

## ***Abner Doubleday, Boy Baseball Pioneer*** **Teacher's Guide**

### **Introduction**

This Teacher's Guide provides a framework for using *Abner Doubleday, Boy Baseball Pioneer* in the classroom as a vehicle to engage students and weave literature into multiple content areas.

The Guide offers many suggestions for interdisciplinary activities that students can do before, during, and after they read the book. These learner-centered activities help students move from solely a comprehension, or knowledge-based way of thinking about historical fiction, to higher levels of critical thought that include analysis and evaluation.

### **Before Reading**

1. Before starting any unit of study, it's a good idea to assess what students already know, or think they know, about the subject. If students have at least some knowledge of Doubleday or his accomplishments, draw a three-column chart on the blackboard with the headings: *What We Know About Abner Doubleday*, *What We Want to Know*, and *What We Learned*.
2. Ask students to respond only to the first two columns. After reading the book and doing some or all of the After Reading activities, revisit the chart with the class to complete the third column (*What We Learned*) and to correct any erroneous information in the first column.
3. If students have no knowledge of Doubleday or his accomplishments, you can have them begin reading the book without any prior discussion, or you can review the historical timeframe that the book covers (approximately 1825 to 1840). There are several mentions in the book of important events in American history, including the Revolutionary War, Bunker Hill, and the Declaration of Independence. Additionally, in the *What Happened Next?* section at the end of the book, students learn that Doubleday fought in several famous Civil War battles. You might want to create a timeline of all referenced historical events or have students create their own as they read through the book.

### **During Reading**

While many teachers prefer that students read a book without interruption, others opt to conduct mini-assessments along the way.

1. Have students keep an ongoing literature journal in which they can write about what they're reading and keep an ongoing vocabulary list of

unfamiliar words or phrases. You might also wish to provide writing prompts to help students think about what they're reading and to make connections to their own lives. Example writing prompts:

- What are some of Abner's qualities, or personality traits that you think helped to shape who he became as an adult? What personality traits did he have that you didn't like? Why? What are some of YOUR best qualities, or traits of which you are most proud?
  - As you read the book, what kinds of conclusions can you make about whether or not the story of Abner's life is true? Do you think some events were made up just to tell an entertaining story? What specific examples in the book can you find to support your ideas?
  - In *Who Invented Baseball?*, at the end of the book, the author writes that she doesn't think Abner invented the game of baseball, but that he was just one of many boys who loved and played the game and who contributed to it becoming the game we play today. Do you agree with the author? Why or why not?
2. As students read the book, be sure to keep a world map posted so that they can identify each city, state, and country mentioned.
  3. As they read, have students identify figures of speech (e.g., metaphors and similes), phrases of alliteration, analogies, and language of the time period (e.g., *make a tally*).

## After Reading

Historical fiction provides wonderful opportunities to weave and blend literature into many different content areas in meaningful ways. Following are a handful of ways for you to integrate a study of Abner Doubleday in your classroom. Although they are organized by content areas, we encourage you to move across content lines to blend them in natural ways AND to encourage your students to conduct further research on any specific topics of interest.

Assessment: All of the activities can be assessed in traditional ways (i.e., with quizzes and letter grading systems) to determine how well students can memorize and can recount facts. However, since these activities are rooted in discovery, discussion, communication, and collaboration, they lend themselves to more holistic types of assessment that measure achievement of academic skills, behaviors, and even social/emotional growth. We encourage you to use one or more of the following alternative assessments as students complete the activities.

- **Portfolios**—Keep one portfolio of work for each student to measure progress over a specific period of time. Portfolios are a great aid for both student/teacher and parent/teacher conferences. Encourage students to participate in selecting samples of writing, artwork, research notes, etc. to be included in their portfolios.
- **Rubrics**— Create a rubric, or chart (with or without grades or a numerical grading scale) to assess whether or not students have met specific standards and learning goals that you have previously identified.
- **Self-Assessment**—Hold regular teacher/student interviews to listen to students evaluate their own progress and skills.
- **Peer-Assessment**—Have students give and receive constructive feedback to assess such things as collaborative group work and to critique writing.
- **Anecdotal Notes**—As students work individually or in teams, make informal observations of how they solve problems, think critically, conduct research, work with others, and synthesize newly learned information. Add your notes to students' portfolios and share them during parent/teacher conferences.

### Language Arts Connections

1. In Chapter 3, Abner's mother checks weather forecasts in *Phinney's Almanac*, a popular pre-Civil War publication which was actually called *Phinney's Calendar*, or *Western Almanac*. It included such content as year-long weather forecasts, phases of the moon, short stories, jokes, wise sayings, and advertisements for medicinal products. Bring to class examples of modern day almanacs, such as *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, still in publication. (Students can also visit the publication's website: <http://www.almanac.com>.) Then ask students to create their own class almanac. Divide students into teams to write and illustrate various sections, including weather predictions, wise sayings or advice, puzzles, jokes, riddles, healthy snack recipes, etc.
2. In Chapter 3, students get a glimpse of what families did together in the 1800s, without television and video games for entertainment! They spent time together, telling and re-telling family stories. Ask students to write any family story that they wish to share with the class. It can be similar to the one Abner listened to (about his namesake), or about a family pet, friend, relative, special event, or anything else. Then have students read their stories aloud to one another.
3. In Chapter 5, Abner translates Latin into English. Have students learn common Latin (and Greek) root words. Create a class chart showing the root word, its meaning, and examples of modern English words. Example: the Latin root word *fac* means *to do or make*, as in *factory* and *manufacture*.

4. Discuss ways in which the author sets the time period and includes historical events and people in the text. Have students try their own hands at writing short historical fiction.
5. After completing the WebQuest to create a personal baseball card (see Social Studies Connections, #1), host a baseball trading card game by having students try to match each card's autobiographical information to the correct student. Collect all students' cards and read aloud all information— except for the student's name. Be sure to hide the photo or illustration from the class so they can't see a picture of the student you're describing!
6. In Chapter 10, Abner read James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*. Although the reading level of this book is well beyond elementary level, you may wish to have students read abridged versions or select parts of chapters online to read aloud and discuss:  
<http://www.americanliterature.com/LM/LMINDX.HTML>.
7. Abner's father edited the local newspaper. Have students take on the role of reporters to write articles for his newspaper about one of Abner's baseball games or a real class baseball game. Guide them to include terms and phrases that describe the game's action and statistical results. If they're writing about one of Abner's games, remind them to use the correct terminology of the time period (e.g., *He tried to reach the tally post.*).
8. The *What Does It Mean?* vocabulary list at the end of the book is a good starting place. But as your students read, they may find additional words that they don't know. Ask each student to keep a vocabulary list of all unfamiliar words and then use a dictionary to learn the definition(s) of each.

### **Social Studies Connections**

1. Have students work individually or in pairs to complete the **WebQuest**. They will follow website links to gather information about and see samples of baseball cards—historical and modern—and then create an autobiographical baseball card.
2. The story contains historical references to several major events in American history (i.e., the battle of Bunker Hill, Revolutionary War, Stoney Point, the Declaration of Independence) and notable people in history (i.e., General Lafayette, Captain Abner Doubleday, Ulysses Doubleday, the "Jackson Democrats"). Divide students into teams to conduct research and write about these important events and people. Compile all writing into a class American History Guide, complete with a timeline.

3. Encourage students to delve more deeply into life in the 1800s. What was daily life like for boys and girls? What was happening around North America and the world during the time Abner was growing up? (Examples include the westward movement, the building of canals and expansion of the railroad, the slavery debate and abolitionist movement.)
4. Students may wish to conduct research on and share information about the Civil War battles that the adult Abner fought in, including the battles of Gettysburg, Antietam, and Fort Sumter.
5. Conduct research, in books and on the Internet, to learn more about the history of baseball. (Students may wish to visit the National Baseball Hall of Fame Museum website: <http://www.baseballhalloffame.org>), Use the story as a reference by reminding students of the evolution of the game Abner played with his friends: *one old cat*, *town ball*, and eventually *baseball*.
6. Play class baseball games using rules for early versions of the game, such as *town ball*, which was adapted from the British game of *rounders*. Rules can be found at the Baseball Rules: Past and Present site: <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/rulestown.shtml> or the Vintage Baseball Rules and Customs site: <http://www.vbba.org/rules>.
7. Learn the history of the National and American Baseball Leagues. Visit the Major League Baseball website: <http://mlb.mlb.com/NASApp/mlb/index.jsp>

## Science Connections

1. Baseball and physics go hand in glove! For example, the angle and speed of the ball has a whole lot to do with successful pitching, hitting, and catching in the game of baseball. [When catching the ball, if a player moves his gloved hand back (instead of keeping it stationary when the ball hits it), it will cushion the impact (decrease momentum) and help to minimize the force.] Even the stitches on a baseball connect to science. Curve balls curve because of a baseball's stitching and the physics of friction and turbulence! (In Chapter 1, Abner asks his mother to re-sew his ball because "...it won't throw straight.") Have students work in pairs to investigate the physics of energy and momentum, friction and turbulence and how they relate to the game of baseball. They can find simple experiments in science texts and/or visit the Exploratorium: Science of Baseball website: <http://www.exploratorium.edu/baseball>

2. Challenge students to think of how understanding the science behind baseball might help someone become a better player.
3. Students can investigate the muscular and skeletal system of the body by playing a game of baseball! Which bones, joints, and muscles do we use when we run or throw and catch a ball? If desired, have teams record the number of hits, runs, etc. each student makes in the game. These statistics can be used on students' personal baseball cards. (See Social Studies Connections ,#1) and/or in word problems (see Mathematics Connections, #2.)
4. In the book, we learn about Abner's interest in and talent for making maps. In Chapters 5 and 6, Abner's maps of landmarks helped him and others find their way in and out of the woods. Have students create their own maps of the classroom or school, identifying a starting point and an ending point that they want someone else to find. They should draw symbols for at least three things in the class or on school grounds. When done, students can trade their maps to see if others can use them successfully to find the designated landmarks. Extend the activity further by having students add a compass rose and key to their maps.
5. The story mentions the cold winters (and one cold, snowy July) in Abner's home town of Auburn, New York. Have students create a Venn diagram to compare the ways in which the Doubleday family warmed their home and themselves with the ways in which we do so today.

### **Mathematics Connections**

1. The game of baseball is filled with mathematical connections—everything from the diamond shape of the field, to the statistical data kept on professional players that are published in newspapers, on television, and on baseball cards. Ask students to bring in the Sports sections of local newspapers to read and evaluate the kinds of statistics kept on individual players, teams, and baseball leagues. Have them learn meanings behind such common baseball statistics as “earned run average” (ERA) and “runs batted in” (RBI).
2. Have students create baseball board games and keep statistics on each of “the players.” (See Arts Connections, #2 for board game instructions.) These board game statistical results can be used to create word problems (e.g., “What were the lowest and highest batting averages of Player 1?”).
3. Have students conduct research to determine the rules of balls' measurements in professional baseball. (Their circumference must measure between 9 and 9.25 inches.) Then measure school baseballs or softballs to see if each would

meet professional regulations. Extend this activity by teaching students to measure diameter and radius.

4. Take a class or school poll to determine favorite baseball teams. Students can tally, graph, and post the results.

### **Arts Connections**

1. Create a mural on a large sheet of butcher paper to illustrate each chapter of the book. There are many detailed descriptions of scenes that students can envision and put on paper. Divide students into pairs or groups of three to create different segments of the class mural.
2. Make a baseball-themed game board. Students can play the game and use the generated “player” statistics in math activities. (See Mathematics Connections, #2.) Divide teams into pairs or small groups to make up a game board on cardboard or heavy stock card. They must draw the baseball diamond, bases, home plate, etc. Students can use dice or a spinner to represent a pitch. The class will need to determine what each roll of two dice or spinner will represent. (Example: a roll or spin of 2 is a single, roll or spin of 9 is a home run.) After a roll or spin “pitch,” the student moves a marker around the baseball diamond, according to the type of hit, run, foul ball, strikeout, etc. made. Have students keep a careful log of the game in order to use the statistical data in math activities, if desired.
3. Dramatize, in short skits, any of the historic events mentioned in the book.
4. In Chapter 3, students learn that candles, not electric light bulbs, were used to light the Doubleday house. Have students make their own candles. Simple instructions for safely melting and molding wax into candles can be found in most art and craft books. Or, visit the My Craft Book website:  
[http://www.mycraftbook.com/Candle\\_Making.asp](http://www.mycraftbook.com/Candle_Making.asp)
5. Make miniature clay or papier mâché models of the stage coach described in Chapters 5 and 6.
6. Students can practice doing some hand sewing as Abner’s mother did.