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*Student Ryan
Rasmusson
relaxing
during a break.*

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*"Captain" Hadley
leading the men into
camp after a long
march at Mill
Springs, Kentucky.*

Putting **Imagination** *Into Education*

The Tools of Interactive Learning

As educators approaching the dawn of a new millennium, we find ourselves at a major turning point. Technology has brought the world into the classroom through satellite communication, video feeds, and the World Wide Web. While they cannot take the place of the classroom or the teacher, such aids bring to life the subject matter being taught and stimulate students' imaginations.

The question is no longer *if* we should invest in these resources, but *how* we will integrate them to move past the outdated model that sees education as pouring information into empty vessels and then requiring them to reproduce it on a test. To the student, that is not learning, but merely memorization. It neither inspires nor educates. The goals of education must include an understanding of history and the world around us. This requires active student participation. But how does a teacher inspire students to get involved with their community so that they may come to know it better?

Our role is not simply to teach, but to inspire. Imagination is the key. Many of us grew up before the invention of video cassette recorders, computer games, or home computers. We had to explore the outdoors and make up our own games—a stick became a raft, a rock a fortress, or a creek an ocean of discovery. We played pirates, cowboys, and other games until darkness prevailed, and our parents ordered us inside. It did not matter if it was 100 degrees or minus 10—we were oblivious to the weather when our imaginations took control. Today, we live in a world of instant gratification. To entertain their children and keep them occupied, many parents allow them to watch hours of television or videos, or to endlessly play computer games. As a result, children today are losing their ability to play and to use their imaginations. As educators, one of our many roles is to give the gift of imagination and wonder back to our students. If we ever lose the ability to inspire creativity in children, then as a society, we are truly lost, and as teachers, we have failed.

How do we inspire young people to use their imaginations and to learn? I believe it truly does take a village to raise a child, so let's examine some resources available to almost every village and school to discover the potential benefits when academia meets the real world.

My areas of specialty include history and archaeology. I have designed interactive museum exhibits for such places as the Creative Discovery Museum for Children and the Tennessee Civil War Museum, authored mentoring programs for children's museums and historic sites,

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B y C r a i g H a d l e y

and acted as a consultant for the History Channel, the Civil War Trust, and America Online. I also have had the privilege of being an adjunct professor of history at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee, for the past four years. These varied experiences of working with young people of various ages and in numerous environments have given me a unique perspective. Using history as an example, I will discuss ways to use the tools available to teachers. Of course, the basic concepts are applicable in almost every subject matter taught in school today.

A Course in the Civil War

One of the courses I teach is called “The Common Soldier and Civilian of the Civil War.” The focus of the course is not to review the American Civil War as seen by a handful of politicians and generals, but from the point of view of the common soldier and civilian who fought and truly experienced the Civil War.

Three years ago, with the help of various grants and some personal funds, I purchased enough historically accurate clothing and supplies to fully equip 20 students as Civil War soldiers and civilians. I combined lecture and reading material with six weekend-long “living history” excursions that gave each student the opportunity to “walk a mile in their shoes.”

Many of my students were either history or education majors interested in learning skills they could use when they became teachers. The male students learned to impersonate Union soldiers, while the women pretended to be Southern Unionist refugees. By wearing and using the actual clothing and equipment of the period, students learned what life was like in the 1860s. In the fields, the men went through a “boot camp” of drill and more drill, while the women learned period sewing techniques and made their own work dresses. Each of the students learned how to cook over an open fire and sleep outdoors with nothing more than a blanket, and engaged in other period activities. The class attended various living-history events around the

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A student from the Civil War class teaches young visitors what it was like to be a Civil War soldier at Chickamauga National Military Park.

southeastern United States, interacting with other living historians/re-enactors.

To complement their field experience, the class lectures and reading material focused on basic issues such as: how children were reared, what people believed, and what their hobbies, interests, and lifestyles were. I brought in original letters from soldiers, wives, and sweethearts for them to read. Live musicians came to the classroom, and the students learned the popular songs and hymns of the period. These activities were interwoven to give each participant an in-depth understanding and connection to the past.

When the course was completed, I discovered that my students’ grade average was higher than that of a standard history class. This was not

because the tests and grading were easier—in fact, they were more strenuous than any other history class offered. I found that my students retained much more information months after the course was over than from other courses with the same level of subject matter. The difference was that the students became excited about learning, and were willing to go beyond what they were asked. From the various questionnaires I handed out to my class, I learned why this was so. My favorite quote came from a student who said that the

class was not about the simple memorization of facts; instead, the living history and interaction had created memories he could associate to the reading and lecture material. He was not just recalling the information—he was relating to it as well.

As a “hands-on” teacher, I believe that the more interactivity you can bring into the classroom, the better. I also teach a historical archaeology course, during which I organize a formal “dig” for students to work on during various Sundays throughout the semester. We visit other excavation sites so they can learn the techniques of archaeology in a hands-on environment that complements the lectures in the classroom. The students also review Internet sites dealing with various aspects of his-

tory and archaeology, and share their findings with their peers.

In another course, “History of the South,” I created a mock Congress from 1860, with the students as Congressmen and myself as speaker of the House. During class, we debated the legality of secession. As a teacher, you can create all manner of interactive opportunities if you explore the possibilities. Not only will this inspire your students, but it also makes teaching more fun for you.

So, how does one go about creating such lesson plans? I will briefly discuss some of the options you can explore for your classroom, as well as issues that need to be examined more closely by both teachers and schools.

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A Cultural Context for History

As teachers, we often get caught up in having students memorize names, dates, places, and events in history. As an example, let’s take April 19, 1775. This is an important date in American history because it is the date of the battles of Lexington and Concord, the official beginning of the American Revolution. Many educators teach the date, where it happened, and who was involved. My goal is to have my students understand the most important question—*why* it happened, as well as what the people were like. By glimpsing the everyday world of these colonial farmers, my students gain an understanding of why they reacted as they did. Questions that should be asked would include: What was life like in Colonial America? What kind of work did people have? How did they dress? What did they believe in? What were their daily routines? Next I focus specifically on the age group I am teaching—What was life like for those children in the 18th century? What was school like? What chores did they perform each day? What games did they play? What kinds of clothes did they wear? This goes beyond simply talking about the events leading up to the “shot heard around the world.” It reaches into the world of colonial life in order to give the students a frame of reference to help them understand the events. This is known as a “cultural context.”

When teaching brings history to their level, students begin to see how people’s lives evolve and change as time and history progress. It also gives them insight into the daily concerns that have been shared by young people throughout history—what I will wear; what I should say; what games we can play, etc. Then, when I lecture on various events in that time period, the students better understand what influenced the people of that time, as well as how they thought and behaved.

Living History

How can you bring history alive for your students? I have

The men in the author’s Civil War class atop Lookout Mountain in Tennessee on the 135th anniversary of that battle.

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discovered that local and regional living historians and re-enactors are both readily available and effective resources for the classroom. Living history has long been used to educate the public. These unique historians can be viewed in re-enactments, as well as state and national parks and historic areas

such as Colonial Williamsburg, Sturbridge Village, and Shaker Village. There are more than 50,000 living historians of all eras scattered throughout the United States, and many in other countries as well. Many living historians will come into your school free of charge to explain their unique perspective on history.

There are also civilian re-enactors from all time periods, as well as craftspeople and musicians who can demonstrate the ways people lived and the technology of the past. These people offer insights relating to a variety of academic areas.

Don't forget to include the firsthand witnesses to history who are still with us today—Holocaust survivors, veterans from World War II, the Korean and Vietnam wars, and people who worked in the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s—are only a few of the possibilities. There are also individuals from various countries who can share their music and culture, and their unique perspectives on historical events. These valuable resources are just waiting to be tapped.

To complement the work-shops and living history, teachers can design lesson plans that combine living history with the interactive technology of the computer.

When I taught the "History of the World Wars," I devoted a large number of classes to bringing in veterans and witnesses to the wars for the class to meet. Holocaust survivors and women who were on the home front told heart-wrenching stories, including what it was like for a young bride to receive a telegram from the War Department telling her that her 19-year-old husband had been killed in Normandy. These people can relate their experiences better than any lecture or reading material that I could ever assign!

Computers and the World Wide Web

To complement the workshops and living history, teachers can design lesson plans that combine living history with the interactive technology of the computer. Educational Web sites are being created all the time by various museums, historical societies, and even educational networks. Your students can combine living-history experiences with research at specific Web sites that contain interactive information geared specifically to their age group.

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"Captain" Hadley addresses his troops at the end of a long weekend of living history at the Mill Springs Battlefield in Kentucky.

Surprisingly few educators have tapped into these resources for their classrooms. However, teachers and students who have used these fantastic resources for history, science, and literature classes have often had exciting results. For example, a sixth-grade student in my neighborhood used the Internet to do research for a paper. She logged onto the main county library Web site to search for books on a particular subject. When she found the book she wanted, she E-mailed a request for the book to be sent to her local library. The next day, the book arrived for her to pick up. She did all of this online without having to leave her home.

Responsible use of the Internet gives children access to a world of information that is exciting, informative, and free. There is also concern about children accessing inappropriate material on the Internet. Adult oversight and blocker programs should minimize the risk to students.

When I surveyed more than 200 teachers in the Chattanooga area, only five replied that they felt comfortable about their knowledge of the Internet and thought they knew how to use it effectively. How can we as educators ensure that children use the Internet responsibly if they know more about that technology than we do? Children as young as 5 years old are learning to navigate the Web, and with each passing year, more households own a personal computer with an Internet connection.

Each school should contract with either a teacher or local individual who can offer workshops on the use of the Internet and how to search for educational resources. Schools can sponsor such a program in the evenings. In a matter of days, teachers will feel competent enough to explore this technology and help direct their students to the proper use of the resources available to them.

Software and Films

As a teacher, you should try to keep up with the new educational software that comes out on the market. Many software companies will provide a complimentary copy for your school to review, hoping that you will use it for your classwork. Take advantage of these offers to plan possible applications for your students. Educational cable and video programs have become accessible in the past few years. Watch for various helpful programs on the History Channel and the Discovery or Learning channels, among others. You can record such programs to use in your classroom to complement your lectures and reading assignments, or you can recommend programs for your students to watch and report on for extra credit.

Imagination and Inspiration

Take advantage of the diverse resources within your community and village. Bring them into your classroom to share them with your students. Inspire imagination by inviting living historians and other people with various talents to visit your classrooms. This will make history, science, and education come alive for your students! You will find that teaching becomes more exciting as you create memories that will help your students understand the world in which they live. You

will also open the magical world of history and science. Children who find joy in learning grow in God's compassion and in a fuller understanding of the world around them. In the end, you are giving them the imagination and sense of wonder it takes to build their futures, create a better world, and inspire future generations. ☞

Craig Hadley did his undergraduate and graduate work in anthropology, history, and historical archaeology. After spending a number of years working as a field director of archaeology, he opened his own company, MCH Historical Services, and moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee. He has published numerous academic papers and lectured around the U.S. on history and education. A well-known Civil War historian, he is currently working on a new book chronicling the history of the Second Minnesota Volunteer Infantry during the U.S. Civil War. Mr. Hadley has been Adjunct Professor of History at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee, since 1995. He can be reached via E-mail at mchadley@aol.com.

Educational Web Links for Children and Teachers

HISTORY

- Colonial Williamsburg Resources for Teachers—<http://www.history.org/other/teaching/teachhdr.htm>
- Old Sturbridge Village Kids—<http://www.osv.org/pages/kids.htm>
- The U.S. Civil War Center—<http://www.cwc.lsu.edu/>
- The Civil War Trust—<http://www.civilwar.org/>
- World War I: Trenches on the Web—<http://www.worldwar1.com/>
- Ohio Historical Society Kids Club—<http://www.ohiohistory.org/kids/programs.html>
- From the Revolution to Reconstruction—<http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/>
- U.S. Capitol Virtual Tour—<http://www.senate.gov/vtour/index.html>
- The White House for Kids—<http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/kids/html/home.html>
- Smithsonian Kids Guide—<http://www.si.edu/resource/tours/kidsguide/start.htm>

SCIENCE

- NASA Spacelinks—<http://spacelink.msfc.nasa.gov/home.index.html>
- Starchild: A Learning Center for Young Astronomers—<http://starchild.gsfc.nasa.gov/docs/StarChild/StarChild.html>
- National Geographic for Kids—<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/kids/>
- World Wildlife Federation for Kids and Teachers—<http://www.panda.org/kids/kids.htm>

WEB PAGES WITH EDUCATIONAL LINKS FOR CHILDREN

- K-12 on the Internet—<http://info.pitt.edu/~aefa/k12.htm>
- Cyberkids—<http://www.cyberkids.com/inside.html>
- Kids Web References: Online Digital Library for K-12—<http://www.kidsvista.com/index.html/> and <http://www.kidsvista.com/Misc/reference.html>
- Links for Kids—<http://classic-cable.com/kids.html>