

# The POINT!

E-Letter for Western Pennsylvania Social Studies Educators

Vol. 15 No. 4

April 2022



## How far have we come?

### ***What were common beliefs and practices in schools of the early 1930s?***

I remember classmates having their left hand tied behind their backs in order to force them to write with the right hand. Memorization was emphasized, especially in literature, geography and history. Corporal punishment corrected bad behavior and sometimes inability to remember the tables in math. In a rural one room school when I was in third grade, male students were usually two to four years behind, just waiting to turn 16 and leave school. Many of these boys missed school to plow fields, sow seeds, cut and haul grain and tend to other farm chores rather than attend class. There was no kindergarten, much less pre-school programs. School buses did not exist in most areas and high school was not for everyone. Black students were often excluded from many schools. Guidance counselors, when they existed, guided children of immigrants away from academic programs in favor of vocational courses. Textbooks, especially in history and geography, were usually several years old.

When I began to teach in the late 1950s, the world history text I inherited was ten years old and featured “*Pitldown Man*” as an ancestor of modern humanity. There were ten pages devoted to Asia and the Pacific. Six pages covered Africa. Nothing was found about Latin America or Canada. Geography texts featured pre-World War II maps of Europe as if the current maps were in error. Black students were still not seen in many schools but in others had replaced immigrant children in the vocational sections. Most girls were usually guided into commercial courses.

Much has changed over the years. “*South Paws*” are no longer seen as a threat to society. Memorizing dates, names, multiplication tables, and selected items of literature are seldom seen as objectives. While rural schools may still be underfunded, most boys usually finish high school. Unfortunately some political leaders long for the good old days when history classes emphasized learning only about the facts that contributed to a mythical view of the past. Efforts to censor who teaches and what is taught is not a welcome sign.

**-Leo West**

## 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 circumstance

Education Department 412-621-4253-Ex.210

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## Czech Embassy Series: Coffee Talk with Daniel Kolsky

with architect, entrepreneur, and human rights activist Daniel Kolsky

Wednesday, April 6, 2022

3:00 PM Eastern Time

Zoom | [Click here for more information](#)

**REGISTER**

"Back in Berlin" Post-Film Discussion with Director, Bobby Lax and CWB Scholar Dr. Natalia Aleksion

Thursday, April 7, 2022

3:00 PM Eastern Time

Zoom | [Click here for more information](#)

## Heinz History Center From Slavery to Freedom

Embark on a journey that begins in 18th century Africa and continues through 21st century Western Pennsylvania.

**VIEW EXHIBIT**

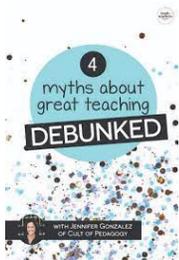


# The Point

For  
Western Pennsylvania  
Social Studies Educators  
EDITORS  
Leo R. West

*The Point* is the  
e-newsletter  
of the former WPCSS  
issued monthly via e-mail.  
WPCSS was a non-profit 501c  
organization dedicated to promoting  
the teaching and learning of social  
studies in Western Pennsylvania

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## Voices in Democracy: Race, Gender and Equality – Saturday, April 2, 2022 – Carlisle High School, Carlisle, PA (8:30am-2:15pm)

### Link to register – Click [HERE](#)

Past PCSS Board member Kevin Wagner encourages you to attend a “Teaching American History” seminar that Carlisle High School will be holding at the start of next month.

From the 17th century on, the realities of racial and gender inequality have been at odds with America’s self-understanding as a “new world” of opportunity for all. We will focus on key moments in the struggle to secure the natural rights of liberty and equality for all Americans.

This program will be conducted as a Socratic discussion, utilizing primary source documents (found here) as the only readings, and with the Discussion Leader facilitating the conversation, instead of lecturing or presenting. Registrants, therefore, are highly encouraged to read all the documents in advance and come ready with questions. All attendees will receive a Letter of Attendance at the end of the seminar.

### NCSS>>>BRI. Program

**[Being an American, one of the Bill of Rights Institute's most popular resources for teaching middle school civics, is getting a significant update, and we wanted you to be among the first to know about it! This updated version will include scaffolded support for ESL students.](#)**

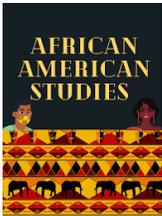
The modified lessons in this curriculum will take students through the Founding documents including the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, and provide tools for primary source analysis, individual writing assignments, and classroom discussion.

**[Sign up today](#)** to be among the first to know when this new resource is available and receive exclusive supplemental materials and event invitations.

### **Research debunks myth about teacher improvement**

The assumption that teachers' skills plateau after three years is a myth; they can continue to improve through at least the 15th year, according to analyses from researchers with the Research Partnership for Professional Learning. Researcher John Papay of the Annenberg Institute at Brown University says teachers must be gauged by an ability to handle student mistakes, ask questions and encourage engaged discussion, rather than just student test scores. **Full Story:** [The Hechinger Report \(3/7\)](#)

*It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent. Madeleine Albright, first woman to serve as US secretary of state, diplomat*



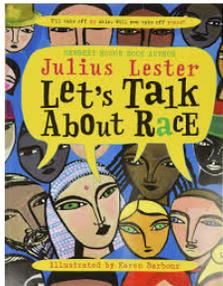
### **P African American studies piloted in some schools**

About 60 schools are expected to pilot an Advanced Placement course in African American studies in the fall, according to the College Board. Among them, White Station High School in Memphis, Tenn., which plans to teach time periods from medieval kingdoms of Africa to present day US. **Full Story:** Education Week (2/25)

### **Strategies to have productive classroom talks about race**

Education Week (2/28)

The guilty verdicts last month in the federal case against the men who murdered Ahmaud Arbery serve as yet another reminder that we need more classroom conversations about how to talk to students about the volatile situations that remain connected to racial justice in America. We also need to be reminded of just how to conduct them. The aftermath of the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor—as court cases in all three tragedies have either concluded or are ramping up—have left feelings of hurt, anger, and despair among students who are trying to process the totality of these horrific events.



### **Va. schools told to drop diversity, equity, inclusion efforts**

The Washington Post (tiered subscription model) (2/25)

The Virginia Department of Education has rescinded a wide range of policies, memos and programs established to further diversity, equity and inclusion in schools in obedience to an executive order from Gov. Glenn Youngkin (R).



### **Race Still Grips and Divides Us. Your Students Want to Talk About It**

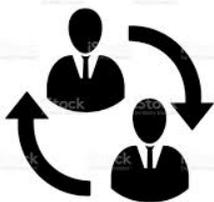
Educators should be open and vulnerable, the authors write.

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### **Retaining BIPOC Educators Starts with Belonging**

Lack of teaching staff diversity doesn't just stem from problems of recruitment or disinterest in teaching; there are higher turnover numbers for BIPOC teachers than for white teachers. In this new article, teachers of color share their experiences in predominantly white schools and what changes would help them stay.



*Time and reflection change the sight little by little 'till we come to understand. Paul Cezanne, artist*

## Why the Russia-Ukraine Crisis Is Relevant to Teachers

The war is dominating the news, and students are watching.

In Rhonda Coombs' 9th grade world geography class, the Russia-Ukraine border crisis has been a big topic of conversation over the past few weeks.

Coombs, who teaches at Bozeman High School in Bozeman, Mont., assigned her students to analyze news coverage of the conflict, asking them to make at least one connection to previous lessons.



## Invasion of Ukraine has Ariz. students asking questions

Students at a Mesa, Ariz., high school have been asking questions about what they are hearing and seeing about Russia invading Ukraine, says social studies teacher Katherine Thrailkill. Though she teaches US history, Thrailkill says she has been answering students' questions with facts, maps and other materials to help students learn more about how such disputes around the world can affect the US, such as with gas prices and the economy. **Full Story:** [KTVK-TV/KPHO-TV \(Phoenix\) \(3/8\)](#)



## **Dr. Rose Reissman Lessons:**

Kensington IS 62 Stands with Kyiv, Ukraine-Brooklyn Middle School Students  
“Involved in Mankind” [Download .docx](#)



## Students learn about war in Ukraine in varied ways

[Daily Herald \(Arlington Heights, Ill.\)](#)

As live history unfolds in Ukraine, high school social studies teachers the suburbs are adjusting lesson plans on the fly to help their students make sense of it all.



## **CHOICES**

[The Ukraine Crisis](#), a free *Teaching with the News* lesson (released February 22, 2022), explores recent developments between Russia and Ukraine. In the three-part lesson, students examine the current situation and its historical origins; analyze political cartoons; and monitor ongoing events and consider international responses.

Why did democracy fail to take root in Russia in 1917? Our [Russian Revolution](#) unit (second edition, February 2020) considers this question as it traces the history of Russia from the end of serfdom to the founding of the Soviet Union. Students explore the conditions that led to the fall of the tsar as well as the competing political ideologies that the Russian people debated in 1917. In one lesson, *Women, War, and Revolution*, students assess primary source documents representing perspectives of women in Russia about World War I and consider the question of what it means to be a revolutionary.

Our curriculum unit on [Russia's Transformation](#) (fifth edition, July 2018) examines what priorities should drive U.S. policy toward Russia. Students survey the economic issues and political developments that have shaped the outlook of policymakers in the Kremlin and Washington, D.C. Lessons explore Russia's geography, propaganda, Cold War policy, photo analysis, and more.

**CHOICES  
PROGRAM**

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*Inspiration gives no warnings. Gabriel García  
Marquez, writer, journalist, Nobel Prize winner*

### Inuit drive ice-monitoring effort in changing Arctic



The study of Arctic sea ice is evolving, with Inuit people driving an initiative known as SmartICE, which monitors ice changes in 32 communities in northern Canada. The Inuit people have "been there making observations of the ice and the land for centuries to millennia," says geography professor Trevor Bell, co-founder of SmartICE. **Full Story:** Bloomberg (3/23)

### How teachers can foster better class discussion



There are five steps that teachers can take to help students engage in richer class discussions, according to Opal Davis Dawson, an ASCD faculty member and retired elementary-school principal who spoke at ASCD's Annual Conference in Chicago. Dawson suggests beginning lessons with an "icebreaker" or quick check-in and setting clear expectations for student participation and behavior. **Full Story:** ASCD Inservice (3/21)

### **Citing budget cuts, state auditor general will kick school audits back to the Department Of Education**



Pennsylvania's auditor general is dissolving the department's school audit bureau in April. WESA's Kiley Koscinski reports that will [put the task of auditing Pennsylvania's 500 public school districts](#) and nearly 180 charter and cyber schools back in the hands of the Department of Education

### **Lessons for Building Comprehension Across the Content Areas**

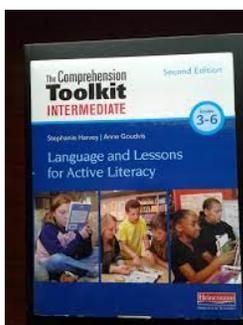
***The Comprehension Toolkit* is a supplemental resource filled with lessons that develop and deepen students' skills in comprehension, critical thinking, and text response.**

The lessons in both the Primary and Intermediate *Comprehension Toolkit* are designed to support comprehension instruction across the content areas. You can [click here to download three free lessons](#) to try at any time.

Many of the resources in the *Toolkit* are available digitally, making it possible to plan and teach in a variety of settings, including remote or hybrid models.

For flexible lessons that support the development of students' comprehension across the content areas, there is no resource better than *The Comprehension Toolkit*

### **LEARN MORE ABOUT TOOLKIT**



*We all require and want respect, man or woman, black or white. It's our basic human right.*

*Aretha Franklin, Singer*

## Minecraft releases "Active Citizen" educational game

Minecraft this month released "Active Citizen," in partnership with the Nobel Peace Center and Games for Change. The goal of the game is to help educate youth worldwide about Nobel Peace Prize laureates and about creating their own positive change in the world. **Full Story:** OnMSFT (3/3), GamesRadar+ (3/1)



## Vietnam War artifacts offer students tangible details

**Valley News Dispatch (Tarentum, Pa.)**

TribLIVE's Daily and Weekly [email newsletters](#) deliver the news you want and information you need, right to your inbox.

History classes and movies don't show a lot of things about the wars the United States has fought.

For instance, Ethan Zahner, a senior at Springdale Junior-Senior High School, wasn't aware of all of the dangers facing soldiers in the Vietnam War.

"I did not know that they had to wear gas masks during the war," he said.

But they did, as evidenced by artifacts brought to the school Thursday through a program from Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hall & Museum.



## Education Extra Credit: Funny teachers, weary teachers

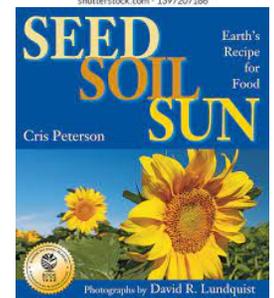
Don't miss SmartBrief's new Education Extra Credit post, which highlights some additional noteworthy news items from the past week or so. This week, we cover teachers who are comedians, teachers who have had enough and humanity-embracing approaches to students who are immigrants. This feature is one of the many education articles that SmartBrief shares outside of our newsletters.



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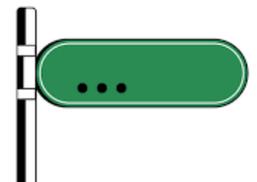
## Pa. farmers mark Ag Literacy Week with storytime visits

Some Pennsylvania farmers this week headed to community libraries to celebrate Ag Literacy Week by reading books during storytime. Books such as "My Family's Soybean Farm" by Katie Olthoff offered an interesting entry point for learning and understanding agriculture, says farmer Craig Conforti of the Penn State Cooperative Extension. **Full Story:** Beaver County Times (Pa.) (tiered subscription model) (3/20)



## Students petition to rename road for historic significance

Student members of a Connecticut Mayor's Youth Council are gathering signatures in support of changing a road name. The students say changing the name of New Street to Dinah Road would have more significance and help teach the history of two women -- a mother and daughter both named Dinah, who were slaves in the West Division of Hartford, now known as West Hartford. **Full Story:** West Hartford News (Conn.) (3/16)



## Can sports help students learn about NATO, Ukraine?

Athletes and sports can offer entry points into discussions about topics related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, write Anne-Lise Halvorsen, an associate professor at Michigan State University, Donald McClure, an assistant professor at St. John's University, and Jacinda Bowman, a teacher at a K-8 school in Detroit. The three offer examples for use in the classroom, such as exploring NATO countries through maps and sporting events including the Olympics and the soccer World Cup. **Full Story:** Education Week (3/17)

