impact in the world. I would like people to know that we are the future of the world and it is important that we do our part to improve it for the generations to come, just as the previous generations have done for us.

”

— Francesca Nyakora.

East Stroudsburg South students participate in UN bell ringing ceremony

By Stacy M. Brown, For the Pocono Record

The second time was the charm for Claire Collins.

The East Stroudsburg South High School junior visited the United Nations in New York as part of a group, led by social studies teacher and UN ASPIRE South adviser Michael Healey, and was chosen to bear member state flags at the Peace Bell Ringing Ceremony in the Peace Bell Garden on Sept. 16.

Collins, who was a member of last year's group led by Healey, said she was delighted when Healey asked her to go again.

"I was beyond excited and honored. Even though it was not my first time going to the United Nations, I was still blown away by the profoundness of the event ... it reinforces the thought of how vast the world is in relation to East Stroudsburg," she said.

Miriam Boucekouk, another junior visiting for the second time, was equally impressed. "Opportunities like this do not happen to everyone, therefore I was very lucky to have been invited to attend," she said.

"This year's event proved to be even more special than last year and I had a lot of fun," she said.

Twenty-five ASPIRE students were chosen to bear UN member flags at the bell ringing and attend a conference in the historic General Assembly, where guests included Dr. Jane Goodall, actors Leonardo DiCaprio and Michael Douglas, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, three Nobel Laureates, and the president of the 71st Session of the General Assembly Peter Thomson.

"Our students raised their flags at the symbolic ringing of the bell then we moved to the General Assembly where every seat

was filled by youth from around the world," said Healey, who, along with his wife Michele Vella, won a United Nations CTAUN Best Practices Award in 2014 for their project, "Bridging the Gap," an HIV/AIDS Awareness Initiative.

"The day was filled with speakers who encouraged youth to challenge convention, raise their voices, and most importantly replace stigma, fear, and ignorance with peace, dialogue, and understanding," Healey said.

East Stroudsburg South sophomore Francesca Nyakora, a 15-year-old Kenyan American, was given the floor to present the work ASPIRE students have done at South to bring positive change locally and globally in coordination with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

"For me, the experience to attend the conference and have the opportunity to speak was something I will never forget," Nyakora said.

"Being able to present our ASPIRE group's project of peace in the General Assembly showed me that no matter how intimidating a task may seem, as long as I believe in myself and try my best, I can succeed," she said.

Nyakora also said relished the opportunity to see and even meet some of the special guests and celebrities on hand.

"The idea of being there and representing our small town made me realize really how much impact one person or a group can make," said South junior Suzannah Costa.

"With the past weekend being the 15th anniversary of 9/11, there was added significance to the trip. It is a sad reminder of what the world had to go through at the

time and it also is a bittersweet moment to realize we have come farther from what happened," Costa said.

Fellow South junior Jerrel Laureano echoed Costa's comments and added that he thought the visit gave students the opportunity to branch out to other resources and to discover different facilities and organizations like the UN that can help make a change.

"Not only affecting our community but other districts and how we can join together to form a better environment for the present along with the future of tomorrow," Laureano said.

An invitation to the United Nations is an honor, but to be invited on International Day of Peace to present the project from ASPIRE East Stroudsburg South was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity for all, Healey said.

Attendance to conferences at the United Nations also presents an opportunity to listen and learn from those who have changed the world, often times, at the risk of their own lives or through the most extraordinary circumstances, he said.

Peace Day 2016 was the largest event Healey's ASPIRE group has taken part in and he looks forward to seeing the results of the visit in the coming days, months and years.

"It is my hope that our project, 'A Year of the Sustainable Development Goals,' and the impact of the International Day of Peace stay with our students and informs their work over the course of their educations, careers and lives," Healey said.

We Flipped Professional Development and Our Teachers Loved It

By Aaron Sams and Justin Aglio

A district built a learning network for teachers and saw PD participation increase 600 percent

Learning cultures have no doubt shifted for students in most K-12 public schools. With new one-to-one initiatives, blended learning, online courses, project-based learning, one could argue that students are now more prepared than ever before for the 21st century. But what about teachers?

How are teachers learning to operate as professionals in the 21st century? Most teachers rely on traditional professional development methods like guidebooks on curriculum implementation or face-to-face, lecture-style settings, the gist of which is “Tell me something and maybe I will do it.” Other teachers, though, strive for more dynamic personalized learning opportunities (like the ones our students receive). So, how is it that we are preparing our students for the 21st century with a sense of urgency, but when it comes to quality learning for teachers, many school districts do not practice what they preach?

There are many theories of why we use words like collaboration, creativity, and communication with students, but we judge and evaluate our teachers with words like individual assessments, standards, and individual accountability. Maybe it is the fault of a “system” that places high expectations for teachers to teach 21st-century skills, but only be evaluated on 20th-century learning outcomes.

The reality is that when teachers move away from the front of the classroom and hand some of the control of the learning process over to students, students become more active learners. The process of learning moves to the forefront, and the

act of obtaining points or scores takes on a lesser role. The more teachers interact with students individually, the more informal, formative assessment can take place. Also, struggles that can lead to students simply giving up on their homework can be diagnosed and corrected by the teacher, allowing the student to progress in his work and ensuring understanding of the material.

In a flipped class, the first benefit comes in the recovery of class time. We recognize this to be true for our students, so how can we apply this same principle to professional development?

During the 2015–2016 school year, the Montour School District in Pennsylvania flipped professional development to create a robust and innovative digital network called the Montour Learning Network (MLN) for EdTech and Innovation. The MLN’s vision is modeled after Pittsburgh’s Remake Learning initiative, a professional network of educators and innovators working together to shape the future of teaching and learning in the Greater Pittsburgh Region. MLN will serve as a resource to shape the future of teaching and learning based upon Montour’s newly written Core Values. All staff members can access the network individually to read articles about learning innovation, browse upcoming ed tech events and opportunities, and connect with other network members within the Montour School District. (Check out this video to learn more about how MLN works.)

Since the creation of the MLN, digital professional development participation has increased 600 percent. Through weekly updates within the entire district, the MLN engages teachers through a wide

variety of support networks, including Google for Educators, EdTech Resources, Social Media, Digital Citizenship, Tech Support, Innovation Zone, and more.

Montour School District recognizes that the number one resource we have is each other. Montour is filled with talented staff members doing extraordinary things for children every day. District leaders honor and respect the staff’s time by providing asynchronous professional development. Through the MLN, Montour has established a Digital Badge reward system that enables teachers to share and learn from each other. The goal of awarding these Digital Badges is to create a community of professionals to promote a growth mindset and support a learning culture while working together. To date, Montour teachers have earned numerous internal badges in a wide range of competencies including Digital Citizenship, EdPuzzle, ClassFlow, GAFE, Flipped Learning, and many more.

With MLN, the district has created the same sort of learning environment for its teachers that it delivers to its students. Flipping our professional development gives our valued educators the freedom to learn on their own time and review material as often as they need. Having so much information at their fingertips also makes their interactions with school and district leaders more productive.

Now that their PD has moved into the 21st century, all of our teachers are better prepared to pass along those 21st-century skills to their students.

Earlier and More Often: Washington Teachers Seek Broad Boost to Civics Education

By Claudia Rowe, Seattle Times staff reporter
Originally published November 28, 2016

Fake news sites are only the latest trend prompting teachers to join a statewide effort aimed at educating students about how to engage with government.

The next generation of voters show “a dismaying inability” to tell the difference between online advertisements and legitimate news stories, according to a study of nearly 8,000 middle, high school and college students released last week by Stanford University.

“Overall, young people’s ability to reason about the information on the internet can be summed up in one word: bleak,” the researchers said. “In every case and at every level, we were taken aback by students’ lack of preparation.”

The findings were no surprise to social studies teachers in Washington, who will ask the 2017 legislature pass an initiative dramatically boosting civics education statewide.

“Overall, young people’s ability to reason about the information on the internet can be summed up in one word: bleak.”

Between high-stakes testing and a growing emphasis on the so-called STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering and math — education about the workings of government has been reduced to an afterthought, said Margaret Fisher, a law professor at Seattle University who is leading the effort.

Moreover, the civics education that does exist varies widely in quality from school to school.

Carinna Tarvin, a National Board Certified social studies teacher said even she would benefit from deeper training and a more coherent approach.

“Social studies in this state is all over the place. Districts all do

different things. Last year, I had to teach civics, and we didn’t even have textbooks,” Tarvin said. “I was just kind of winging it.”

The district-to-district discrepancies are particularly concerning to Fisher.

“Middle- and upper middle-class kids tend to get quality programs,” she said. “Our special priority is youth of color, rural and immigrant and refugee groups. There are some high quality programs in Washington, but the percentage of students that get access to them is very small.”

“I’d like to see kids evaluating politicians and what they’re doing, and applying knowledge — not just memorizing facts from 240 years ago.”

Fisher and her team plan to ask the legislature for \$250,000, some of which would be used to give teachers better training in civics education and expand it to middle- and elementary schools.

“Knowing the three branches of government and how many stripes are on the flag doesn’t teach you how to be a citizen, how to participate and be a critical consumer of the news,” said Anthony Jonas, a social studies teacher in Bellevue who co-chairs the Washington State Council for the Social Studies.

He would like to see the basic foundation — for instance, how to talk through differing viewpoints — set in elementary or middle school. Then media literacy and assessing the quality of information.

“I’d like to see kids evaluating politicians and what they’re doing, and applying knowledge — not just memorizing facts from 240 years ago,” Jonas said. “This feeling has been bubbling for a while, but the election really pushed people to see that education can’t just be all about STEM.”

Teachers Rework Lesson Plans After Donald Trump's Election

By Tawnell D. Hobbs, Wall Street Journal

As some students protest the election of Donald Trump and others rejoice, teachers are wrestling with how best to educate them on a significant event that has split the country.

Textbooks have yet to catch up to one of the most contentious presidential elections in modern history. Lesson plans are being created on the fly, from the coal country in West Virginia to the Bay Area of California.

John Quesenberry, who teaches advanced history and government in Beckley, W.Va., has been leading his students in discussions of President Andrew Jackson's appeal to the common man in seeking to explain the phenomenon that propelled Mr. Trump toward the White House.

He also brings in the history of executive orders and how campaign rhetoric in other countries is sometimes more sharp than actual governing. And in light of recent protests, the class discusses the First Amendment and "freedom of assembly."

"It's been real good to work in historical analogies," Mr. Quesenberry said. "I try not to take a view, but give them the different things and let them draw conclusions."

Some teachers are taking a more radical approach.

In San Francisco, Mission High School peer resources teacher Fakrah Shah's lesson calls Mr. Trump "racist and sexist" and urges students to fight oppression. Ms. Shah has used the plan in her class and a copy of it was posted on a union web site for other teachers to draw from.

Howard Epstein, vice chairman of communications for the San Francisco Republican Party, called the lesson plan "ridiculous," even for a liberal city like San Francisco. He said that teachers who use it "should be fired immediately."

The San Francisco Unified School District has been neutral on the matter, saying the lesson plan is optional. A spokesman for the 6,200-member union said the lesson plan has been positively re-

ceived by many teachers and some parents.

Few national organizations have developed lesson plans on the topic.

"It is a tough issue at the moment," said Lawrence Paska, executive director of the National Council for the Social Studies. "You're going to see a lot of organizations coming forward with resources."

That leaves many teachers on their own.

In Arkansas, teacher Chuck West admits to having strong views about the election, but he says he keeps his lessons neutral at Little Rock Central High School.

Students in Mr. West's advanced American History classes have discussed the "alt-right," which he defines as people that "are further to the right than your typical Republican." Discussion in his demographically diverse classes also has focused on a president's powers and the impeachment process.

"I don't encourage them to think in terms of impeachment, but they have questions," Mr. West said. "They might not care about the war of 1812, but they care a lot about the election of 2016."

At Easley High School in South Carolina, U.S. history teacher Tracy Todd takes a different route. "We do not teach about any particular candidate," she said, adding that she follows her state's academic standards, which are more general.

In Mountain View, Calif., an election lesson didn't end well. A teacher was put on leave after allegedly drawing similarities between Mr. Trump and Adolf Hitler. The leave lasted part of a day and ended after about 35,000 people signed an online petition demanding his return. School officials said the leave wasn't over the lesson but a parent and student complaint.

Some teachers say the election has provided many "teachable moments."

Tim Sokolowski's government classes in southeast Indianapolis have analyzed election results and studied the congressional hearing process as Mr. Trump assembles his team. They discuss whether pre-election polling should continue, in light of miscalculations in the recent election. And they talk about the Constitution, and whether it would allow banning Muslims from entering the U.S.

"Where's that line of liberty versus security?" Mr. Sokolowski said he asked the students. "Give me an argument of why I can or can't do that."

Mr. Sokolowski said the students have handled the election maturely. He said that he can recall only one incident that he perceived as negative in class, when a student said, "Build that wall."

Dallas high-school teacher Diane Birdwell senses the nervousness of students in her majority-Hispanic classes on oral history. They fear Mr. Trump's agenda when it comes to immigration.

Ms. Birdwell, 56 years old, said that she has turned focus to the civil rights movement to help address the fears. She tells them that she recalls it being a lot worse in the 1960s, and that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., would be disappointed with some of the current protests because they are unorganized. She talks about how far the country has come, noting that the current president is a black man, a race that once couldn't vote.

Students also have to be able to say what they do or don't like about Mr. Trump's proposals in Ms. Birdwell's class.

"I tell them, 'Explain it to me, the white middle-age woman,'" she said. "I challenge them."

*Write to Tawnell D. Hobbs at
Tawnell.Hobbs@wsj.com*

“Free Speech or Hate Crime: What is the role of the social studies teacher in examining these kind of behaviors with their students?”

By Riley Yates and Andrew Wagaman Of The Morning Call

The racism contained in a video shot by a 14-year-old Saucon Valley student was nothing short of “repulsive,” Northampton County District Attorney John Morganelli said.

Shared on social media, the recording showed a 16-year-old black high school classmate eating chicken. The narration contained the N-word and references to welfare and other racist stereotypes, Morganelli said.

“ ‘Look at that N-word eating chicken,’ ”

meaningless,” Morganelli said.

The criminal probe comes as school districts in the Lehigh Valley, in Pennsylvania and across the nation grapple with racial incidents that some have tied to the ugly tone of the presidential campaign. After Donald Trump was elected, he walked back some of his harshest comments, striking a gentler tone during his victory speech and telling people to stop harassing minorities during a “60 Minutes” interview.

wrong message to kids: that words don’t matter.”

Lower Saucon Township police filed the charges against Asteak’s client after consultations with an assistant district attorney from Morganelli’s office, said township Chief Guy Lesser, who welcomes Morganelli’s decision to re-examine the case.

“The conduct, the speech by the 14-year-old in the video, it was very disgusting,” Lesser said. “I’ll add that there should be

The ethnic intimidation statute seeks to punish people who commit crimes against others because of animus toward their race, religion or national origin.

Morganelli, who viewed the video Wednesday, recalled in describing it. “I was outraged by it. It was repulsive. It was very insulting.”

That outrage has Morganelli investigating whether to charge the white student who produced it with ethnic intimidation, saying the video may have stepped over the line of free speech and into harassment that is prohibited by law.

Morganelli said he asked a county detective to determine whether a crime was committed. If so, Morganelli said, that student will face charges in juvenile court.

The ethnic intimidation statute seeks to punish people who commit crimes against others because of animus toward their race, religion or national origin. Under the law, an offender has to commit a separate offense — in this case, harassment — and to have done so for bigoted reasons.

“If we overlook this, then this statute is

Morganelli said the video was brought to his attention by an attorney for the black Saucon Valley student, who faces pending criminal charges that allege he assaulted the student who produced the video.

The black student is accused in juvenile court of simple assault, harassment and disorderly conduct for an Oct. 14 confrontation at Saucon Valley High School. Morganelli said the teenager was provoked by the video, which the boy had seen after it was disseminated to “numerous students.”

The teen’s lawyer, Gary Asteak, said Wednesday that the video was made at a pep rally and was sent through Snapchat to a group of the producer’s friends. Asteak said that in charging his client and not the other boy, authorities acted insensitively to the racial aspects of what happened.

“They can’t turn a blind eye to racist speech anywhere, much less our schools,” Asteak said. “To condone it is sending the

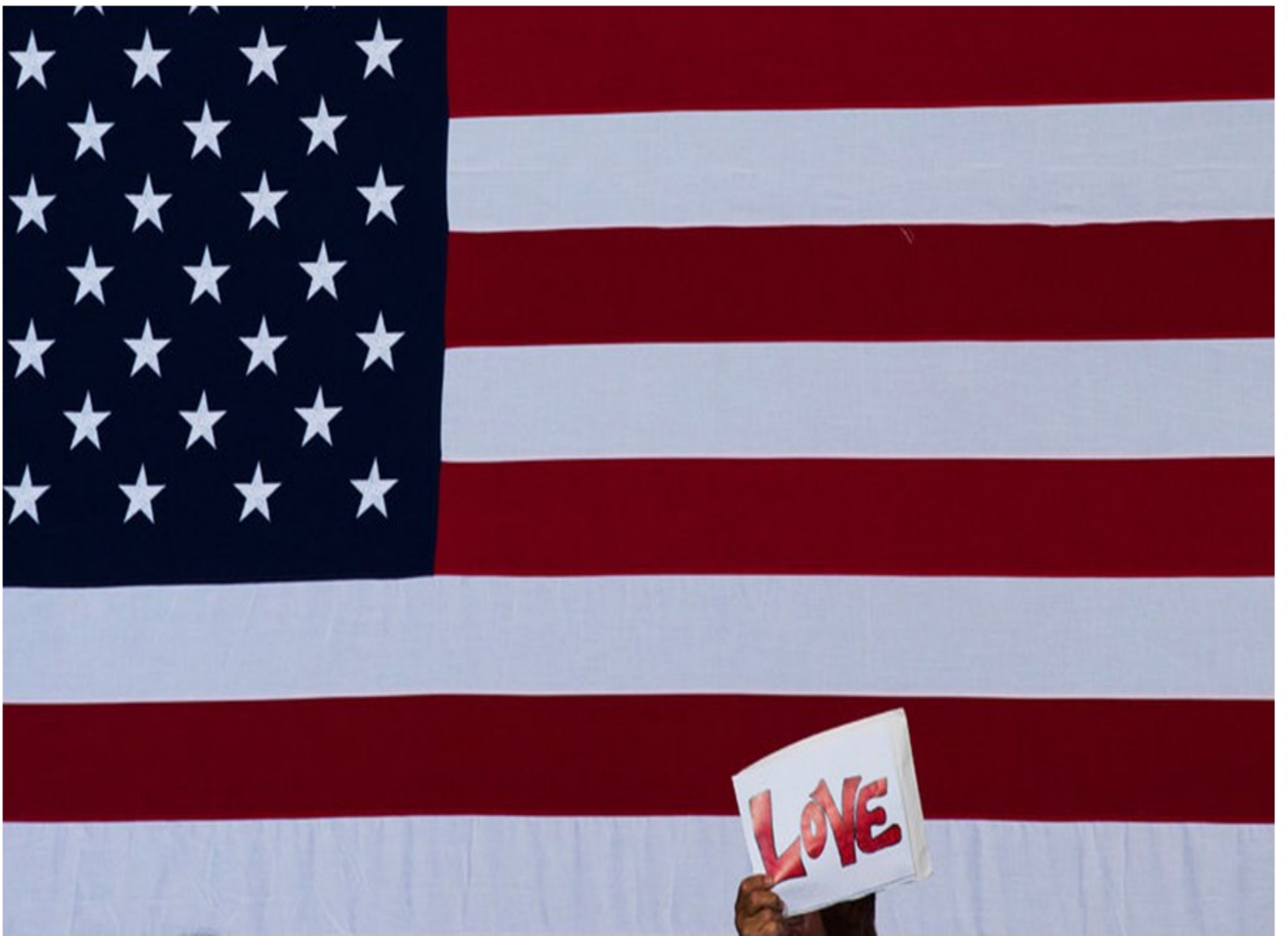
no tolerance for that conduct and that conduct should be criminal.”

Lesser further said: “If you viewed the video, you would not be surprised that the person who made the video, who made the racist remarks, was assaulted by the person he attacked.”

Monica McHale-Small, superintendent of the Saucon Valley School District, said Wednesday that Morganelli’s investigation took her by surprise.

McHale-Small said school administrators investigated and “handled it very appropriately, meeting with both students and their families.”

McHale-Small said the district “does not condone in any way” the “incredibly vile” behavior of the student who recorded the video. But she wouldn’t comment further on the incident, which she said was considered a disciplinary matter.



***Talking Across Divides:
10 Ways to Encourage Civil
Classroom Conversation
On Difficult Issues***

**By Katherine Schulten
September 29, 2016
New York Times**

(Photo: Ruth Fremson / The New York Times)

“Fistfights at campaign rallies. A congressional sit-in. Angry political trolling on the internet. It’s not your imagination: America’s partisan divide is deeper today than at any point in nearly a quarter-century, according to a new study.”

So begins [an article from June 2016](#), which described a problem that has only deepened as the weeks of this unprecedented, vitriolic presidential campaign have gone on.

Months ago, the Southern Poverty Law Center [documented](#) the worrying effects of all this angry rhetoric on students and classrooms, and, since then, we’ve heard those concerns echoed by [teachers we asked](#) ourselves. But even after this election is over, a divided nation will remain — and teachers will always be in a uniquely powerful position to help young people learn how to talk to each other across those divides.

Below, we share some ideas we’ve collected from our readers, The Times and around the web. Use them anytime you and your students are tackling controversial issues, whether in a traditional classroom or online. We welcome your additions to the list.

1.

Create classroom rules and structures that support respectful and generative discussion, online and off.

How do you handle conversations in your classroom in general? What structures and rules are in place to ensure that they are constructive and civil, yet promote real learning and growth? How do you invite all voices? What happens when someone states an unpopular opinion?

Consider talking about these issues with your students after first asking them to write anonymously about how teachers and schools in general might improve in this area. What problems do they see? What memorable experiences, good and bad, have informed their attitudes toward class discussions? What suggestions for rules, structures or guidelines might they have? How should schools [balance the need for open intellectual discussion about issues with the need to protect those who may feel marginalized for some reason](#)?

Then, have a classroom discussion about classroom discussions.

Over the years, we have published many ideas for [talking about sensitive issues](#), and suggested structures including journal-writing, the “[one-question interview](#),” [fishbowls](#) and

[four-corner exercises](#). You might use any of those methods, or consult this “[big list of class discussion strategies](#)” from Cult of Pedagogy. Or, use a protocol called [Circle of Viewpoints](#) that focuses on helping students consider diverse perspectives on a topic.

Finally, extend your inquiry from physical classroom conversation to online discussion by borrowing a recent [Reader Idea](#) from a teacher named Kate Harris.

She explains how, when teaching a high school World Religions elective, she used the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris as a “teachable moment” to help her students observe and critique online conversations. Ms. Harris writes:

“Teachers have to address the political and social issues that divide our nation and dominate our social media feeds. More important, we need to equip students to address those issues on their own, to engage with and respond to conversations and news that may be troubling or challenging, from domestic gun control and police brutality to the 2016 U.S. presidential election and worldwide terrorism. So much of our students’ worlds is online. How can we get them to think critically not only about big media, delivered by giants such as Fox News and The New York Times, but also about “little media,” or the comments and tweets that they write, read and repost?”

2.

Take the ‘Speak Up for Civility’ pledge from Teaching Tolerance.

Though it is a [pledge intended for teachers and other adults](#), you might share it with your students as well:

“I pledge to discuss this election with civility, to treat people whose opinions differ from mine with respect, and to focus on ideas, policies and values. I will encourage others to do the same. I will speak up when I hear name-calling, stereotypes and slurs. I will do this because children are listening, and it’s important that adults model good citizenship.”

The organization’s [ideas for teaching Election 2016](#) can also be useful, and those under the heading of “getting along” can be applied far beyond this election season.

3.

Read and discuss articles that explore the problem of a divided America.

Your students might [annotate](#) as they read, then use one of the discussion models listed above to talk about their reactions. Here are just a few places in The Times to start:

- [The Divided States of America](#)
- [Why Calls for a ‘National Conversation’ Are Futile](#)
- [Polarization Is Dividing American Society, Not Just Politics](#)
- [Bipartisanship Isn’t for Wimps, After All](#)
- [Why Facts Don’t Unify Us](#)
- [The Age of Post-Truth Politics](#) and a [response from a teenager](#) — a Student Summer Reading Contest Winner, Michelle Kim — who wrote:

“After reading this op-ed piece, I am more aware of my own attitude and more wary of this polarization — the “us” versus “them” mentality that often reduces comments sections into battlegrounds, when passionate ideals are not tempered by a willingness to explore possibilities in order to approach fact.”

To what extent do your students experience these divides? What can their generation do to close them?

4.

Consider commenting standards — and test what you learn via the Times Comment-Moderation Quiz.

In “[What Your Online Comments Say About You](#),” Anna North writes about some questions researchers recently asked:

“When we comment on news stories, most of us hope to say something about the topic at hand — even (or maybe especially) if it’s that the author got it all wrong. But what do the comments we leave say about us — about our beliefs, our biases and how we act when the ordinary rules don’t apply? And how do our comments affect the beliefs of others?”

Read that article, and, for more context, perhaps the Room for Debate forum “[Have Comment Sections on News Media Websites Failed?](#)” Why do we seem to be able to say things online that we wouldn’t say in person? Where do students see especially glaring examples of that?

The Times, including The Learning Network, has commenting standards put in place to maintain civility. You might share them with students, along with a related Times post, “[The Top 10 Reasons We Deleted Your Comment](#).” What do they think of these rules? Could they be useful elsewhere on the internet? Why or why not?

Then, test how well they have absorbed those standards by taking a [Times quiz created by our comment-moderation team](#). If you were a moderator, which responses would you approve and which would you reject? Why?

You might start with a recent Op-Ed essay [“Will the Left Survive Millennials?”](#) Among the many comments, this one by [Andy B](#):

“Has anyone noticed that despite our increasing diversity, we are becoming a more isolated society? More prone to stare at a screen than to engage our neighbors in conversation. That same screen provides easy access to surround oneself with an echo chamber that allows for an ever growing sense of entitlement to impose one’s opinion on others above all else. Both sides have moved so far away from one another that honest constructive debate is next to impossible. For the sake of our American experience, let’s hope we can eventually find a unifying force. Imagine what could be done as a society if we unplugged and engaged again.”

5.

Practice Empathy.

Do your students know who Glenn Beck is? He is a conservative radio host and media personality who surprised many this summer when he urged his fellow conservatives to understand the [Black Lives Matter movement](#). He then published an Op-Ed essay in The Times that begins:

“In a recent [speech](#) to a group of conservatives, I made what I thought was a relatively uncontroversial point about the commonalities between Trump supporters and Black Lives Matter activists. I thought this was a simple idea, but the criticism was immediate and sharp: How dare I try to understand the “other side”?

But as people, wouldn’t we all benefit from trying to empathize with people we disagree with?”

Have them read what he has to say — and read some of the 919 comments Times readers made in response. What do they think of the argument he makes? What issues about which they feel passionately might they seek to understand from an opposing point of view?

6.

Back up statements with evidence and sources.

“These days it seems like politics and propaganda take precedence over rational discussion, especially when the conversation goes online,” writes Chris Sloan in an essay at KQED Education on [“Teaching the Art of Civil Dialogue.”](#) He suggests “teaching argument the way it’s been conceived since Aristotle’s time.”

“It seems that everyone agrees that in order

to be “college and career ready” our students need to know how to write argument and back it up with evidence. In reality, this approach falls short when our own assumptions are challenged; however, [research shows](#) that learning gains are greatest in these moments of “cognitive dissonance.”

The [winners](#) of our annual [Student Editorial Contest](#), in which we invite students to “write about an issue that matters to you” but back it up with evidence both from The Times and elsewhere, can provide models for how to do this. You might invite students to [scroll through the essays](#) and find a few that interest them to see how the evidence is woven in.

And [this related lesson plan](#) can help with tips and ideas. In it, we quote Andrew Rosenthal, former Times editorial page editor, who made a video for our contest and reminds students to do their research. He says:

“Everyone is entitled to their opinion, you’re not entitled to your own facts. Go online, make calls if you can, check your information, double-check it. There’s nothing that will undermine your argument faster than a fact you got wrong, that you did not have to get wrong.”

7.

Listen better, and ask genuine questions that seek to help you understand rather than judge.

Hearing is easy, [writes](#) Seth S. Horowitz in the Sunday Review. But “listening is a skill that we’re in danger of losing in a world of digital distraction and information overload.”

Many teachers are familiar with the concept of [“active listening”](#) and, via activities like “think/pair/share,” have incorporated regular practice in the skill. But listening can be much more, as this famous essay from the 1930s, [“Tell Me More,”](#) describes. In it, the writer Brenda Ueland says listening is a “creative force,” and explains:

“When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand. Ideas actually begin to grow within us and come to life. You know how if a person laughs at your jokes you become funnier and funnier, and if he does not, every tiny little joke in you weakens up and dies. Well, that is the principle of it.”

One recent example of listening in action: a new book by the sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild that seeks to understand [“Why Do People Who Need Help From the Government Hate It So Much?”](#) The Times reviewer writes, “A distinguished Berkeley sociologist, Hochschild is a woman of the left, but her mission is empathy, not polemics.” Have students read the review to understand the role

open-minded questioning and listening played in this “respectful” work, then think about how they might practice listening to those with whom they disagree.

8.

Expand your ‘filter bubble.’

In a Student Opinion question, [“Is Your Online World Just a ‘Filter Bubble’ of People With the Same Opinions?”](#) we challenge teenagers to look at their social and news feeds and work to broaden them to include new perspectives and opinions.

Read our questions and invite your students to think about where and how they get their news. How diverse are their social media and news feeds in terms of the ages, races, religions, geographical locations, interests and political affiliations of the people they follow — and why does it matter?

9.

Consider why ‘us and them’ is so ingrained in who we are.

Our friends at [Facing History and Ourselves](#) frequently look at questions like these:

- Why are notions of “us and them” such a consistent feature of human societies?
- When and why does an “us and them” view of the world become especially appealing or attractive? When does this worldview develop into verbal and physical violence?
- How can individuals respond to expressions of hatred, anger and fear? What happens if we choose to remain silent?

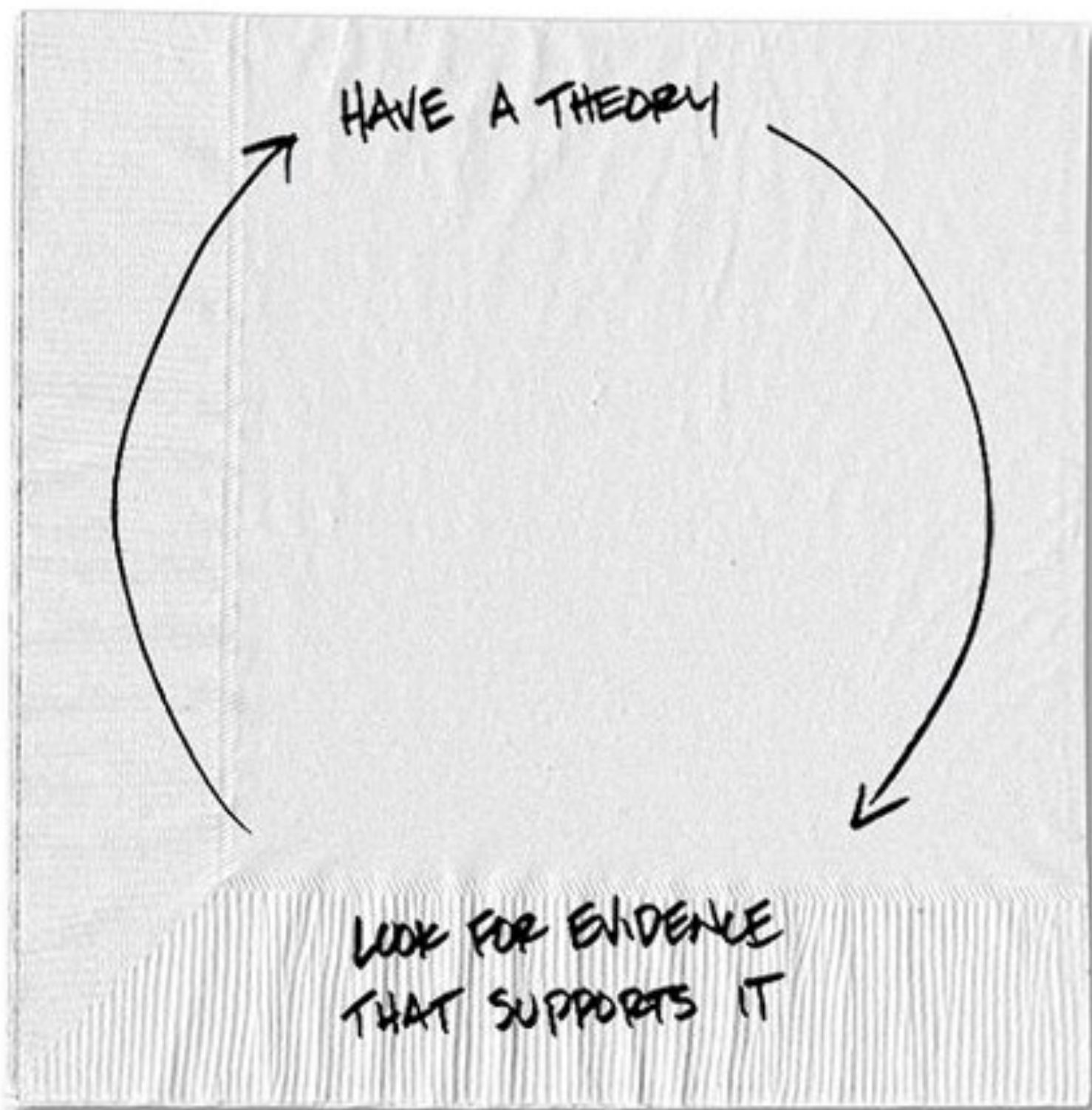
In [“How Teachers Can Help Students Make Sense of Today’s Political and Social Tensions,”](#) Laura Tavares and Jocelyn Stanton list a number of resources to help teachers and students go deeper.

10.

Learn about and try to counter ‘confirmation bias.’

Confirmation bias is the tendency to look for information that supports the way we feel about something. Carl Richards wrote about it for The Times in a 2013 piece, [“Challenge What You Think You Know”](#):

“We do this all the time. In fact, academics even have a name for it: [confirmation bias](#).”



“It’s when we form an opinion, and then we systematically look for evidence to support that opinion while discarding anything that contradicts it.

“The first place we go for feedback about what we believe is other people. And who do we ask first? That’s right, people we know who are already inclined to think the same way as we do. And friends don’t always tell one another the truth, even if they disagree. The result is a dangerous feedback loop that actually confirms our bias. It’s incredibly hard to avoid.”

[The Upshot also wrote about this phenomenon](#), saying:

“...confirmation bias may be the reason that our political debates remain intractable. After all, as you accumulate more evidence confirming your views, you’re less likely to question them, and less likely to change your mind. As members of competing political tribes collect more evidence in favor of their favored views, their opinions harden, and each tribe becomes more convinced of its correctness.”

So what’s the solution? As Mr. Richards writes, “The only solution that I see is to purposely expose yourself to views that don’t match yours.” In an echo of many of the other ideas in this post, he suggests purposely seeking out views from “the other side,” whether via websites, books, radio or television, or conversations with people across the aisle. And, he says, it’s not enough just to seek them out:

Try, just try, to listen, to understand.

See if you can get to the point where you can honestly say, “I understand the argument and can see why they feel that way.”

After Comet Ping Pong and Pizzagate, teachers tackle fake news

by Moriah Balingit, The Washington Post

History teacher Chris Dier was in the middle of a lesson last week at Chalmette High School in Chalmette, La., when a student made a befuddling inquiry: “He raised his hand and asked if I knew about Hillary Clinton using pizza places to traffic people.”

About a thousand miles away at Wilson High School in Northwest Washington, distressed students in teacher Eden McCauslin’s history and government classes asked why a North Carolina man armed with an assault rifle had appeared at their local pizza shop, Comet Ping Pong, telling police that he wanted to free child sex slaves he believed to be harbored there, a false narrative conspiracy theorists have pushed on the Internet.

Hoaxes, fake news and conspiracy theories have abounded on the Web, spreading with increasing speed and intensity during the recent presidential election cycle. While they have duped many — and provided entertainment to others — they also have created a sense of urgency for social studies teachers and librarians to teach students how to distinguish the real from the invented, to identify bias in news articles and to evaluate sources for credibility.

As the Comet Ping Pong incident displayed, such false accounts can inspire very real consequences.

“It took one crazy person to start firing in a D.C. pizza shop to get people to realize that media literacy is a critical skill that we all need for many reasons,” said Erin McNeill, the founder and president of Media Literacy Now, which advocates making media literacy a classroom requirement. “If there’s a few educated people who understand media literacy skills, that leaves a lot of people who are open to being swayed in various ways by fake news and misleading news.”

McNeill argues that schools are not doing enough to prepare young adults for a digital information age that has spurred a cottage in-

dustry for fake news creators and has created a fertile space on social media for them to flourish.

Other observers have raised concerns that social media also has contributed to deepening the divide between Americans, with people steering their peers toward partisan news sources that bolster — rather than challenge — their points of view. Young adults may be particularly vulnerable to that kind of filtering: About a third of 18- to 29-year-olds the Pew Research Center surveyed this year reported that they “often” get news from social media. Just 10 percent of people in that age group said they trust the national media “a lot,” the lowest proportion of any generation surveyed.

Joseph Uscinski, an associate professor at the University of Miami and a co-author of “American Conspiracy Theories,” said people convinced by conspiracy theories and fake news often approach the world with a conspiratorial mind-set, just as partisanship colors the way a Republican or a Democrat sees the world. Those predispositions are difficult to undo, but media literacy education could help combat them.

“Educators are part of that socialization,” Uscinski said. “They have a chance to make a difference. They have a chance to show kids that you should rely on lots of different data.”

Sam Wineburg, a professor of educational psychology at Stanford University and director of the Stanford History Education Group, said teachers are ill equipped to help students navigate the pitfalls of the modern information age.

The smartphone “has changed us,” Wineburg said, “and the only thing that’s going to determine whether we become its master or whether it gets the best of us will be our educational response. And right now, we are woefully behind the eight ball.”

Wineburg developed assessments to help teachers determine how good their students are at distinguishing mainstream news sources from fake news websites and at identifying sources that might have a political agenda, such as sponsored content. Many teachers reported that a large portion of their students could not make that distinction, painting a “bleak” picture of how students are managing the modern information landscape.

Even though it is not part of the standard curriculum in many places, individual educators are taking it upon themselves to build more lessons about consuming news. Once focused on lessons about navigating the stacks, librarians are now helping students navigate the Internet.

Courtney Walker, a media specialist in the library at Shorecrest Preparatory School in St. Petersburg, Fla., developed an entire lesson around made-up news. She had ninth-graders read articles on the Internet and identify if they came from real or fake news sources. Some of the links she included directed students to websites that are designed to look like mainstream news sources — lifting their logos and mimicking their Web addresses — but which peddle fake information. She co-taught the lesson with a history teacher, who opened the class by talking about what happened at Comet Ping Pong.

Some history teachers have taken a broader approach to steering their students away from misinformation. The Stanford History Education Group trains teachers in its “Reading Like a Historian” method.

Instead of being drilled with facts, dates and historical figures, students read and listen to primary sources and interpret them. In the process, teachers help students evaluate a source’s veracity and bias.

The PCSS Annual Conference

The 63rd annual
Pennsylvania Council for the Social Studies Conference
was held in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
on
October 20-22, 2016.

This year's conference theme was
"Creating Global Citizens Through Issues Focused Instruction".

PCSS explored how social studies represents the vehicle for issues focused instruction; a matter of importance in that we live in a complex and ever-changing "global village". More than 40 individual sessions and a score of exhibitors brought the theme to life on the main conference day of Friday, October 21, 2016.

On Thursday, October 20th,
PCSS held a free pre-conference seminar
on the implementation of Act 70
which focuses on the implementation of instruction
dealing with the Holocaust, genocide and the violation of Human Rights.
Participants gained insight into teaching strategies
that support the implementation of Act 70.

The annual awards program followed at a reception
on Thursday night and Friday evening brought an exciting presentation
by National Geographic Explorer Andrés Ruzo.
The conference ended with a PCSS Board meeting Saturday morning.

2017 will bring the 64th annual
Pennsylvania Council for the Social Studies Conference,
to be held once again at the
Red Lion Hotel in Harrisburg October 19-21, 2017.

The conference theme is
"Social Studies Still Matters Today."
Look for more information soon on the PCSS website at
<http://pcssonline.org/>