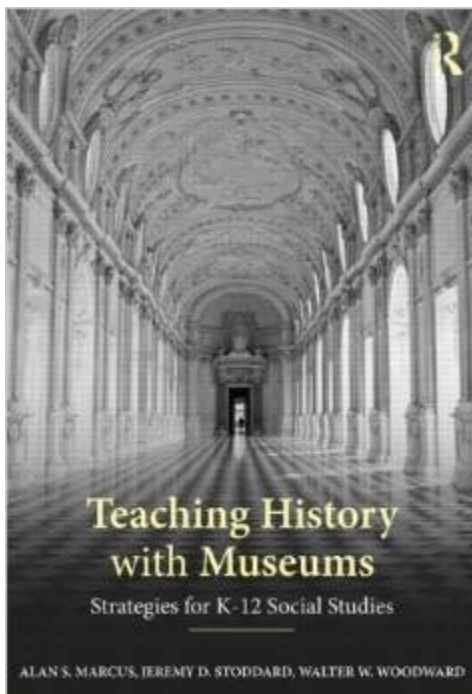


## **Book Review**

### **Strategies for K-12 Social Studies**

## **“Teaching History with Museums” by Alan S. Marcus, Jeremy D. Stoddard, and Walter W. Woodward**

By Eric Martone



Field trips, particularly to museums, are a common activity within American schools. While many districts mandate that such trips connect to their curricula, the “rich pedagogical power” of museums, as the authors assert in *Teaching History with Museums*, is not usually exploited to its fullest potential. Their book, following on the heels of the rising popularity of public history and museum studies within the larger history profession,<sup>1</sup> takes a giant leap toward helping educators achieve this goal by providing them “with both a conceptual model linking

museum visits to learning about the past, and a collection of practical strategies illustrated through case studies focused on different ‘types’ of museum” (5).

A large part of the introduction defends the importance of museums for history/social studies education. The authors cite interesting studies revealing that secondary teachers, despite specializing in history/social studies content, plan only a limited number of trips because of “logistical and pedagogical barriers” (6-7). Consequently, the majority of student museums trips are organized at the elementary level.

After the introduction, the authors establish a theoretical framework for using museums (including the history of museums’ roles in society, and museums’ shifting missions and methods) to provide an overview of the ways museums can be used effectively to enhance social studies content and skills. Many of these skills also relate to language arts and Common Core Standards. However, the authors also focus on how museum trips can impact students’ dispositions toward history since they provide opportunities to develop not only more sophisticated understandings of the past, but also “habits of the mind,” or attitudes toward the past that are not easily learned or transferred within classroom walls. They argue that since students are more likely continue to visit museums in their adult lives (as opposed to

reading historical narratives), these are the sites (sources) where they are likely to continue learning about the past. As a result, it is important to be able to *read* museums as visual narratives. The authors thus encourage educators to teach their students to recognize that despite museums' seemingly authoritative roles in interpreting the past, these interpretations are as subjective as traditional narrative accounts and need to be analyzed and questioned in a similar fashion.

The heart of the book, however, is a series of several case studies grouped according to different categories (or types) of museums to demonstrate history teaching through museum visits. These categories include: artifact and display-based museums (US Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC); state history museums (Minnesota History Center); historic forts (Fort at No. 4 in New Hampshire and Fort Ticonderoga in New York); historic house museums (Mark Twain House in Hartford, Connecticut and the Johnson County Historical Society's properties in Iowa); living history museums (Colonial Williamsburg, the Jamestown Settlement, Yorktown); and memorials and monuments (911 memorials in Connecticut).

Each case study chapter includes a general discussion about this type of museum, followed by the case study (or studies). Each case study includes pre-visit, during visit, and post-visit activities for students, followed by a reflection on the case study discussing the pros and cons of using this type of museum as well as further resources.

The final chapter, "bringing the museum to the classroom," focuses on the various services and programs museums offer educators in the form of outreach programs, museum kits, and virtual trips, in keeping with the authors' view that museums are really three sources in one (the museum itself, its staff, and its online resources). The book's back matter includes three appendices (including a particularly useful

one on ten overall strategies for effective museum visits), a list of the museums mentioned in the book, and resources for educators.

Since two of the authors are from the University of Connecticut (one is from The College of William and Mary), many case studies are from the Mid-Atlantic and New England regions. This is a distinct advantage for teachers in these areas because less adapting is needed to make use of the case studies. Nevertheless, the case studies are intended to be adapted and altered for any region and the models are clear and straightforward enough for this to be accomplished relatively easily.

The case studies, however, rely on using museums as a way to teach "history." Yet social studies is a multidisciplinary subject. While history is arguably the dominant discipline within social studies education at the secondary and upper elementary levels, this is not so much the case within early elementary social studies, where general scope and sequence pattern at the national level privileges other social scientific fields (like political science, anthropology, and sociology). Further, the book's subtitle, which markets it to grades K through 12 teachers, is slightly misleading for elementary level educators since most of the activities within the book are directed toward teachers of grades 5 and above. As a result of these two caveats, the book is most valuable for teachers in the upper elementary and secondary grade levels, rather than those at the lower elementary/early childhood level.

Overall, *Teaching History with Museums* successfully weds theory and practice to serve as a valuable resource for educators seeking to integrate museums into their curricula. Consequently, it succeeds in meeting its general goals and is highly recommended for history and social studies educators.

## Notes

1. Public history has become an increasingly common and popular program at North

American colleges and universities. Further, the abysmal academic job market for history PhDs has prompted the American Historical Association, a professional organization for historians based in North America, to take efforts to develop initiatives to direct history PhD graduates to alternative careers, including historical preservationists and museum curators. See: Allen Mikaelian, "Department Specializations and the History Major," *Perspectives on History* 52, 7 (2014): 12-13; Allen Mikaelian, "The Academic Job Market's Jagged Line," *Perspectives on History* 52, 6 (2014): 14-15; Anthony Grafton and James Grossman, "No More Plan B: A Very Modest Proposal for Graduate Programs in History," *Perspectives in History* 49 (2011); Debbie Ann Doyle, "Museums and the Future of Education," *Perspectives on History* 51, 4 (2013); Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, "Some Proposals to Help Solve the Job Crisis," *Perspectives on History* 51, 4 (2013).

***"Teaching History with Museums: Strategies for K-12 Social Studies"***

By Alan S. Marcus, Jeremy D. Stoddard, and Walter W. Woodward. New York: Routledge, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-415-89165-3

**About the Authors**

**Alan S. Marcus** is an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the Neag School of Education, University of Connecticut.

**Jeremy D. Stoddard** is a former middle school teacher and curriculum and technology professional development specialist. He is currently an associate professor in the School of Education at The College of William and Mary.

**Walter W. Woodward** is an associate professor in the Department of History, University of Connecticut and is the Connecticut State Historian.

**About the Reviewer**

**Eric Martone, PhD**, is assistant professor of history/social studies education at Mercy College, Dobbs Ferry, New York. Prior to receiving his PhD in history from Stony Brook University, he was a social studies teacher in Connecticut. His books include the *Encyclopedia of Blacks in European History and Culture* (2009), *The Black Musketeer: Reevaluating Alexandre Dumas within the Francophone World* (2011), and *Mercy College: Yesterday and Today* (2013).