

The POINT!



E-Letter for Western Pennsylvania Social Studies Educators

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What is critical race theory?

The core idea of critical race theory is that racism is a social construct that's woven into policies and legal systems, including education. The theory says that racism is part of everyday life, so people — white or nonwhite — who don't intend to be racist can nevertheless make choices that fuel racism.

In current controversies, critical race theory is often conflated with anti-racism and social justice, more common terms and concepts used and taught in schools. Increasingly, conservative critics incorrectly cite critical race theory as the basis for any equity, diversity, and inclusion effort.

Parents may be confused, believing that critical race theory is a teaching method, training, or program. In fact, it isn't synonymous with culturally relevant teaching (which endeavors to affirm students' ethnic and racial backgrounds) or other strategies schools may be using to make students of color feel supported.

The proposals to ban critical race theory could have a chilling effect on what teachers teach about certain topics. They may worry that teaching the full history of the Trail of Tears or the Civil War will land them in trouble with parents or administrators.

To rise above the fray, listen, and take strong positions that ultimately affirm and support *all* students even in the face of political pressure and division. These guiding questions — with nuanced answers — [are a good place to start](#). This [collection of articles and opinion pieces](#) on equity, diversity, and race can also build your knowledge.

Soldiers & Sailors Hall!

Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hall & Museum houses a vast collection of primary and secondary documents and military artifacts. It is their mission to promote the use of these educational items and create an understanding for all groups who visit the museum. They provide a rich learning experience for all people by exploring the deeds and sacrifices of ordinary citizens during extraordinary circumstances.



NCSS IDM Summer Institute

This is our 7th year helping teachers learn about the Inquiry Design Model (IDM) and designing inquiries. This institute will be conducted online this year. And it will be an experience. After a year like none other, we are reminded of the power of inquiry. The pandemic, the struggle for racial justice, a generational presidential election, and the insurrection at the US Capitol -- all of this and more has us asking questions about our history, how we can survive today, and who we want to be going forward. Our students need the tools of inquiry, and they need us to help them build the confidence to ask and answer the questions before us all. Learn more and register.



Elementary Inquiry Summer Institute: Inquiry For the Elementary Classroom

July 29, 2021 - July 30, 2021

Join NCSS and inquirED for a two-day virtual exploration of the tools and strategies that educators need to bring inquiry to life in their classrooms. So many inquiry programs focus on high school instruction. But what's it like to use inquiry with a first-grader who is just learning to read? A third-grader who struggles during group work? Or a sixth-grader who is just gaining the confidence to speak in class? Find out at this year's Elementary Inquiry Summer Institute! Learn more.



2021 Summer Leadership Institute: Think Global! Act Local!

July 12, 2021 - July 13, 2021

As COVID-19 continues to affect us globally and unite us in efforts to combat the pandemic, we have noticed the need to also reconnect locally to create meaningful contributions to our communities. This year's SLI will showcase ways to build strong connections between NCSS state, regional, and local councils and community organizations who share similar visions to advocate for and promote the social studies profession. Free for NCSS members with registration. Register.



*If you can't get out of something, get into it. Kris Kristofferson,
singer-songwriter, actor*

The Point

For
Western Pennsylvania
Social Studies Educators
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studies in Western Pennsylvania

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C-SPAN Deliberations

Inquiry-based lessons organized by topic.

Students will use video clips and handouts to explore the different sides of these issues and develop their own opinions. Each lesson concludes by having students answer the question and support their stance using examples from the videos. These inquiry-based activities can be adapted to distance learning through the use of discussion boards, video-conference discussions, or through written responses.

PBL moves AP courses beyond memorizing facts

Project-based learning has been an effective way to help the students in Advanced Placement US Government and Politics courses develop understanding of content, not just memorize facts, writes Amber Graeber, an instructional coach at Des Moines Public Schools. Graeber suggests three ways teachers can get started with PBL, including working with like-minded colleagues to design a project. **Full Story:** SmartBrief/ Education (5/20)

Multilingualism helped by culturally responsive teaching

Culturally responsive teaching can help school districts broaden diversity and inclusion initiatives, which can include designing lessons that encourage multilingualism, write Maya Valencia Goodall and Kristie Shelley, senior directors of emergent bilingual curriculum at Lexia Learning. In this commentary, they share three steps educators can take to launch or improve CRT, such as identifying and eliminating unconscious bias. **Full Story:** Language Magazine online (5/17)

Why teacher-prep must train for online learning

A 2016 report in the Journal of Online Learning Research -- the most recent data available -- revealed that less than 5% of US-based teacher-training programs provided educators with hands-on experience in creating online learning environments. With some remote settings and hybrid learning expected to continue after the end of the pandemic, online-learning experts including Michael Barbour say school districts will need to train teachers on how to make better use of technology in the classroom. **Full Story:**

Never think you've seen the last of anything. Eudora Welty, writer, Pulitzer Prize winner

Educator: Learning history, truth can be uncomfortable

Schools must be representative of the diversity, especially the diverse students from marginalized groups, in resources, curriculum, instruction and teacher training -- even if the truth and history lessons are uncomfortable, writes Tinisha Shaw, a former history teacher who is now a social and emotional learning specialist. In this opinion article, Shaw writes that "public education can be where "students and educators share and acquire knowledge in learning spaces where critical thinking, exploration, respect and community are key." **Full Story:** EdSurge(5/19)

THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH



GAYTON MCKENZIE

Students rally for anti-racist teaching in Iowa

A rally of about 60 students and staff at a Marion, Iowa, high school included calls for equity and anti-racist teaching as well as urging Gov. Kim Reynolds to veto a bill passed by the state Senate and House of Representatives that restricts teaching about systemic racism, white privilege and related topics. The event was the first organized by the school's Social Justice Club, a recently launched group open to any student who feels marginalized, says Janessa Carr, a student assistance counselor at the school. **Full Story:** The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Marion, Iowa) (5/18)



Ariz. could fine teachers who discuss certain topics

An amendment to an Arizona Senate bill would allow fines of up to \$5,000 for teachers who permit discussions in class about racism or related topics, or if equal weight on certain issues is lacking in lessons. Some educators have criticized the bill as distrustful of teachers and an effort to censor teachers, **Full Story:** The Arizona Republic (Phoenix) (tiered subscription model) (5/20)



Lawmakers clamp down on teaching about racism, sexism

Lawmakers in Idaho, Iowa, Oklahoma and Tennessee have passed legislation to limit teaching about racism, sexism and other topics that they consider controversial and prohibit use of certain resources. Lawmakers in a minimum of 15 states have weighed similar bills, which have been heavily criticized by educators and others who point to a lack of understanding of what is taught in schools. **Full Story:** Education Week (5/17)



Centenarians testify as witnesses to 1921 race massacre

Viola Fletcher -- a 107-year-old survivor of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre that killed as many as 300 Black residents and destroyed a 35-city-block community known as Black Wall Street -- testified before the US House Judiciary subcommittee on Wednesday about her memories and the need for reparations for the Oklahoma community. Fletcher, her 100-year-old brother and another 106-year-old survivor shared their memories and eyewitness accounts of the massacre and a century spent seeking acknowledgement and justice. **Full Story:** The Washington Post (tiered subscription model) (5/19), USA Today (5/20), CBS News (5/19)



Confronting Inequity: When Racial Discussions Go Wrong

Diagnosis of instructional errors is critical when teaching sensitive topics, writes Matthew R. Kay. Such errors are often tactical or strategic and don't mean the topic wasn't worth teaching.



Teacher: Historical truths should be uncontroversial

Moments in teaching have the potential to challenge and inspire students, according to veteran history teacher Valencia Ann Abbott, who writes that she is "a Black woman, and teaching my history -- telling the truth about it -- should not be controversial." In this commentary, Abbott writes that she's tired of fighting for the acknowledgement of Black humanity and history, and shares that laws placing limits on history lessons will bar covering the historical truths that students need to learn to think and read critically. **Full Story:** [Chalkbeat \(5/25\)](#)



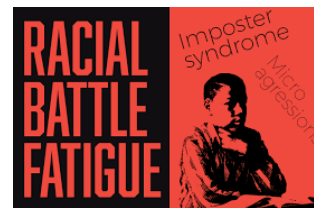
Educator: Lift restrictions on teaching about race

Recent efforts to restrict teachers from teaching about issues -- including racism, sexism and white supremacy -- to efforts to challenge and ban books, such as "The Hate U Give," by Angie Thomas, writes Gina Caneva, a library media specialist at an Illinois high school. In this commentary, Caneva advocates for teachers to have the freedom to address in the classroom the tough topics seen in the news. **Full Story:** [Chicago Tribune \(tiered subscription model\) \(5/24\)](#)



Black teachers wearied by "racial battle fatigue"

Stress from an ongoing pandemic and racial unrest have created a "perfect storm" for Black teachers that is concerning educators and experts, who fear an exodus of Black teachers from the workforce. Richard Ingersoll, professor of education and policy at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, said there was a concern about the number of Black teachers in the classroom, and male teachers of color were already quitting at higher rates. **Full Story:** [The Hechinger Report \(5/24\)](#)



Pennsylvania back together?

In this unit, students explore the history of immigration to the United States and recent U.S. immigration policy. Lessons cover oral histories, immigration trends, immigrant experiences, refugees, resettlement, and more!



Immigration and the U.S. Policy Debate

Like, literally put the pieces together? If you enjoy puzzles and politics, we have the ultimate challenge for you: take Pennsylvania's population and create 17 congressional voting districts that follow recognized **constitutional guidelines**. Feeling really fired up? Draw the Commonwealth's 50-seat State Senate or the 203-seat state House maps



Opinion: Prioritize time for play next year

After the disruptions of the past year, lessons students learn through play in the coming year will be even more important, write Lenore Skenazy, president of the nonprofit Let Grow, and Peter Gray, a research professor of psychology at Boston College. In this blog post, they share the benefits of play and advocate for schools to make it a priority. **Full Story:** [SmartBrief/Education \(5/27\)](#)



*There is a choice to make, a chance to take. Jill McCorkle,
writer, educator*



Financial-literacy instruction gains popularity

More middle- and high-school educators are adding financial literacy to their curricula, from requiring basic personal-finance classes to finding ways to incorporate these concepts into existing math, economics and social studies coursework. High-school family and consumer sciences teacher Kailen Stover writes that students' most common financial goals include understanding taxes, managing credit cards and living on their own. **Full Story:** Edutopia (5/18)

Can ancient tales offer climate clues?

Old legends and myths about the natural world may contain clues about environmental change and natural disasters and possibly provide useful insight for the future, some researchers say. For example, Patrick Nunn of the University of the Sunshine Coast has been studying stories from Australia and Northwest Europe focusing on sea-level rise. **Full Story:** BBC (free registration) (5/10)

Use online simulations for historical role-playing

Older students are often reluctant to dress up as a historical figure, but the same outcome of learning empathy for a historic situation can be taught through online simulations, writes Mary Berkery, program director of history at Excelsior College. Berkery uses the Muzzy Lane platform to have students role-play as historical figures to determine how decisions were made and the context they were made in. **Full Story:** SmartBrief/Education (5/18)

Turning the Helen Keller debate into a research project

The viral TikTok videos proclaiming Helen Keller lacked the ability to have accomplished all she did begs the question of how to get students to think critically, research history and seek facts, writes Rochelle Melander, an author and professional certified coach. Melander in this article suggests that because students respond well to gamification, research projects can be turned into games with defined paths and goals -- including adopting superhero personas. **Full Story:** MiddleWeb (5/16)

Students' letters seek return of performing arts

Students in the social-action theater class at San Diego School of Creative and Performing Arts used a newspaper article published about how COVID-19 affects sports practices as inspiration to write opinion essays seeking Gov. Gavin Newsom's support for the return of the performing arts. Teacher Cortney Golub's lessons about writing opinion pieces resulted in about 100 students using their research skills to write the letters, which were published together in the San Diego Union-Tribune. **Full Story:** The San Diego Union-Tribune (tiered subscription model) (5/16)



NCH Statement Opposing “Divisive Concepts” Legislation

Legislation currently under consideration by numerous state legislatures around the country menaces the academic freedom essential to all classrooms, especially those where history is the focus of discussion and debate. The National Coalition for History, which NCSS is a member of, opposes the passage of so-called “divisive concepts” legislation in these legislatures. Such bills have been introduced in eight states and are designed to limit discussion about racism, sexism, and discrimination in the classroom and/or the workplace. What is especially pernicious about these bills is that they masquerade as legislation defending free speech, but in fact have been purposely designed to curb consideration of subjects controversial and in any way critical of American society and culture. [Read the full statement here.](#)



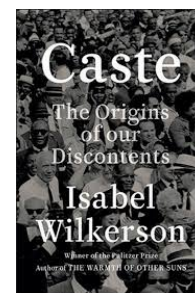
Pair literature, primary sources to boost connections

Pairing primary sources with literature -- such as a song mentioned in text or a photo connecting to it -- can enhance students' understanding, relatability and connection to the world, writes Tom Bober, a school librarian. Bober suggests ways in which students can participate in the process, such as taking the role of a researcher, and offers examples, including pairing George Orwell's "1984" with World War II propaganda. **Full Story:** School Library Journal (5/24)



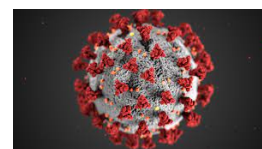
Lessons on current events, racism limited in Texas

Lawmakers in the Texas Senate have passed a bill that puts limits on how teachers address issues of racism and current events are taught in schools. The bill has been opposed by educators, historians and school advocacy groups, who have criticized the legislation as too vague and requires teachers to give multiple viewpoints without "deference to any one perspective." **Full Story:** The Texas Tribune (



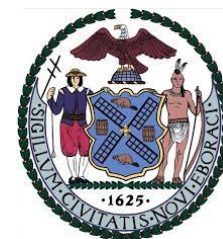
Operation Outbreak platform simulates pandemic

An educator in Florida and infectious disease researchers at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard created Operation Outbreak, a platform that simulates a pandemic. The teaching tool simulates an outbreak and engages students in lessons focused on science and governance. **Full Story:** The Hechinger Report (5/23)



N.Y. considers "seal of civic readiness" for students

Education leaders in New York are considering offering a "seal of civic readiness" that would count toward one of the Regents exams students take to graduate. Students could complete an internship and other civic-related activities to earn the seal, which would be added to the state's other pathways in the arts, career and technical education, career development and occupational studies, humanities, science, world languages and STEM. **Full Story:** Chalkbeat/New York (5/10)



There are no passengers on spaceship earth. We are all crew.
Marshall McLuhan, philosopher