

# Tapping on Technology in a Social Science Class

Find out how **Michael Gordon Robinson, AST 2011 Outstanding Educator-in-Residence**, a Social Studies/Geography teacher from Houston High School, actively engages his students in voicing and exchanging their opinions with each other through stimulating tasks and activities which tap on available technology.

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When teaching any social science class (history, geography, etc.) it is imperative for students to be able to convey opinions and points of view. Thus, it is the teacher's responsibility to instruct students in the best

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ways to communicate with others and present material in such a way as to be persuasive and compelling. What is also challenging for the teacher is to understand how information is shared in today's world. It is not enough to have students write essays and letters. The use of technology for effective communication is essential in today's high tech global world. Teachers must find innovative ways to use the internet to engage their students in communicating with others in their class, school, country, and even with others around the world.

The following are examples of various ways to communicate in my classroom.

## 1. VoiceThread ([voicethread.com](http://voicethread.com))

This is the first year I have used this form of communication. It allows people to navigate through the slides and leave comments in 5 ways: using voice (with a microphone or telephone), text, audio file, or video (via a webcam). This provides an exciting way for my students to communicate with others in the classroom in a non-traditional way. It also allows them to participate with students in other parts of the country and world.

## 2. Class Blog

The class blog I used in the past allows my students to comment on items that I posted, and it allows them to have a conversation online with other students in the class. The particular blog that I use allows me as

the teacher to monitor all conversations, and it gives me the control to post or not post the students' comments.

### **3. Sixty Seconds to Care Project**

I have a multimedia project where my students have 60-90 seconds to create a persuasive movie. The objective is to make the viewer care about what they have seen. The last of slide of the movie has information for the viewer, telling them where they could go to find additional information or even make a donation. The photo below shows students working on their projects.



### **4. Class Debates**

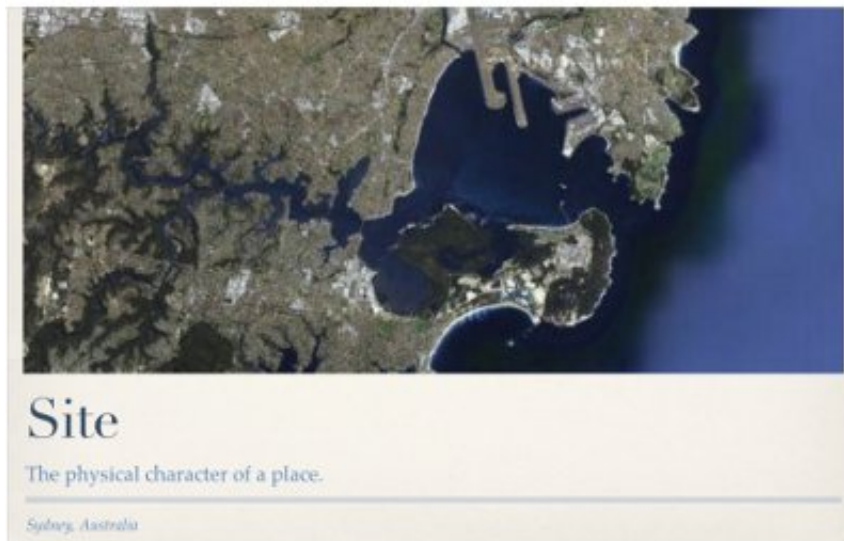
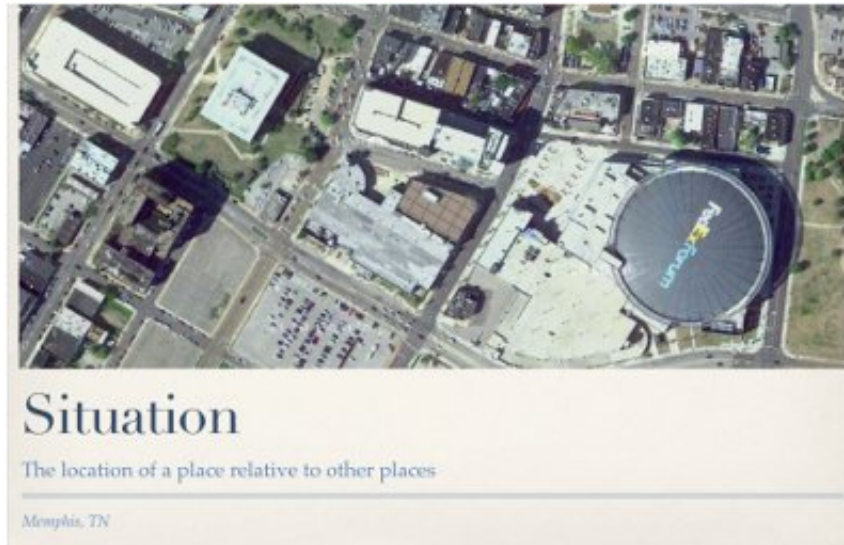
In my senior level class (17-18 year old students), part of the curriculum involves students in a class debate on a variety of topics, e.g., health care, personal freedoms, legalizing drugs, capital punishment, abortion, etc. Before the debates, we spend time in class discussing what vocabulary to use and how best to formulate and express one's opinion.

### **5. Advanced Placement (AP) Human Geography Exam**

I spend a great deal in my AP class discussing what particular words mean when used in an essay question on the AP exam. We discuss in class what is meant when the question says to "explain," "identify," "analyze," etc.

### **6. Advanced Placement (AP) Human Geography Vocabulary**

In teaching my AP Human Geography class, I spend a great deal of time teaching the vocabulary. I have found it helpful to have illustrations with the vocabulary word. I have found that this helps with understanding, and for the visual learners, it helps in their learning the meaning of the word and not just memorizing the meaning. See the examples below.



## 7. Required Class Participation

In my classes, I encourage my students to participate in class. The students each day must answer a daily question, and they can volunteer to give their answer during the class discussion of the question. I require my students to participate at least five times during the week. They have a weekly handout (worksheet) where they are to record their participation. When they record their participation, they must summarize what it was they said during class. I have found this an effective way to have all my students participate during the week, especially the shy students who rarely, if ever, say anything in class. As long as students

value their grade in class, they will make an effort to participate in class during the week.



*Mr. Michael Robinson has been a secondary social studies teacher for 18 years. Since 2003 he has taught at Houston High School in Germantown, Tennessee, where he teaches courses on cultural geography, world and national contemporary issues, and Holocaust studies. In 2010, he was the National Council for Social Studies Outstanding Social Studies Teacher 7-12 and the Tennessee National Council for the Social Studies Outstanding Social Studies Teacher 7-12. In 2011, he received the Margo Stern Strom Teaching Award from Facing History and Ourselves which included a grant to travel to Prague and Vienna for research in Holocaust studies. Since 1995 he has conducted over 60 in-service workshops for teachers in Shelby County Schools, Houston High School, Tennessee Geographic Alliance, and National Council for Geographic Education. His [webpage](#) contains a wealth of materials for Social Studies teachers.*