

PRESERVING TOMORROW'S HISTORY TODAY

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With an eye toward recent trends in social studies education, it could be said, “the future is in our past”. Educators are seeing the benefits of project-based curricula centered on historical preservation. These benefits include an opportunity for authentic assessment, a more active role for students in community involvement, a strengthened link between generations, an initiative for restoration projects, flexibility for the educator, a renewed sense of community pride, and a heightened feeling of student ownership in learning. The future of social studies education seems to have shifted from studying the past by memorizing dates and names to preserving the past for future generations to study.

One example of this project-based historical preservation is in classes taking trips to cemeteries, where they study the genealogical background of the deceased, the symbolism used on grave markers, and the history behind such symbolism. Teachers may also assign their students to study the history of particular individuals on grave markers in the cemetery. This can lead to a deeper understanding of community history through the individuals’ stories. Often, cemetery projects lead to a cleaning up and restoring of cemeteries in the local community.

Another popular project, especially in U.S. History classes, has been oral history preservation. Classes utilize with paper and pencil or video techniques to interview community members who were alive during different eras studied. Using these primary source interviews to study

specific time periods learning can be much more meaningful for students.

Veterans are often chosen for these interviews because there has been a particular interest in the war experience, perhaps initiated by recent popular movies. Urgency has been attached to interviewing World War II veterans, as their numbers are dwindling. The veterans themselves may also recognize this urgency, as some may share experiences in the interview that they had previously been reluctant to discuss. Older generations entrusting their stories to younger generations provides a valuable link between them.

In some areas, preserving historical buildings in their communities is a focus. Classes study how buildings in their community were built using different construction techniques during different eras. Often a walking field trip to look at the different types of architecture and materials used would get the class out of the traditional classroom. Buildings that previously held little significance for students could become real life textbooks and daily reminders of community history.

Using the flexibility that project-based curriculum allows, teachers can expand their classrooms to include the entire community around them. Students have more ownership in their learning and more pride in their community when they are encouraged to preserve a part of their community for future generations.

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