

We Were There Too!

by Phillip Hoose

"This may be the most exhilarating and revelatory history of our country. It is the heroism of our young, hitherto unwritten, often told in their own words, from a teenager sailing with Columbus to a kid with AIDS. Phil Hoose has done a remarkable piece of detective work. It is MUST reading for today's youth—as well as their elders." --Studs Terkel

Introduction

We Were There, Too!: Young People in U.S. History by Phillip Hoose is the first to tell the story of the role children and adolescents have played in the making of our nation. Based largely on primary sources—first person accounts, journals, and interviews—and including 160 authentic images, this volume highlights the contributions of more than seventy young people from diverse cultures. Sidebars that provide context and illuminating detail, maps, and "What Happened to . . ." explanations complete each entry. The book can be used as a stand-alone in your study of American history, as a supplement to your text, or as a jumping-off point for in-depth study and research.

We Were There, Too! is intended for use in grades 5-8 and can be extended for use in high school. In many states, American history is taught chronologically in grade 5 and again in-depth with a thematic approach in grade 8. Specific periods of American history are often studied as part of classes in government in high school. *We Were There, Too!* can also be used in grades 6 and 7 in your reading and writing program, listening and speaking program, the study of citizenship and democracy, and conflict resolution.

When you use We Were There, Too! it will become obvious that it addresses many of the state standards that your students must achieve. For example: reading narrative documents and other evidence of the past to clarify their understanding of history; using vocabulary and key words to find main and supporting ideas; arranging events in sequence; interpreting information; comparing and contrasting primary and secondary sources; discovering the changing role of men and women in U.S. history; developing a respect for a variety of human experiences; and learning to analyze, compare, and contrast differing perceptions of a historical event.

I. Investigations

Use *We Were There, Too!* to stimulate inquiry-based learning.

Digging into Primary Sources

Select a particular period in American history. Find primary source material: broadsides, newspapers, diaries, government documents, photographs, etc.

Activities

After reading *Saints and Strangers: Bound by Hope* (pages 25-28), find out more about Elizabeth Tilley. Through the Internet, students can find more detailed biographical information, read her last will and testament, and even trace her genealogy up to the present day. (Three U.S. presidents are direct descendants.)

Photo research. After reading *Peggy Eaton: Ridin' the Rails* (pages 198-201), search the Library of Congress American Memory Collections for photographs of children during the Depression (for example, Gottschlo-Schleisnewer, "Seventy-one Years, or My Life with Photography, Part IV, The Depression Years, 1931-1934"). Make a collage contrasting the different experiences.

Social Conscience

Find examples of young people in social struggle and recognize their impact on change. For example: antislavery -- Frederick Douglass: *Taking On a Tyrant* (pages 94-97), the labor movement -- Jennie Curtis: *Strike Leader* (pages 171-75), or civil rights -- Elizabeth Eckford: *Facing a Mob on the First Day of School* (pages 218-20).

Activities

- Stage a debate between Jenny Curtis and George Pullman
- Have a student portray Elizabeth Eckford and give a speech retelling her ordeal.
- Make placards for each young person proclaiming their struggle.
- Class project: Create a newspaper. Individual reporters can write articles and interviews, draw political cartoons, etc.

In Time of War

Acts of heroism during times of crisis are not limited to adults. Whether acting as spies, engaging in combat, raising money, or even protesting what they thought was an unjust war, young people have made their mark on history. Find examples and explore the role of young people during times of war.

For example: Joseph Plumb Martin: "And Now I Was a Soldier" (pages 53-57), Elisha Stockwell: "Such a Mess As I Was In" (pages 106-9), Mary Redmond, John Darragh, and Dicey Langston: *Spies* (pages 62-64), Margaret Davidson: *War on the Home Front* (pages 192-95), Calvin Graham: *Too Young to Be a Hero?* (pages 202-4), and John Tinker: *Tinker v. Des Moines* (pages 225-229).

Activities

- Pick young people from different eras and compare the roles they played and their motivation.
- Relate their experiences to modern-day children. Research the role children have played in contemporary struggles, for example, Sierra Leone, the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Sudan.

Women in American History

Have your students read several entries that focus on the role of young women, for example, Eliza Lucas: Indigo Planter (pages 36-38), Phyllis Wheatley: The Impossible Poet (pages 42-45), and Rose Cohen: First Day in a Sweatshop (pages 165-68).

Activities

- Report on the similarities and differences of the young women's experiences.
- Engage in a panel discussion acting out what each might say and how they would say it.

Similar treatment can be done for *minority groups*: Susie King Taylor: At the Heart of the Sea Islands (pages 116-19), Chuka: "I Did Not Want My Shirt Taken from My Back" (pages 155-59), and Charles Denby: Bound North (pages 184-187); or for *Immigrants*: Ng Poon Chew and Lee Chew: Gold Mountain Boys (pages 146-150), Terry Grimmesey: What Had We Done (pages 205-8), and Arn Chorn: Starting All Over (pages 237-39).

II. Call to Action

The lives depicted in this book, whether ordinary or heroic, show that every individual participates in his or her time: each of us has a part in history. Here are some suggestions for activities students can become involved in.

Activities

Stamp campaign: Petition the U.S. Postal Service on behalf of a local hero. New York towns petitioned and won a stamp for Sybil Ludington in 1975. The Citizen's Advisory Committee of the U.S. Postal Service handles petitions for the creation of new stamps. Log on to www.usps.gov. On the left side of the screen find "About USPS." Click on "Who We Are." Here you'll find the listing for the Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee and all the procedures and regulations needed to petition for a new stamp.

Quality of life: Using the story of Kory Johnson: An Environmentalist for Life (pages 246-49) as inspiration for a cleaner environment, create a community garden or improve a park. This can be done in cooperation with your science teacher. Students can study which plants will grow best in the available environment, track the growth of the plants, study the biology of flowering plants, and so on.

III. Responding to Literature

These suggestions can be used to extend the learning, as a comprehension check, and to enhance the enjoyment of *We Were There, Too!* and nonfiction literature in general. These activities can be used in cooperation with other subject area teachers (art, drama, reading).

Activities

Imagine a meeting between two young people with similar struggles but from different eras. Write a dialogue between them. For example Lucy Larcom or Harriet

Hanson: *Voices of the Mills* (pages 82-84) and Joseph Milauskas: *Breaker Boy* (pages 168-171).

Identify personality traits in the young people in the book by creating circle maps. Compare maps to show similarities and differences.

Journal writing is a time-honored tradition in American history. Travelers on the Mayflower, pioneers, farmers, and others kept journals to record the everyday happenings of their lives. Read Carrie Berry: "They Came Burning Atlanta Today" (pages 120-23). Have your students write journal entries of their lives. The entries can contain facts about what is going on, their thoughts and feelings, or anything they think is pertinent to their journals.

- Read the section Betty Parris and Abigail Williams: *Bewitched or Bored?* (pages 29-32). Using a flow chart, track the sequence of events that led up to the Salem Witch Trials.
- Make a replica of the flag that Caroline Pickersgill (pages 79-81) helped to sew in 1813. Research other historical American flags.
- Students can dress up as one of the historical figures and tell his or her story.
- Groups of students can write a play about one of the characters and perform it.
- Students can write an epic poem telling the story of one of the young people in the book.
- On a map of the United States, identify where the stories take place. Mark the map with the characters' names.
- Make a time-line mural of American history featuring the young people who made it. The mural can be made large enough to stretch down the school hall.
- For fun, have students pick a character and play "six degrees of separation" from the character to themselves.

IV. Enrichment

Every chapter in *We Were There, Too!* can be used as the start of a research project on the Internet. One example is the genealogy of Elizabeth Tilley. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, George H. Bush, and George W. Bush are her descendants. On the Refdesk Web site (see note below), type in "Elizabeth Tilley". On the first page of links you'll find *Genealogy of the presidents of the USA Elizabeth Tilly*. Click on and follow the paths of her daughter Hope Howland and her son Joseph Howland to the presidents.

Note on the World Wide Web

This book is perfectly suited for leading students to do research on the Internet. While most students by now can log on, play games, and surf for their favorite sites, they are at a loss when it comes to researching for primary-source historical documents.

Excellent sites include:

www.refdesk.com/

Refdesk is a source for facts on the net. It is extremely easy to use. Log on to the Internet with your browser, then type in: www.refdesk.com/. Look in the upper left hand corner for the box labeled "search the Web / Google Search." Type most any name mentioned in the book and it will link to dozens of sites that can supply primary-source documents.

<http://lcweb.loc.gov/>

This is the home page for the Library of Congress. You can search its vast collections of photographs and printed documents.

<http://personal.pitnet.net/primarysources>

This is The American Colonist's Library. It links to primary source document pertaining to early American history.

www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/people.html

Through the American Library Association you can link to many sites with primary-source material designed for use by teachers and students.

www.state.vt.us/vhs/educate/diaries.htm

This is the site for the Vermont Historical Society. The site provides lesson plans focusing on two diaries of Vermont schoolchildren.

For more information visit www.weweretheretoo.com

This guide was prepared by Clifford Wohl,
a former teacher and bookstore owner.