

# Social Studies

## Elementary School

1. The shortest war in history was between the United Kingdom and Zanzibar in 1896—it lasted thirty-eight minutes (Lagan, 2009).
2. Louis Braille invented Braille when he was just thirteen years old! He perfected the system by the time he was fifteen (Beyer, 2003).
3. In 1836, Mexican General Santa Anna held a state funeral for his leg (Burns & Ives, 2001).
4. Gertrude Ederle was the first woman to swim the English Channel. She did it in 1926, at a time when only five men had risen to the challenge. Her time was roughly fourteen and a half hours, which was better than the fastest man by roughly two hours (Smithsonian National Museum of American History, n.d.)!
5. In the eighteenth century, people didn't use clocks to tell time! They used the sun, the stars, and information in an almanac instead (Smithsonian National Museum of American History, 2007).

## Middle School

1. Eratosthenes (276–196 BC) was the first to use the word *geography*, and he measured—quite closely—the circumference of the Earth using little more than a shadow and a well (Davis, 1992).
2. Almost as many Americans fought *for* Britain in the Revolutionary War as fought *against* it. In 1780, there were nine thousand soldiers in Washington's army and eight thousand loyalist soldiers in the British army (Shenkman, 1988).
3. The *Mayflower* was originally headed for Virginia when a storm blew the ship all the way up to Massachusetts. Instead of making their way back down the coast though, the crew members landed at Plymouth Rock. Why? They had run out of beer. One of the first things they did upon landing was create a brewhouse (Beyer, 2003).
4. Bjarni Herjólfsson was trying to find Greenland when a series of storms blew his boat off course. When the weather cleared, he and his crew spotted land, but because it had neither mountains nor glaciers, he knew it wasn't Greenland. His crew desperately wanted him to land, but he didn't. He simply wanted to go home. Later, he told a friend the story of that trip. That friend was Leif Eriksson, and the land Herjólfsson ignored was the Americas (Beyer, 2003).
5. When Europe discovered coffee in the late 16th century, the Vatican believed it to be satanic. Pope Clement VIII tasted it and found it delicious. It is rumored that he lamented the infidels should be the only ones drinking it, so he gave coffee a papal blessing (Beyer, 2003).

## High School

1. Shortly before the collapse of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis authorized a diplomat to inform Britain and France that the Confederacy would emancipate the slaves in exchange for official recognition as an independent country (Shenkman, 1988).
2. In 1938, Hitler was voted *Time* magazine's Man of the Year. Stalin was voted Man of the Year in 1939 (*Time*, 2010).
3. In 1533, the Inca Empire was six million strong, and it was nearly twice the size of Texas. It also had an army of almost eight thousand men and a large supply of gold. Francisco Pizarro was a simple Spanish conquistador traveling with 150 men, but Pizarro was not intimidated. He persuaded the Incan Emperor Atahualpa to meet with him, and when the emperor arrived, Pizarro and his small army attacked. The ambush killed thousands and Pizarro captured Atahualpa. The surprise threw the Incans into disarray, and eventually Pizarro and his 150 men reduced the entire empire to ruins (Beyer, 2003).
4. In 1856, sixty Arab chieftains gathered in the French colony of Algeria. Why? The chieftains were from a local tribe who used magic tricks, such as fire-eating, to convince their followers to overthrow the French. The tricks proved the tribesmen had supernatural powers that could help them defeat the French and establish new leadership. The French asked famed magician Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin to perform for the chieftains to prove France was more powerful. During the performance, Robert-Houdin caught a bullet and made a member of the audience disappear, among other tricks. The audience was stunned. But Robert-Houdin didn't stop there. He sent out translators to explain how the tribesmen performed their tricks, thus stripping the chieftains of their "magic." The rebellion was squashed (Beyer, 2003).
5. It is quite possible that three cigars helped secure the Union victory in the American Civil War. How? When the Indiana regiment of the Union army stopped to rest in a place the Confederates had been a few days prior, a few soldiers discovered an envelope. Inside were three cigars wrapped in a piece of paper. While smoking, one of the soldiers idly opened that piece of paper and found the marching orders for General Lee's army. Clearly a Confederate had lost the envelope along the way. The orders were sent to General McClellan. As a result, the Confederates lost the Battle of Antietam—a key victory for the Union and the bloodiest single-day battle in the history of the United States (Beyer, 2003).

**References**

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