

Fireboat: The Heroic Adventures of the John J. Harvey

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Literature based unit study written by Michelle Light

Note: Please pre-read this book to determine if the content should be shared with your child. It is not easy to tell our children about tragic events, but we don't want to downplay them, either. This book does an excellent job of telling the story of 9/11 in a way that children can understand.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Geography

Locate New York on a map.

New York borders Canada as well as two of the Great Lakes: Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. The story mentions Staten Island and the Hudson River. Using an outline map, have your student mark these two geographical landmarks. You may also want to discuss other New York geography such as the Hudson River, Niagara Falls, Ellis Island, the Erie Canal, and the Adirondack Mountains.

Significant Dates in History

Throughout history there are significant dates where the actual day is remembered rather than simply the time era.

Defining events like these don't come often in one's lifetime; but, when they do, the moment is etched in one's memory--never to be forgotten.

Some people are old enough to remember the unprovoked attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941: "A day that will live in infamy."

Many people are old enough to remember where they were the day President Kennedy fell to an assassin's bullets, the day President Reagan was shot, or the moment they learned that the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded on its way to orbit.

We will forever remember the moment we saw two hijacked commercial airliners crash into the World Trade Center twin towers in New York City. September 11, 2001, will go down as another day of infamy. Discuss with your student what you were doing on this date. Perhaps you have stories from your student's grandparents about some of the other dates mentioned.

New York History Research Project

Many different aspects of 1931 New York City history are mentioned at the beginning of this story. Have your older student choose one (or more) of these topics for an in-depth research project:

Babe Ruth

Snickers Candy Bars

The Empire State Building

The George Washington Bridge

Pendley Calling of Blarney

You could also make a timeline of NYC history with your student. The above events are all mentioned as 1931 happenings. The book also gives a bit more NYC history (ending with 9/11). If your student is interested, you can continue this project by looking up other significant NYC events online or in an encyclopedia (don't forget to add The Little Red Lighthouse if you are familiar with that story).

Another idea would be to add your family history (dates of birth, death, marriage, etc.) to the timeline.

Character Building: Willingness to Help

So many people jumped in on that dreadful day to see how they could help. We need to be willing to help when the need arises! Try to teach your children this week to be helpful. Try also to teach them to go the extra mile by teaching them the phrase, "is there anything else I can do for you?" Tell them to be alert and keep their eyes out for things that they can be helping with-- to see what needs done and DO it (Is there trash on the ground at the park that needs picked up? Does someone need help with something that they dropped? Can I wipe up a spill? Can I take my brother's laundry to the hamper?)

LANGUAGE ARTS

Vocabulary:

- bustling- excited place with activity; noisy
- elegantly- graceful yet simple
- launched- to cause to move into water
- brave- having or showing courage
- merchandise- anything bought and sold for profit
- celebration- to observe a day or event; to have a happy and lively time
- scrap- to discard; to get rid of
- surprising- causing wonder; amazing or startling
- urgent- requiring immediate attention
- terrified- filled with fear
- snoozing- to sleep lightly
- scene- the place and surrounding of a certain event
- ceremony- a formal act or occasion
- audience- a group of people gathered together to hear and see a certain event
- hero- a person of great courage especially one who had undergone great danger or difficulty
- award- a prize usually given as a result of winning a contest

Choices Writers Can Make: Font

With your student, look at each page in the story paying special attention to the way the font (text) is written. Look at the way the author chose to write certain words--as to grab your attention--up, down, big, small, capitalizing the whole word. Can you and your student determine why the author made certain choices for certain pages/words/phrases?

In poetry, this is an especially common practice (something usually called concrete poetry). Poets can manipulate the text to help give a visual impact to the tones/themes of the poem. Encourage your writer to try playing with font sizes and shapes in order to make what is being written more meaningful.

Listmaking

List all the people who helped when the 9/11 tragedy occurred (firefighters, police officers, doctors, etc.). Take a few minutes and discuss each occupation. How could

the different people use their area of expertise to help specifically?

Listmaking

List all the maintenance jobs that had to be completed in order to fix the *John J. Harvey*.

Inventing Words

The author mentions the invention of "HOT-CHA"-- a new jazz word. Since English is a living language, new words and phrases are frequently implemented into our speech. A language continues to evolve as long as it is alive and even the rules of grammar, punctuation, and spelling can change over time.

Discuss other words (especially slang) that take on new meanings with time (cool, sweet, and do you remember when people used to say, "that's bad"-- and it had a positive connotation! Funny!).

You can also discuss words (or phrases) that your family may have invented and that you use within your own family culture (for instance, at my house we call ketchup *DIP-IT*).

Creative Writing: Newspaper Writing

Your older student may enjoy designing the front page of a newspaper to tell about the events of 9/11. Have her study the front page your local newspaper and then use a similar lay-out and design. If a front page project is overwhelming, you may want to simply the assignment to just one column.

APPLIED MATH

Story Problems

1. There were 8 pipes on the Harvey that could shoot 16,000 gallons of water per minute. If all the pipes shoot the same amount, how many gallons were being shot per pipe? ($16,000 / 8 =$)
2. How many total gallons could be shot in five minutes? ($5 \times 16,000$) In ten minutes? ($10 \times 16,000$) In one hour? ($60 \times 16,000$)

3. The story mentions that people worked for 4 days and 4 nights. How many hours of work total? ($24 \times 4 =$)

4. The *John J. Harvey* could go 20 miles per hour. How long would it take it to go 60 miles? 10 miles?

SCIENCE

Different Types of Boats

There are many different kinds of boats! Has your student ever been in a boat? What kind of boat was it?

Different boats are used for different jobs-- large barges are used to carry cargo, small kayaks are used for sport and recreation. Other boats are used for fishing and some boats even serve as houses. Would your student like to live on a boat? Some boats are used in specific areas of the world like the Jamaican banana boat and the Chinese dragon boat.

STEM connection: Consider giving your student various materials (sponge, wood pieces, fun foam, etc.) and let her build a boat. Encourage her to keep working until it floats!

Boat Lingo

There is a bit of boat vocabulary used in this book and your student may not be familiar with the terms used.

- pilot's cabin- a small cabin on the deck of the ship that protects the steering wheel and the crewman steering
- propeller- A rotating device, with two or more blades, that acts as a screw in propelling a vessel
- hull- The main body of the boat, not including the deck, mast, or cabin.

Rivers

The Hudson River is mentioned in this book.

Rivers are important. Often major cities of the world were founded on the banks of a major river. New York was founded near the Hudson River. Cairo, Egypt was founded on the Nile. You have more examples if you look at Paris, France which was founded on the Seine and London, England which was founded on the Thames.

Rivers provide us with drinking water. They also provided a way for goods to be transported by boat. Some rivers are even used to produce electricity.

Here are some important river terms to know:

Source: This is the beginning of a river. It is often found where melting snow or rain is pulled by gravity. Sometimes the source of a river is an underground spring.

Main River: The main river is the primary channel of water.

Tributary: A tributary is a smaller river or stream that joins into the main river.

Floodplain: The flat area of land that is found on either side of the river is the floodplain. These areas flood during heavy spring rains or when excess snow melts.

Meander: If you look at a map of a river, you can see loops and bends in the way the river winds. These loops and bends are called meanders.

Barnacles

Barnacles had to be cleaned off the bottom of the boat. What are they?

A barnacle is an invertebrate, a type of arthropod. There are approximately 1,000 species of barnacles.

Barnacles go through two stages as larva. The first is called the nauplius-- spends about two weeks eating, molting, and floating wherever the wind and waves will carry it. In the second stage, it doesn't feed and it becomes a strong swimming cyprid larva eventually settling down in a safe and productive environment such as rocks. This environment is sometimes a man-made structure and the barnacles will eventually destroy the structure (especially that of ships).

The cyprid larva cements itself headfirst to the surface and undergoes metamorphosis into a juvenile barnacle. Most develop six hard armor plates to surround and protect their bodies. For the rest of the barnacles life, it will stay on the structure using feathery legs to capture food.

Library List

The Man Who Walked Between the Towers by Mordicai Gerstein

September Roses by Jeanette Winter

On That Day: A Book of Hope for Children by Andrea Patel

Hero Dogs: Courageous Canines in Action by Donna M. Jackson

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