

IOWA HISTORY ONLINE

by

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A Glimpse of Education in Iowa

Iowa Education Code states the following with regard to Iowa history: 281:12.5(3)b.: [Elementary grades 1-6] Social studies instruction shall include citizenship education, history and social sciences. Democratic beliefs and values, problem-solving skills, and social and political participation skills shall be incorporated. Instruction shall encompass geography, history of the United States and Iowa, and cultures of other peoples and nations. American citizenship, including the study of national, state, and local government; and the awareness of the physical, social, emotional and mental self shall be infused in the instructional program.

“History of the United State and Iowa...” This is the mandate from the Code of Iowa that our children be taught history of Iowa. School administrators or curriculum directors around the state of Iowa should not look on this directive lightly. Pressures of the No Child Left Behind legislation have influenced schools to direct their instructional priorities from the social sciences toward the areas of reading and math. The Iowa State Department of Education (IDOE) has consistently looked at reading and math as indicators of achievement among students. Along with these two curricular areas, in 2004 the IDOE required that 8th grade science scores be included in each school district’s Annual Progress Report. Increased emphasis in reading, math and science has impacted school district curriculum priorities.

The curriculum content of each Iowa school is similar in many ways. However, the subject area emphasis can vary from school district to school district and teacher to teacher. For instance, if an elementary teacher has a group of students who performed poorly on standardized tests in the areas of reading and math then they will, and probably should, spend a disproportional amount of time on reading and math in their classroom. At the same time the teacher down the hall may be focusing in other areas. These curricular decisions are the result of high-stakes testing and the subsequent ramifications for teachers and schools. High-stakes testing has steered public educational systems and teachers into making distinctive curricular choices. These choices typically don’t include the study of Iowa history, but they could and should.

Inclusion of Iowa History in Curriculum

One way to include Iowa history in the classroom content is to incorporate it within other subject areas. To do this will require creativity on the part of the teacher. Given the current state of education, in the spring of 2001 the State Historical Society of Iowa conducted a survey of Iowa history teachers to determine their specific instructional needs. The survey found that many teachers had questions regarding Iowa history and how to teach it's content in a meaningful way. With this survey information, in the fall of 2003, Malcolm Price Laboratory School in partnership with the University of Northern Iowa's Curriculum and Instruction Department developed Iowa History Online (<http://fp.uni.edu/iowaonline/>).

Iowa History Online

The purpose of Iowa History Online (IHO) is to provide Iowa history teachers across the state of Iowa with high quality instructional tools and online access to excellent teaching resources. IHO is constructed around ten frequently asked questions that emerged from the State Historical Society of Iowa survey of Iowa history teachers. These ten questions are based on the following themes: 1) state requirements, 2) benchmarks, 3) national standards, 4) scope and sequence, 5) curriculum guides, 6) literature, 7) textbooks, 8) primary source material, 9) field trips and 10) contacts for help. Also among the contents of IHO is a listserv that teachers can become a part of, a list of affiliate organizations for resources, links to other web pages that could be helpful, a contact link and a search window. IHO could be the key for those schools that seek to keep Iowa history alive in their curriculum despite the continued pressure to improve standardized test scores at the expense of other subject areas.

What are the State Requirements?

The code of Iowa states, "Social studies instruction shall include... history of the United States and Iowa." Obviously this statement does not indicate the grade level that Iowa history should be taught or the amount of time a teacher should devote to it's content. It simply says that social studies shall include it. This leaves each school district with the task of prioritizing its importance. Basically, according to the code, Iowa history should be part of the social studies curriculum.

What are the Iowa History Benchmarks?

IHO contains benchmarks that were drafted under the leadership of the Board of the State Historical Society of Iowa and approved in March of 2002. The collection of benchmarks identifies the content knowledge students of Iowa history should possess. These benchmarks also provide curriculum developers a framework from which to work when developing instructional units on specific periods of Iowa's history. IHO has links to the benchmarks through 18 category headings. The headings are listed in chronological order for easy access.

What National Curriculum Standards Relate to Iowa History?

IHO has linked the K-4 History Standards, United States History Standards, Historical Understanding Standards, and Geography Standards from the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (<http://www.mcrel.org>). A complete list of standards for each area is listed with the standards that are most closely aligned with Iowa history placed in bold type. This section provides the teacher with a glimpse of how Iowa history can fit into the grand context of all of the history standards.

What Lesson Plans are Available for Schools to Use?

The lesson plans link provides schools with formats for how they could include Iowa history in their curriculum. Selected lesson plans have been thematically organized around the 18 Iowa history benchmarks. Lessons have been drawn from various Iowa history curriculum projects and suggestions are offered regarding the appropriate instructional level for each.

Where can I Find Curriculum Guides and Activities for Iowa History?

IHO lists nine sources of online curriculum guides for teachers to use. Each source has been picked based on its quality and usefulness for the classroom. The State Historical Society of Iowa has given permission for IHO to create Portable Document Format files (PDF) of their Iowa history lessons, Prairie Voices. The Prairie Voices lessons have been reviewed and categorized according subject and grade level and lessons are also recommended for the middle school and high school grades. Other sites included are: CampSilos and CampSilos excursions sponsored by the Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area, Communities Across Iowa, Explorations in Iowa History, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum: Curriculum Guides for Education, Iowa Past to Present—Teacher Guide, Iowa’s Underground Railroad Teacher’s Guide, and Iowa Public Television (IPTV). This impressive list of curriculum guides provides a wealth of information for curriculum directors and teachers to utilize with their classrooms.

What Children’s Literature Might I Use While Teaching Iowa History?

IHO lists 51 books to use while teaching Iowa history. Included in the book lists are stories about famous persons from Iowa’s history. Included are John Deere, Kate Shelly, Herbert Hoover, Janet Guthrie, Chief Black Hawk, Buffalo Bill, Bob Feller, and Dan Gable just to name a few.

What Iowa History Textbooks are Available?

The textbooks listed on IHO textbooks page are placed into several categories. Online summaries are comprised of two overviews. The first is “State of Iowa History”, written by Iowa State University Professor Dorothy Schwieder. The second, “A Brief Overview of Iowa History” is part of the State Historical Society of Iowa’s Prairie Voices material. Each of these texts does an excellent job of reviewing the history of Iowa. The next section is a listing of ten student texts available. Finally, the page ends with a listing of four adult texts. Each of the texts listed on this page are noteworthy.

Where Can I Find Primary Sources Material for Teaching Iowa History?

IHO has a wonderful list of primary source material. The American Memory page (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/amhome.htm>) has a huge database of historical materials from photographs to diary excerpts. The Explorations in Iowa History Project (<http://fp.uni.edu/iowahist/>) collects, organizes and disseminates primary source materials for instructional use by elementary and secondary Iowa history teachers. Finally, the Iowa Heritage Digital Collection (<http://lib-transition.iowa.uiowa.edu/>) is an online collection of Iowa history and culture created by bringing together documents, images, maps, finding aids, interpretive and educational materials, and other media from collections held by a wide range of organizations throughout Iowa. Other sites listed on this page include the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library site (<http://www.hoover.archives.gov/education/index.html>). Each of the sites listed on the page would assist any teacher or school district in their quest to build an Iowa history curriculum.

Where can I go for Exciting Field Trips Centered on Iowa History?

As all teachers know there is no better learning than by doing. Field trips are those experiences that allow students to meet with history face to face or learn by doing. IHO has several links to field trips that students could experience. Among these are the popular field trip locations of the State Capitol Building and Living History Farms in Des Moines, the Old Capitol Building in Iowa City, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, and the Amana Colonies. There are many other places that students could visit. The Travel Iowa-Attractions link on the page will allow teachers to investigate other historical or informational sites that may suit their needs more fully. As the list of field trip sites is impressive it is certainly not complete. There are many places that students could visit to make their Iowa history experience come to life.

Who can I Contact for Help with Iowa His- tory Curriculum?

If after visiting the IHO site you have other questions about Iowa His-

tory you could contact any one of the persons listed on the contact page. Another way to get more information about Iowa History is to join the IHO listserv. In the header of each page is a link that will invite you to join the listserv. This listserv will allow you to join other Iowa history educators to learn what they are doing with Iowa history in their classroom.

Conclusion

Being an Iowa educator today one can be faced with very difficult curricular decisions. Curricular choices with regard to Iowa history can be part of those difficult choices. It is clear that the code of Iowa acknowledges that Iowa history should be part of the social studies in the elementary (K-6) curriculum. It is also apparent that pressures of standardized testing have influenced schools to emphasize some curricular areas over others. Iowa History Online is available for educators to make the collection of Iowa history curricular materials useful and easy. When it comes to Iowa history we who are Iowans are, in a sense, living history. We as educators have the responsibility to honor our state history by teaching the children about those that have come before us.

“Learning about the past helps us realize that we all play a part in history. We have inherited communities, inventions and ideas from those who have lived before us. What we do with what we have affects all of us now, and those who will come after us. There are millions of characters in the Iowa story – Black Hawk, Annie Wittenmyer, Carrie Chapman Catt, Herbert Hoover, James Van Allen and you.” (Iowa Past to Present pg. 301)

Bibliography

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