



K-6 Social Studies Program

Giving Our Children Voices in the Classroom

by Catherine Clinton

We, the authors of *We The People*, are dedicated to the proposition that securing the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity can be best achieved by creating a program which allows the voices from the past to shape the voices of future citizens, our children.

To that end, we have incorporated a chorus of texts which capture the words and feelings of those who have made America what it is today. In *Build Our Nation*, for example, students read:

- Bartolomé de Las Casas' pleas for the rights of enslaved Native Americans,
- the stirring words of George Washington's farewell to his officers,
- Mercy Otis Warren's thoughts on government,
- Lincoln's address on the dedication of the Gettysburg cemetery, as well as
- a letter from a forty-niner describing life in California during the Gold Rush.

Our readers will hear the voices of children. Whenever possible, we incorporate their experiences, for example, fifth grade students develop a real sense of historical empathy as they read:

- an account of a seven year old Creek girl during Indian Removal,
- the story of a "mill girl" in Massachusetts,
- a ten year old's description of a birthday celebration during the Civil War, and
- an immigrant child's perspective on school during the late 1800s.

Additionally, we recognize that one of the best ways to trigger children's interest in the past is to offer them authentic accounts. We provide fictional renderings of characters and contexts, excerpts from contemporary publications (articles which tie past and present together) and historical documents which speak for themselves.

Finally, we have used the words of real students to highlight our program's themes. Every unit in grades 3-6 opens with a memorable quote from the past and a quote from a contemporary student. These quotes set the stage for what students are about to study and they provide a student's perspective on why the information is relevant and interesting.

By providing students with diverse and exciting voices from the past and by highlighting the emerging significance of voice, we create opportunities for students to find their own voices in the classroom and the larger world.

