

# A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO MIDDLE GRADE NONFICTION



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Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7  
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## Two Superior Leaders, Two Fantastic Biographies!

Best-selling author Kenneth C. Davis weaves a smooth, flowing narrative into his trademark question-and-answer format, peppering these fresh biographies with informational sidebars and compelling quotes.

## Introduction

Learning occurs best when we make the information real, relevant, and readily retained. This can be accomplished by building upon a child's prior knowledge and relating the facts to the specific reality of the child. Kenneth C. Davis provides a wealth of information in his DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT® book series that lends itself to very meaningful lessons for young people. Here Mr. Davis delves into the world of biography. His texts are wonderful classroom tools that take children beyond what they may typically learn about George Washington and Sitting Bull, thereby making the information real, relevant, and certainly readily retained.



## Pre-Reading Activity

The subject matter of these books lends itself perfectly for a K-W-L chart (What I Know; What I Want to Know; and What I Learned). George Washington is studied in schools so often, as is Native American culture, that it may be interesting to see what students enter under the "What I Know" column of the class chart. To ignite this activity, read several questions that the author has presented throughout the book (e.g. True or False? Washington wore false teeth made of wood, page 110). Davis writes the DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT® books in a manner that enlightens readers with many little-known facts, so this is an ideal pre-reading activity.

## Setting the Stage

Set the stage for either or both of the books by collecting items, artifacts, pictures, related stories, music, and books that relate to the time period in question (i.e., Native American artifacts, pre-Revolutionary war). Work with the students to transform the room into a museum. By hanging pictures and reading related stories, the students will begin to experience the culture. Research web sites and organizations that specialize in American and Native American culture for ideas. The older children should be called upon to research this part to provide a sense of ownership and learning empowerment. Hold a discussion about the Lakota tribe, in which truth and bravery are valued traits. Explain to students that this is the behavior to model and then use this as a springboard to discuss community. Another option is to teach both books at the same time, noting differences and similarities of both cultures.

## Apparel-ly Not

Divide the class in half. Half of the class will find information about the clothing worn by Native American children, while the other half will find out what children of George Washington's day wore. Each group will report back to the rest of the class. Create a Venn diagram to show the differences and similarities in the clothing of both groups in comparison to today. This can be done for food, medicine, hygiene, games, etc.



## Words of Origin

"Both skunk and squash came from Indian words." (page 19 of DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT GEORGE WASHINGTON) Write the list of words on page 19 on chart paper. Mix in words from Latin and Greek origins as well. Discuss the origins of words. Then have students look for other such words when studying DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT SITTING BULL and add them to the chart. Challenge students to always be looking for words of Indian origin to add to the class wall chart.

# In the Classroom

## with Sitting Bull

The story of Sitting Bull is more than an individual's biography. It is the story of a nation of people, their way of life, rise to greatness, and eventual clash with western civilization that proved to be their demise. One cannot study Sitting Bull, the man, without studying the culture that formed him and that which defeated him. Sitting Bull and the story of the Native American should be carefully examined.

### What's in a Name?

Sitting Bull had many names throughout his life. Each had meaning to him. Have students research their full name. Find out why they were named this. What is the meaning of the name? Then have them create a name tag using pictures describing the qualities of their name (e.g. David means king...draw a crown.) As an alternative activity, ask each child to think about his/her most dominant trait and then make up a Native American name for it. Have each child illustrate his/her new Native American name and share it with the rest of the class. Make it into a book or post it on a bulletin board and have it be the new class roster.

### On the Road Again

Using maps from long ago (which can be obtained from the Internet), have students figure out how far in miles the Lakota traveled on foot when moving camp. Create a map with a key indicating the findings. As a writing extension, ask students to imagine that their family is moving and they will travel by travois. You can only take what you can carry. List what you would take with you and why. Share with the class.



### A Book a Mile

As an extension to the On the Road Again activity, have students calculate the miles traveled by the Lakota to reach summer or winter quarters. Consider each mile as one book or chapter of a longer book. Challenge the class to read as many books as miles traveled. This can serve as a way to promote reading throughout the year.

### Being SENSE-able

Lakota children develop keen senses at an early age. Have each student wear a blindfold, or have them close their eyes. Ask them to listen to the school sounds for a minute or so. Then make a list of all the sounds they heard. Try this again outside. They can also listen to a recording of various sounds that Slow might have heard as a child (i.e., horses, drums, chanting, fire, birds, owls, wolves, etc.) to try to decipher what they are.

### Worth a Thousand Words

Review the Lakota calendar, called a "winter count," on page 15. Try to find other examples of Lakota calendars to show students. Then have students write a story in the conventional way. It can be about a birthday, a vacation, their family, a sporting event, etc. Then have them convert their story to Lakota pictures. Display them on a bulletin board backed with paper or fabric resembling buffalo or deer hides.

### Proud to Be Me

Slow killed his first buffalo at age ten. This made him very famous and proud. Ask students if there is something they have done that they are proud of. How old were they when they accomplished it? Why is this important to them? How will it help them as adults? Students may wish to make this an entry in a Proud to Be Me journal.

### My Hero

Sitting Bull proved his bravery many times in the face of great danger. As a result he became a great hero to his people. Discuss the qualities that a hero possesses. Have students write about someone they consider to be a hero. What did this person do to gain respect as a hero?

## Hindsight is 20/20

Using historical accounts of specific battles during the Indian Wars, research what happened during each. Pretend you are newspaper reporters of the time and write accounts. Compare the tones of those written by students today and those from long ago. Discuss “yellow journalism” and freedom of the press. Do we have any incidents of bias in news today?



## The Rest of the Story

Have students research old news articles and stories of Native Americans. Read the pieces aloud and discuss the tone of the story and what happened. Then collect stories from the native perspective. (Ask the school librarian for help finding such stories.) How do they differ? How are they the same? See if there are issues in the present day that can be discussed in a similar manner (e.g., Palestine, Taiwan). Then using a specific story from DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT® SITTING BULL, ask students to write a newspaper article trying to hold true to the perspective of the Native American.

## Lessons Learned

Brainstorm with students an agreeable alternative to the one that history shows us with regard to Native Americans. Was there any way to avoid what happened to these people? Are there any issues alive today that could fall into this category (e.g. Middle East, Ireland, Pakistan)? Have students start keeping a current events folder that follows these events closely. Discuss these matters and see if lessons learned from Sitting Bull's story can help.

## He Said/He Said

Collect quotes from Native Americans and white Americans prominent during the 1800's, such as the quotes from Sitting Bull and Horace Greeley on page 60. Discuss perspectives on different subject matter (e.g. land ownership, buffalo use, development). Using graphic organizers, try to arrive at common ground or resolution on some of the major issues. For students in older grades, hold a class debate over the issues at hand.

## Clothes Make the Man

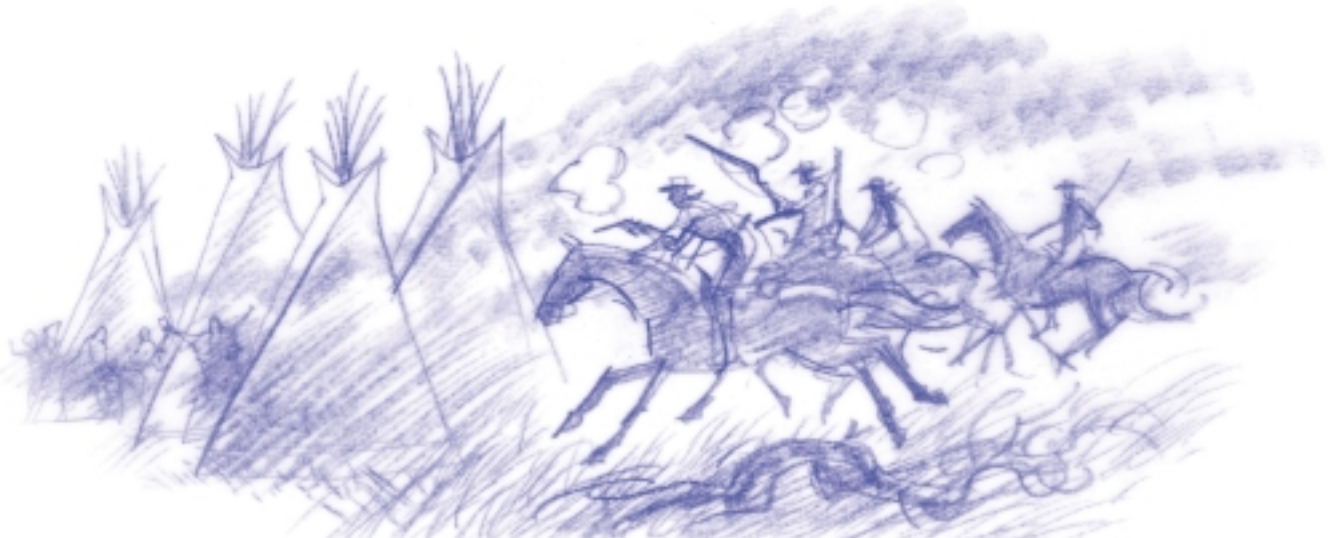
Research and collect pictures of various styles of Native American ceremonial dress. Compare it to ceremonial dress and uniforms of soldiers throughout history (e.g. knights, soldiers, royalty). Compare what they wore and reasons for it.

## Living in a New Path

Discuss reservation life and the differences between reservation life and life prior. Why was it so hard on the Native Americans? Then have students talk with people two generations before them in age, possibly a grandparent. Ask them to discuss how life has changed since then. Have students share their findings with the class. Now discuss with students what it must have been like for the next generations of Native Americans to have to abandon their culture so completely. What do they think they would do under the same circumstances?

## Rise to the Future

In order to get firsthand information on the rebuilding of these cultures, contact Native American tribal organizations and, if possible, arrange a classroom visit. See how, although assimilated, these people keep their culture alive for the next generation. Discuss tolerance and conflict resolution with students. Perhaps a student who is Native American or has Native American blood can share his/her heritage and background with the class.



## In the Classroom

### with George Washington

DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT® GEORGE WASHINGTON is a precursor to DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT® SITTING BULL, in that it examines America in its nascence and the philosophy which drove the people of the day to create our nation. It shows that while cultural differences do exist between western man and the Native American, there is reason and ideology of merit that has sustained our nation and—good, bad, or indifferent—made us what we are today. It is our task to take history's lessons and help students apply them to a global society that in essence is not much different than Colonial America.

#### The Cherry Tree—True or False?

The myth of the cherry tree is both true and fictional (page 7). Read one of Aesop's fables or any of the Greek myths and consider how a story that never happened in one sense can still be true in another sense. What does the moral of a fable tell us?

#### The Lakota's View on Truth

The myth of the cherry tree is an example of something that can happen to all of us. Kenneth Davis writes in DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT SITTING BULL, "Telling and remembering the truth was important to them [Lakota]." (page 14.) Hold a class discussion about an instance in your own life when you were in trouble and were faced with the decision to either tell the truth or lie. Why is it sometimes harder to tell the truth? Why is it always better to tell the truth? Why did the Lakota people believe so strongly in the truth? Should we model our behavior after them?

#### IN-dependence

The word independence is used quite often in this book. Look up the definition of the word dependence and the word independence and explain what the prefix in- does to a word. Look up five more in- words and their opposites (dispensable/indispensable; active/inactive; considerate/inconsiderate).

#### Coming to America

Was the "Father of the Country" born in America? (page 8.) Have students interview someone in their family or circle of friends who was born in a country other than the United States. Here are some questions they might ask:

- Who are you?
- Where were you born?
- Why and when did you move from there to here?
- How is the USA similar to your native land?
- How is it different?

#### Free Markets or Controlled Markets?

Great Britain imposed oppressive trade restrictions on America to benefit itself and keep America weak. Present the following example to the class as an example of controlled markets.

Your Boy or Girl Scout Troop is selling candy for a fundraiser to go to Florida. Your den mother/father sets down a rule that you can only sell chocolate in your own neighborhood. Will you sell more or less chocolate following this rule than if you were allowed to sell chocolate in all the neighborhoods you know of in your community? Discuss why or why not.

Then ask students if England was helping or hurting the colonies by demanding that the colonies trade only with it. How would this affect the colonies' chances of growing rich and prosperous and therefore more independent? Adam Smith is mentioned as one of the famous people in Washington's lifetime (page 106.) After reading about his life and thoughts, ask if he would have approved or disapproved of England's controls over American trade. Why?



## First in War

The Continental army was in bad shape when Washington took over. He had lots of work to do to whip this rag-tag army into shape. What would it be like to be a soldier in such an army? Have students write a persuasive letter to George Washington explaining the conditions and problems the army suffers and requesting some changes that would improve the situation. Surprise students with a response from George himself!

## The Declaration of Independence

Make your own Declaration of \_\_\_\_\_ for your classroom. Discuss the language and meaning of the Declaration of Independence. As a class ad-lib the Declaration of Independence and post it in the classroom. Hold students to the words and “contract” of the declaration.

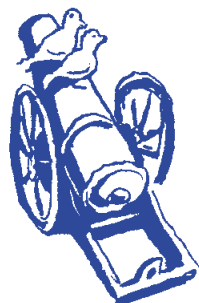
We, the class of \_\_\_\_\_, hold these \_\_\_\_\_ to be self-evident that all \_\_\_\_\_ are created \_\_\_\_\_ and that they are endowed by their creator with \_\_\_\_\_, that among these are \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_.

## What Were They Thinking?

Every painting has a story. Each observer of a painting can derive his/her own story from that painting. Ask students to carefully examine the painting of Washington Crossing the Delaware (page 65), then have them write a cartoon bubble over each of the men’s heads. Students should write using the expressions, dress, position, and posture of those in the painting as clues.

## Caught between a Rock and a Hard Place

There are many sayings that we sometimes hear and don’t understand. If we think about them, however, these sayings sometimes can sum up with a few words a lot of information. Have students re-read the way Cornwallis was defeated at Yorktown (pages 80–82) and explain why the saying “caught between a rock and a hard place” sums up his military defeat.



## The World Turned Upside Down

The British could not believe the rag-tag army of America could defeat them. The British were so taken aback that they thought the world could sooner be turned upside down than the great and powerful British empire be brought low by the colonists. The song that the British military band played in reaction contained lyrics filled with contradiction. A contradiction is a phrase that disagrees with common sense, like this phrase from the song “The World Turned Upside Down,”: “boats on land, churches on sea.” Ask students if they can think of three more contradictions that would describe a world turned upside down. Here is another example: clouds on the ground and mud in the sky.

## Democracy or Monarchy?

Have students define the words democracy and monarchy. Discuss the difference between the two terms. Then have students complete the following sentences. They can write their responses. Use their responses to segue into a class discussion about presidency vs. monarchy, parliament vs. congress, etc. Create a Venn diagram to show the similarities and differences between the two forms of government.

In a democracy the leader is called a *president/king*?

George the III was a *president/king* while George Washington was America’s first *president/king*.

*George Washington/George III* was a leader for life.

*George Washington/George III* gave up his power after two terms.

In a Monarchy (like England’s) the king shared power with the *parliament/congress* while in a democracy (like America’s) the president shares power with a *parliament/congress*.



# On-the-Job Training

Here is Washington's résumé describing his early experiences and education. Use it as a guide for your own résumé. Choose a career and research what experiences and education you will need to become a professional in your chosen field. After completing your research and résumé, describe one way in which people today are prepared for careers differently than Washington was.

## George Washington Mount Vernon • Virginia

### OBJECTIVE

To become commander in chief of American Continental Army.

### EXPERIENCE

- 1752** Virginia Militia Virginia  
Major in Virginia Militia  
Brought skills as expert hunter and horseman to military post  
Trained officers  
Learned to delegate others to help train officers
- 1754** Virginia Regiment Virginia  
Commander of Virginia Regiment  
As commander of colonial army, worked together with royal army  
Obedient to counterparts in royal army (and even ranking subordinates)  
Attacked French soldiers
- 1755** Fort Duquesne Lake Erie  
Aide to General Braddock  
Earned trust and confidence of General Braddock  
Attacked French at Fort Duquesne  
Displayed distinguished acts of bravery during battle at Fort Duquesne

### EDUCATION

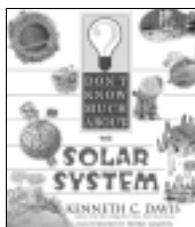
- 1743–1750** Ferry Farm Virginia  
Tutor-educated and some grammar school  
Took over Ferry Farm at age 11  
Became surveyor for Lord Fairfax (see reference)

### INTERESTS

Hunting, agricultural experimentation, and mathematics

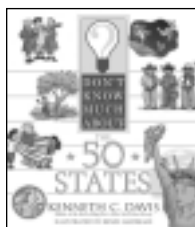
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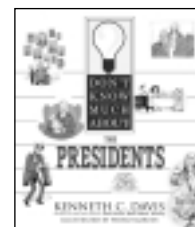
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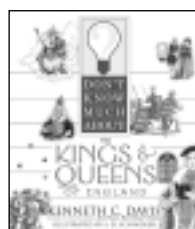
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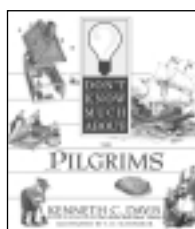
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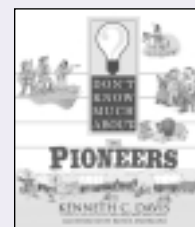
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