

George Rogers Clark: Boy of the Northwest Frontier Teacher's Guide

Introduction

This Teacher's Guide provides a framework for using *George Rogers Clark: Boy of the Northwest Frontier* 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 Clark or his accomplishments, draw a three-column chart on the blackboard with the headings: *What We Know About George Rogers Clark*, *What We Want to Know*, and *What We Learned*. You might also wish to design a similar chart about what students already know and wish to learn about the *Northwest Frontier*.

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.

2. If students have no knowledge of Clark or his accomplishments, you can have them begin reading the book without any prior discussion, or you can review the historical time frame that the book covers: approximately 1757 to 1779. This period covers such events as the French and Indian War (1754-1763), the Stamp Act (1765), Boston Tea Party (1775), Declaration of Independence (1776), and of course, the American Revolution (1775-1783). (Additionally, in Chapter 9, the 1804-1806 Lewis and Clark expedition is mentioned briefly, when discussing what became of George Clark's younger brother, William.) Help students to keep track of the chronology of all of these historical events by creating a class timeline or having them create their own individual timelines.

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 of writing prompts:
 - What impact did George's childhood experiences have on his life as an adult? How did they shape his views about life? What kinds of experiences have you had in your life that have shaped your views about things?
 - What were some of George's qualities, or personality traits that you think helped to shape who he became as an adult? (Students might identify such traits as resourcefulness, courage, or a desire to explore the unknown.) 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 the way George viewed the wilderness? What specific examples in the book can you find to support your conclusion?
2. As students read the book, be sure to keep a world map posted so that they can identify each region 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.

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 Georges Rogers Clark 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. The book is filled with quite a few expressions commonly used during the 1700s, including (Chapter 1) “He sat his pony well,” (Chapter 7) “Chip off the old block,” and (Chapter 7) “The West is a bonny land” Have students work in pairs to create booklets of expressions or figures of speech that were popular during George’s lifetime, along with their meanings. Then create a comparative list of expressions, with meanings, that are popular today.
2. In Chapter 2, the baby raccoon turned out to be the “best medicine” for George’s ill sister. Ask students to write about a “best medicine” they ever had given to them—one that didn’t involve ingesting real medicine at all.
3. In Chapter 7, as George expresses his yearning for the wilderness and exploration, his grandfather tells George that he thinks, “...that most of your schooling will be from the book of nature—nature itself.” Ask students to write about their own yen for learning outside the school walls. What interests them the most? What might they do to start learning more about their passions? (For example, students might decide that they could do what George did—apprenticing with someone who already works in the field about which they are interested in learning.)
4. Have students take on the role of a character during this time period to write fictional journal entries about daily life.

5. In Chapter 4, when describing Kentucky, Mr. Lawrence says, “The land beyond those mountains ought to be explored.” Help students understand that during this period of history, the west had not yet been explored at all. Ask students if they can think of any places that have still not been explored entirely today. (Examples might include the polar regions, deep oceans, and space.) Then write a story about what it might be like to explore one of those regions.
6. In Chapter 4, George meets and wrestles with Atalpa, a Native American boy who is being raised by Mr. Lawrence. Atalpa nicknames George “Big Knife” in reference to Kentucky trappers. Ask students to write nicknames for themselves that describe accomplishments or future goals and then explain to classmates what the name means.
7. According to the Indiana Historical Bureau, when Clark died in 1818 at age 62, Judge John Rowan memorialized Clark saying: “The mighty oak of the forest has fallen, and now the scrub oaks may sprout all around...The father of the western country is no more.” Have students write a short summary of what they think the Judge’s memorial meant.
8. Although it is not mentioned in the book, frontiersmen (adults and children) often held spelling bee competitions, watched by the whole community, as one might watch a competitive sport. Have students conduct research to learn more about spelling bees of the time period and then hold one themselves using regular spelling lists and/or any new vocabulary from the story.

Social Studies Connections

1. Have students work individually or in pairs to complete the **WebQuest** by following links to gather information about the history of petitions submitted to Virginia’s House of Burgesses. Once they’ve read some descriptions and samples, they are asked to write their own petition to the teacher for a change they would like to see happen in their class or in the school. Remind students that petitions must address real issues. For example, a student might write a petition to start recycling paper goods in the classroom, or to hold regular class votes on certain issues.

Once petitions are submitted, you may choose to have the class vote on some or all of the requested changes and then implement as many of them as possible.

2. The story makes references to counties and other regions, but there is no mention of where these regions are located. For example, in Chapter 1, there is mention of Albemarle County, Shadwell, and Tidewater, but there is never a mention of Virginia where they are/were all located. Instead of providing the

information to students, challenge them to use maps and to conduct Internet research on the life of George Rogers Clark to discover it on their own. Once they determine that Clark was raised in Virginia, have them research historical maps of Virginia and compare them to modern day maps. Ask students to also determine whether or not Virginia was a state yet when Clark was a child. (It was not. Virginia did not earn statehood until 1788.)

3. The book is filled with historical references to several major places and events in American history (e.g., Williamsburg, Fredericksburg, House of Burgesses, Stamp Act, Revolutionary War, War of 1812) as well as notable people (e.g., Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Patrick Henry, Lewis and Clark). Divide students into teams to conduct research and write about these important events and people. Compile all writing into a class American History Guide.
4. Although it is only briefly mentioned in the story, George's younger brother (William) grows up to be the William Clark of Lewis and Clark fame. 2003 to 2006 mark the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial, a celebration of their "Corps of Discovery" expedition 200 years ago, to find and map a water route to the Pacific Ocean. Many states along the trail are planning special celebrations. Check [the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Web site](#) for the latest news, information, and educational materials related to George's little brother.
5. Divide students into teams of three to learn more about colonial life. Have each team research one region: Southern Colonies (Virginia, Georgia, Maryland, North and South Carolina), New England Colonies (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Connecticut), and Middle Colonies (New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware). Create a large Venn diagram (interlocking circles) comparing daily life in each region.
6. Older students can conduct research on the status of Native Americans and African slaves during the mid to late 1700s. Although the story infers that the Native Americans and slaves that George knows are all happy and got along well, the reality was that Native Americans were oppressed (and in many instances massacred) by settlers. Slaves working the plantations in southern colonies (including the Clark family plantation), of course, were not happy, docile people who enjoyed being owned. Students might also wish to learn the roles of Native Americans and slaves during the Revolutionary War.
7. Bring history alive in the classroom by using primary sources. Students can read such handwritten, original documents as:
 - letters from George Rogers Clark to George Washington
 - letters to and from Clark's childhood friend, Thomas Jefferson
 - a statement written by Clark's physician concerning his health
 - a variety of letters from Virginia delegates to the Continental Congress

To access these resources, go to [the Library of Congress American Memory](#) site. Type "George Rogers Clark" into the Search window to find all related items in the *Thomas Jefferson Papers*, *Century of Lawmaking*, *First American West*, and *George Washington Papers* Collections.

Additional primary sources related to Clark are contained at the [Indiana Historical Bureau](#).

8. The occupation of Kaskaskia and battle at Vincennes, described in Chapter 10, were important historical events that eventually led to the Treaty of Paris in 1783. Have students learn more about the events, the Treaty, and Clark's role in all of it.

Science Connections

1. In Chapter 1, George offers his baby sister some *barley sugar* to try to stop her crying during the long journey to Tidewater. Barley sugar was a popular sweet that was also often used for upset stomachs and sore throats. It was originally made by boiling refined cane sugar, adding barley water (for coloring), and then twisting the mixture into long strips as it cooled. Have students make their own barley sugar to sample. Older students can analyze the chemistry behind the making of the candy, including learning the simple properties of starches (barley) and sugars and investigating why it might have been used medicinally. (Science textbooks are a good place to find such data.)

Barley Sugar Recipe: Cook 9 oz. hulled barley in water for about 5 hours on a low to medium heat. Strain out the resulting thickened liquid and return the remaining barley water to the pot. (Discard the thickened barley or use in another recipe.) Add 2 1/4 pounds granulated sugar and stir over a low heat until completely dissolved. Boil the mixture until it reaches 150° C (300° F) on a candy thermometer. Pour out the mixture onto an oiled cookie sheet. As it cools, cut into long strips and twist them. Let cool and harden before eating.

2. In Chapter 4, Mr. Lawrence points out to George the Blue Ridge Mountains. After identifying the mountain range on a current map of the United States, have students work together to research and report on the ecology and biodiversity of this majestic mountain range. Ask students to discover how the mountain range first formed millions of years ago. They might be surprised to discover a volcanic connection!
3. In Chapter 5, on their hunting trip, George's father determines the direction of the wind by letting leaves fall from his fingers. Have students try this

themselves to see if it works (on a breezy day) and then design a more scientific method: wind socks. Make them by bending a clothes hanger (or florist's wire) to form a circle wide enough to fit the open end of a long nylon stocking. (You can also use a piece of lightweight fabric.) Bend the nylon over the wire, glue, and let dry. Poke four small holes in the fabric near the top of the wire and tie four strings onto it. Attach the strings to a pole, the top of a fence, or a tree limb. Watch and record which way the sock blows every two hours. If desired, use a compass to determine the exact direction of the wind.

4. In Chapter 6, when George spends a night alone in the woods, he sees or thinks he sees several animals including squirrels, raccoons, possums, and a panther. Learn about these and other animals that lived in Virginia during George's childhood and compare to the species that remain in the region today. Are any species now endangered or extinct? If so, what was the cause?
5. Discuss or hold a class debate about the difference between hunting for survival (food and clothing) and hunting for sport. Ask students what they think George's father meant (in Chapter 5) when he said to George, after he killed his first deer: "You have respect for life. I hope you always have that respect."

Mathematics Connections

1. Develop math skills through cooking by having students make recipes of the time period, including corncakes, mentioned in Chapter 4.

Corncakes Recipe:

Ingredients: 2 cups corn meal, 1 tablespoon molasses, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1 tablespoon butter, 1 cup gently boiled milk.

Directions: Mix the first three ingredients in a mixing bowl. In a saucepan, add the butter to the milk and bring to a quick boil. Remove from heat and slowly add the milk mixture to the corn meal mixture, beating into a stiff dough. Let the dough cool and then form into thin, flat rounds. Oil a baking sheet and bake the corncakes for about 20 minutes or until golden brown.

2. Use graph paper to create maps of all the regions identified in the book.
3. Have students learn more about surveying and mapping, Clark's chosen profession. Help them to understand that during Colonial times, the public land survey system used a system called "metes and bounds" to create boundaries based on such physical land features as trees, fences, or roads. It wasn't until the Land Ordinance of 1785 that grid surveys were introduced, dividing land into parcels by grids or square/rectangular regions.

(Interestingly, many eastern states, Texas, and Hawaii still use the metes and bounds method of surveying.)

Students may also wish to conduct research on modern methods, including Geographic Information Systems (GIS) which is used to create digital, computerized maps using global positioning systems.

Invite to class a surveyor to demonstrate surveying methods and tools on school grounds. Students can use rope to “survey” by marking off a grid system on the school yard and then computing the area of each square or rectangle in the grid. Students can also use triangulation to measure distances on the school yard or design a simple sighting device using a ruler and protractor. (Many math textbooks contain instructions.)

Arts Connections

1. Create shoebox dioramas of any scene described in the book.
2. Make corncob dolls, popular with children (like George’s sister) during the 1700s. Remove the husk and corn silk from an ear of corn, saving both to be used later. Cut the cob in half, so each student has a half of an ear of corn for their doll’s body. Use sticks, toothpicks, popsicle sticks and other readily available materials to form arms and legs. Use pebbles or small stones for eyes and glue into place. Glue corn silk onto the doll’s head to make its hair and create clothes from the green corn husk (or use fabric scraps).
3. Make other traditional crafts of the time period including apple dolls, embroidery samplers, and pomander balls (oranges or apples covered with whole spices, including allspice, cloves, and nutmeg).
4. In Chapter 1, George mentions a mill and a paddle wheel. Although we have no details of the type of mill it was, nor what the paddle wheel was doing, students can conduct research and make educated guesses about what the mill might have been. Challenge students to make model paddle wheels using such readily available materials as milk cartons and popsicle sticks. Test in basins of water to see if they work!
5. Create a mural on a large sheet of butcher paper to illustrate each chapter of the book.
6. Students can conduct research to learn more about the design of pole, or log cabins which were popular homes in the frontier because they could be built relatively quickly using readily available materials. They can then build models of log cabins using popsicle sticks.