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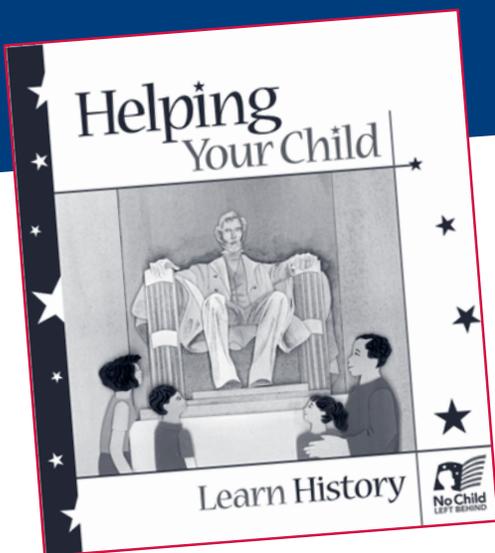
FIRST CLASS



**“When it comes to
the education of our
children ... failure is
not an option.”**

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

HELPING YOUR CHILD! Exploring the Story of the Past



Studying U.S. history enables us to learn about our nation's traditions, values and organizing principles, while world history affords us the opportunity to discover other cultures.

The latest release of the U.S. Department of Education's *Helping Your Child* series examines the importance of studying the story of people and events and the record of times past. *Helping Your Child Learn History* is designed to help families prepare their children to achieve the lifelong task of finding their place in history by helping them learn what shaped the world into which they were born.

Employing the latest research, the booklet is largely comprised of activities that can be performed at home for children in preschool through grade 5. It includes, for example, a simple recipe for Native American fry bread as a means of exploring the history of these first Americans.

Also included are some information about the basics of history; practical suggestions for how to work with teachers and schools to help children succeed in school; and a list of federal resources, helpful Web sites and suggested books for parents and children. *Helping Your Child Learn History* will be available later this summer online at www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/tools-for-success. The Department's publication center is taking advance orders for the printed version at 1-877-4ED-PUBS or www.edpubs.org/webstore/Content/search.asp. Please include with your order identification numbers EK0754P for the English edition and EKH0193P for the Spanish translation.



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Student Loan Interest Rates Drop for Fourth Straight Year

Interest rates on federal student loans have dropped to 3.37 percent—the lowest point in nearly 35 years—saving money for millions of borrowers, the U.S. Department of Education announced last month.

Compared to three years ago, when the interest rate was 5.99 percent, borrowers with \$10,000 in student loan debt and a 10-year standard repayment plan can save \$1,523 in interest over the life of the loan.

For borrowers with Stafford loans issued since July 1998, the new interest rate is 3.37 percent, down from 3.42 percent last year. For students who are still in school, within the six-month grace period or with deferred payment, the interest rate is 2.77 percent. The new rate for Parent PLUS loans is 4.17 percent.

Interest rates on most student loans are calculated based on formulas set by law. The formula used depends on whether

the borrower is in school, in a grace period, has received a temporary deferment from repayment or is making payments.

Annually, 13 million students apply for federal student aid. This year, the Department expects to issue \$52 billion in new loans to more than 7 million students and families.

President George W. Bush's Fiscal Year 2005 proposed budget includes several initiatives to help students pursue a higher education. Among these items are:

- \$73.1 billion in available student aid, a 6 percent increase over the 2004 level;
- \$12.9 billion for the Pell Grant program, an increase of \$856 million for low- and middle-income students;
- \$395 million for Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic Serving Institutions; and
- An increase in loan limits for first-year students, from \$2,625 to \$3,000.

For more information on federal student aid, visit www.studentaid.ed.gov or call 1-800-433-3243.

Bringing the Past to Life

By Cathy Gorn, College Park, Md.



During the 1982-83 school year, I saw my first National History Day (NHD) contest. The theme for the student program was "Turning Points in History," and it was indeed a major pivotal point in my life. Nearly 22 years later, I still work for the organization because it doesn't get old. It doesn't get old because I can think of nothing more powerful or exciting than to have an effect on a young person, to change a life in some positive way—to watch the light bulb go on and feel that I had something to do with that. NHD does that for nearly 1 million young people each year. Our influence extends to the barrios of Los Angeles, to inner-city Houston, to Navajo and Lakota Indian reservations, to small, rural mid-western towns and to wealthy and middle-class suburbs.

The NHD program brings the past to life for students and teachers. Middle and high school students present historical research in papers, table-top exhibits, dramatic performances and multi-media documentaries. These products are

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The mission of National History Day, says its executive director Cathy Gorn, is to "encourage all teachers to engage their students in a meaningful study of the past. In so doing, we will help young Americans prepare themselves to meet the challenge of forming 'a more perfect union.'"



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For questions and comments, contact: Nicole Ashby, Editor, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Room 5E217, Washington, DC 20202, 202-205-0676 (fax), NoChildLeftBehind@ed.gov.

For address changes and subscriptions, contact: ED Pubs, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794, 1-877-4ED-PUBS (1-877-433-7827), edpubs@inet.ed.gov.

For information on ED programs, resources and events, contact: Information Resource Center, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20202, 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327), usa_learn@ed.gov.

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entered into contests at local, state and national levels and are evaluated by professional historians and educators.

But National History Day is more than a contest. It is a rigorous yearlong program that requires young people to conduct extensive primary and secondary research, interpret information and draw conclusions about the meaning of the past. In the process, students examine topics within historical context, learning important content as well as valuable research, critical thinking and communication skills. It is an exercise in understanding democracy and citizenship, as students engage in an exploration of the conflicts and compromises, triumphs and tragedies, and rights and responsibilities embodied in our history.

The program also has a dramatic impact on the way in which teachers teach, inspiring educators to incorporate research techniques and primary source analysis into their regular classroom work. To help teachers enhance classroom history teaching and student learning, NHD offers professional opportunities that provide them with the latest in historical scholarship and innovative teaching methods.

Our teacher programs are crucial, as educators are some-

times not as well-prepared in their undergraduate courses to move their students beyond the textbook and through a meaningful study of the past. This means that some teachers need additional training to adequately understand the process of historical inquiry and build a solid foundation of knowledge about the past for themselves.

One of the most critical elements of our teacher programs is the NHD Summer Institute, through which educators receive instruction in historical content and teaching methods. These institutes bring teachers up-to-date on the latest in historiography and provide intensive instruction in accessing primary sources and using such material in the classrooms.

The NHD Summer Institute helps teachers change their classroom practices and engage their students in a truly rigorous examination of history. After her teacher returned from our 2002 institute on the Civil Rights Movement, Brittany Hess, a seventh-grader at Fruitvale Junior High School in Bakersfield, Calif., participated in a lesson on civil rights and wrote:

“We all cover segregation in elementary school, but it was made so that it didn't look like things were so bad. This was the ‘real deal.’ We as seventh-graders got exposure to the real world. The way this was presented made us want to keep exploring and learn more.”

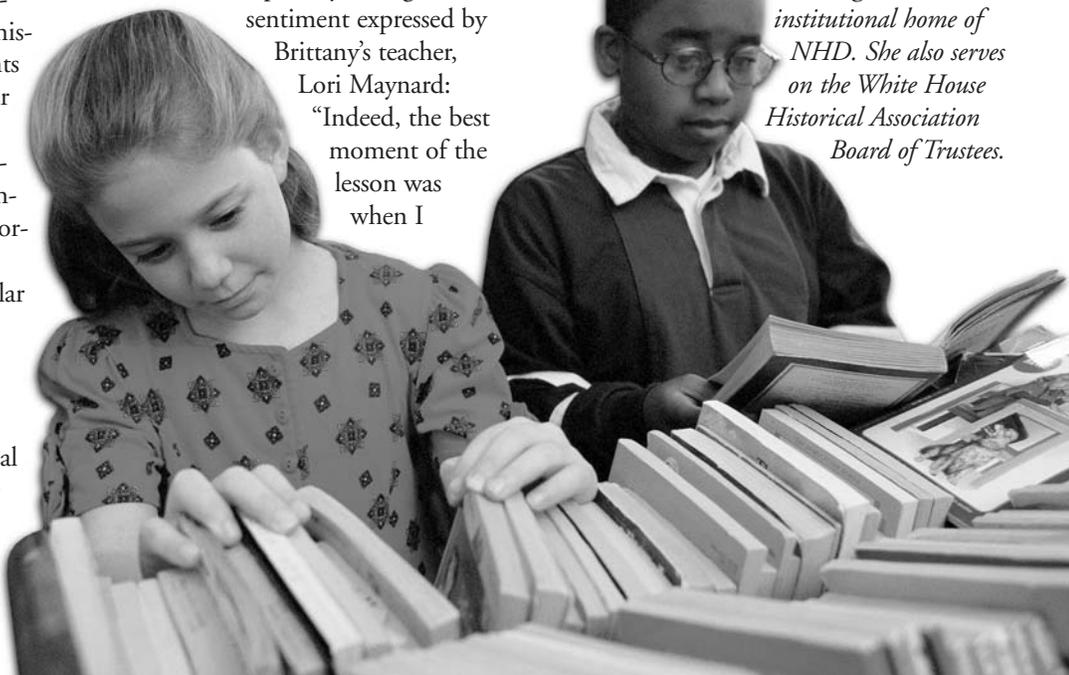
Especially telling is the sentiment expressed by Brittany's teacher, Lori Maynard: “Indeed, the best moment of the lesson was when I

gave a student who was ‘always doing what he is not supposed to be doing’ the *Declaration of Independence*. He actually read it and was interested in it! None of my students had ever seen the *Declaration of Independence*, and all of them studied it quite deliberately when they had it in their hands. These documents are a sacred part of our history as Americans. I did not realize how truly special they were until I shared them with my seventh-graders.”

Our task now is to continue this effort and encourage all teachers to engage their students in a meaningful study of the past. In so doing, we will help young Americans prepare themselves to meet the challenge of forming “a more perfect union.” It is my sincere hope that when the next generation becomes old enough to vote in local, state and national elections, it will do so only after thinking critically about the nation's past and its legacy for the future.

This year's NHD teacher program, July 25-30 at the University of Maryland, focuses on “Politics and the Press: The Impact of the Media on America.” For more information, visit www.nationalhistoryday.org.

Cathy Gorn is executive director of National History Day and a history professor at the University of Maryland at College Park, the institutional home of NHD. She also serves on the White House Historical Association Board of Trustees.



"After many years, I still look forward to Monday mornings. Working with this diverse community of learners and their supportive families is one of the most rewarding things I have ever done or ever could do."

2004 Teacher of the Year Kathy Mellor, who teaches English as a Second Language at Davisville Middle School in North Kingstown, Rhode Island.



Close-Up:



Presidential Scholars Program

This month, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige and the Commission on Presidential Scholars will welcome to Washington, D.C.,

141 graduating high school seniors who represent some of the nation's top students. The 2004 Presidential Scholars will be recognized for their outstanding academic achievement, artistic excellence, leadership and community service during the program's National Recognition Week, June 19-22. The week culminates in the presentation of the Presidential Scholars Medallion to the students in a ceremony sponsored by the White House.

Established in 1964 by executive order of the president, this prestigious program for the past 40 years has honored more than 5,000 Presidential Scholars. This year's candidates qualified on the basis of outstanding performance on the College Board SAT and ACT assessments; or nomination through the talent search conducted by the program's nonprofit partner, the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts. Scholars are chosen on the basis of broad academic achievement, essays and transcripts, as well as evidence of community service and commitment to high ideals.

The U.S. Department of Education partners with the Commission on Presidential Scholars, a 28-member group appointed by President George W. Bush, which made the final selection from a field of 2,700 applicants. The 141 winners include one young man and one young woman from each state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and from U.S. families living abroad; 15 students at-large; and up to 20 students who have excelled specifically in the creative and performing arts.

"These young Americans are proof of what students can achieve when met with high academic standards, challenging expectations and high-quality teaching," said Secretary Paige. "These scholars are examples to us all of the great potential that lies within our children and our schools."

Presidential Scholars alumni have included a Pulitzer Prize winner, poet laureate, a heart and lung transplant surgeon and a novelist, as well as film and stage actors, teachers, attorneys, and chemical and software engineers.

For more information on the Presidential Scholars Program, visit www.ed.gov/programs/psp/index.html or call 202-401-0961.

Summer break should not mean a vacation from learning. To prevent learning losses that often occur during the summer break from school, the National Endowment for the Humanities, with assistance from librarians and reading experts, has compiled a list of recommended summer readings that highlight classic literature for students from kindergarten through high school. Below is a sampling:

Kindergarten to Grade 3

Brunhoff, Jean de. *The Story of Babar*.
Galdone, Paul. *The Three Little Pigs*.
Piper, Watty. *The Little Engine That Could*.
Seuss, Dr. *The Cat in the Hat*.

Grades 4 to 6

Baum, L. Frank. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.
Farley, Walter. *The Black Stallion*.
Lindgren, Astrid. *Pippi Longstocking*.
Wyss, Johann. *Swiss Family Robinson*.

Grades 7 to 8

Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*.
Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress*.
Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.
Hugo, Victor. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

Grades 9 to 12

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*.
Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*.
Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*.
Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*.

For a complete listing, visit www.neh.gov/projects/summertimefavorites.html.

Note: The reading list does not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Department of Education or its employees, and the information provided here is only one of many resources that parents, students and educators may find helpful and use at their option. The Education Department does not mandate or prescribe particular curricula or lesson plans, and the inclusion of this list does not represent an endorsement of any views or products mentioned.

Please Note



We will take a break for the summer and resume publication with our Sept. 1, 2004, issue. As we plan for the next school year, we welcome your comments on how we can continue to improve *The Achiever* to meet your needs.