



Social Studies Class Newsletter

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History, despite its wrenching pain cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.

Maya Angelou

Learning with Projects

This year we are going to be studying some of the topics in our curriculum through the creation of hands-on projects. I am excited about these projects because it will allow your child to experience social studies the way people who study it as a profession and as a hobby do.

Educational research, as well as common sense, suggests that students understand what they are learning more deeply when they are engaged in meaningful activities rather than just memorizing facts. Here are some findings from research on learning with projects:

- Students have better attendance, are more self-reliant, and enjoy learning more.
- Academic learning is at least as good in project-based classes as in traditional classes, and sometimes it is better.
- Projects allow choices making it possible for students to work in their areas of strength while they are improving in other areas.

Please read other articles in this newsletter for more information about how and why we will be using projects this year.

What about Standards and Basic Skills?

Some people worry that students will not be learning the information and skills they need when they work on projects. In fact, the opposite is true. Students will need to acquire and refine many skills in order to be successful with projects. Projects are especially appropriate for the development of 21st century skills that will be necessary for students to be successful as adults. Some of these skills are:

- Collaboration—Working productively with others
- Self-direction—Managing and taking responsibility for their own learning
- Information literacy—Locating, evaluating, and

using information from a variety of sources looking at the world

- Communication—Reading, writing, and speaking
- Problem solving—Framing, analyzing, and solving problems
- Critical thinking—Reasoning about information, forming opinions, and making decisions

Other important skills in social studies, such as analyzing cause and effect,



interpreting documents, and looking at different points of view, will be addressed throughout all the projects. Our projects will also be designed to cover important content, such as the people, places, and events that have been important in our country's history.

Only a good-for-nothing is not interested in his past.
Sigmund Freud

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Go
Eagles!!!

Grading

Projects cannot be graded in the same way that tests are--by checking answers right or wrong or looking for key points in essays. Since projects are more complicated, assessment will also take place in different ways.

First, to help students develop skills of self-direction and independence, they will be asked to plan and assess their own progress as they work and to provide each other with feedback. They will be asked to meet checkpoints along the way.

The final projects will be assessed using rubrics that describe the different levels of quality. Students will have these rubrics at the beginning of the project, so they can refer to it as they create their project.

Projects, like most work in real life, is often completed in groups. Many parents and students are concerned about how one student's poor performance might affect another's grade. Certain parts of the project will be graded individually to reflect each student's effort, but other parts must be graded as a group. Students must develop collaborative skills to work successfully with their groups and to be proactive in addressing potential problems before they become serious.

Changing Students' Roles

Although projects are more interesting and engaging than traditional classroom activities, they offer new challenges for students. Some will do better in the different environment, and some may struggle at first.

Students who are good at memorizing information and following explicit directions will have an opportunity to learn to solve problems, think creatively, and collaborate--all extremely important in real life. Students will receive instruction in strategies they can use to be successful with

How Can I Help My Child?

Since projects require real-world application, some work must be done outside of the classroom in non-traditional places. Supporting your children's access to community resources and providing opportunities for collaboration with other students can help them make successful.

You can also use your real-life learning to help your child solve problems that may arise during the course of a project. For example, you may share a time when a co-worker let you down and explain how you dealt with the problem. When students discuss problems with you related to the project, keep in mind that they are learning important skills for getting along in the world. Encourage them to discuss processes for dealing with problems rather than focusing on a desired solution.

Finally, self-direction is probably the most important benefit of projects in the classroom. If your children have problems with organization or following through on commitments, you can help by setting up procedures at home to help them stay on track.

their projects, and they will receive ongoing support as they develop these important lifelong skills.

On the other hand, students who may not be good at remembering information but are good at organizing, working with others, and thinking about complex problems will probably be more successful with this kind of work. Since we will be having a mixture of both kinds of instruction in our class, all students will have a chance to develop new skills and use the strengths they have.

Upcoming Project

Students will work with the International Famine Centre to identify ways to address current relief needs and to propose recommendations for reducing famine in the world