

MAKING HISTORY, CIVICS, AND SOCIAL STUDIES COME ALIVE!

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow, www.disabilityisnatural.com

IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) states: "A child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classes solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum." For example, a 10-year-old student should not be removed (or denied placement) in a fifth grade classroom just because he isn't reading at grade level—the class reading material (in this case) should be modified so he can "be involved and make progress" (per IDEA) in the fifth grade curriculum. This is one in a series of articles about curriculum modifications.

Curriculum modifications for History, Civics, and Social Studies (and other subjects) can be simple and fun to create! These topics can be learned using real-life activities—they don't have to be meaningless, abstract, or boring. We can find ways to make them relevant to any student!

Fourteen-year-old Dylan is enjoying the ninth grade, but Civics includes some difficult concepts. Instead of writing an essay like his classmates, Dylan (who has Down syndrome) will do a project that's meaningful and relevant, with a little help from others. (His mom came up with this idea!)

Dylan's project will focus on voting. His 19-year-old sister is away at college and will be voting for the first time! Dylan will send E-mails to his sister and several of her friends, asking what voting means to them, how they decided who to vote for, and more. Then he'll compose his report.

Other Civics projects could include attending a City Council meeting or interviewing the Mayor. Lessons on democracy could be learned through role-playing within the family or the classroom: voting on an issue, electing leaders, and so forth.

What better way to learn American History than interviewing/talking with grandparents or other elders? Some may have diaries or journals to share with a budding historian. If there are no family elders close by, a senior center and/or historical society might work. Websites, computer software, the History Channel, and audio or video programs could be useful. My son has a CD set that includes the actual

radio broadcasts of significant events in our American history. Listening to these radio broadcasts allows my son to "be there" when history happened!

If a student needs modifications in World History, she could interview someone who is originally from another country. The U.S. is a melting pot; there may be someone in the neighborhood whose family emigrated from another nation. If not, there are other ways to find help: look for ethnic grocery stores, community groups, or churches. Who knows, maybe the student will achieve star-status by bringing in such an expert as a guest lecturer for the whole class!

Social Studies often overlaps into History, so the previous ideas may work, especially as they relate to cultural issues. But Social Studies may also include lessons about how cities work, geography, ecology, and other topics. Interviewing a city planner or other official might be an effective and meaningful modification. What about talking with people from the Parks and Recreation department, Forest Rangers, utility company workers, or others in the fields of ecology, land use, energy, and related areas of expertise?

If we ensure the *student* is involved in designing curriculum modifications, he'll be motivated and excited about the learning opportunities before him. Civics, History, and Social Studies can come alive in relevant and meaningful ways. And consider this: exciting curriculum modifications created for one student might influence the way these subjects are taught to all the students!