

TEACHER'S GUIDE

STAGES OF HISTORY

Plays About America's Past



PERFECTION LEARNING®

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TO THE TEACHER

Stages of History is designed to be used in language arts, literature, history, and drama classrooms. Each play is one act and **royalty-free**. This is a collection of original stories that dramatize actual events in American history. The plays use lively characters and a variety of literary and theatrical techniques to engage readers and actors with these events and their relevance today. This teacher's guide extends the student book by offering suggestions for teaching, discussing, and producing the plays.

Teaching

The Teaching section looks at each play as history, literature, and theatre. A chart of the elements covered for each play can be found on page 7 of this Teacher's Guide. Share these concepts with students whenever it is appropriate—before reading, after reading, or at various stages along the way.

Discussing

The Discussing section provides thought-provoking questions and activities that can be used in a number of ways. For example, discussion questions that emphasize critical thinking skills could be the basis for literary circles, essay tests, or debate topics. This section also includes additional resources for teaching the plays.

Producing

The Producing section presents simple staging suggestions, including basic stage layouts and casting options.

Reproducibles

You will find several useful reproducibles at the back of this book. They are designed to help students with various stages of play production, including costumes, makeup, and so forth.

How you use the student book and teacher's guide will of course depend on your purpose and your students' prior knowledge of history. However, you might want to start by having students read the introductory essay in the student book. A chart on page 8 of this teacher's guide relates the thematic connections mentioned in the introduction to the student book. Handing out copies of the timeline on pages 5–6 can help students keep track of each story's position in history.

TIMELINE FOR THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAYS

- 1590** **The Roanoke Riddles (1587–1590)**
- 1600** Jamestown settled; Virginia colony founded (1607)
- 1610** First African slaves brought to the English colonies (1619)
- 1620** Massachusetts colony founded (1620)
- 1630** Maryland colony founded (1634)
Connecticut colony founded (1635)
Rhode Island colony founded (1636)
Delaware colony founded (1638)
New Hampshire colony founded (1638)
- 1650** North Carolina colony founded (1653)
- 1660** South Carolina colony founded (1663)
New Jersey colony founded (1664)
New York colony founded (1664)
- 1680** Pennsylvania colony founded (1682)
- 1730** Benjamin Franklin opens the first lending library (1731)
Georgia colony founded (1732)
- 1750** The French and Indian War (1755–1763)
- 1770** The Boston Tea Party (1773)
The Scarlet Cloak (1775)
Declaration of Independence written (1776)
- 1780** Peace treaty recognizing American independence (1783)
U.S. Constitution written (1788)
- 1790** Eli Whitney invents the cotton gin (1793)

continued

TIMELINE FOR THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAYS

- 1800 The Louisiana Purchase (1803)
 Bitterroot (1805)
 Washington Irving writes *Rip Van Winkle* (1809)
- 1810 Steamboats in use on the Mississippi River (1811)
 War of 1812
- 1820 Erie Canal opens (1825)
- 1830 Cyrus H. McCormick invents the mechanical reaper (1831)
 Samuel Colt's revolver begins production (1836)
 Ghosts of the Alamo (1836)
- 1840 Morse builds first working telegraph (1844)
 War with Mexico (1846–1848)
 Streets of Gold (1847–1848)
- 1850 Nathaniel Hawthorne writes *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)
 Harriet Beecher Stowe writes *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1850)
 Freight (1856)
- 1860 The American Civil War (1861–1865)
 Eye in the Sky (1862)
 Transcontinental railroad lines joined in Utah (1869)
- 1870 **Horse Thieves (1870)**

STAGES OF HISTORY SKILLS CHART

| PLAY TITLE | HISTORY | LITERATURE | THEATRE |
|----------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>The Roanoke Riddles</i> | Colonialism | Ambiguity | Projections |
| <i>The Scarlet Cloak</i> | Revolution | Exposition | Scene Changes |
| <i>Bitterroot</i> | Exploration | Irony | Choric Characters |
| <i>Ghosts of the Alamo</i> | War | Conflict | Alienation |
| <i>Streets of Gold</i> | Entrepreneurship | Characterization | Theatricalism |
| <i>Freight</i> | Slavery | Symbolism | Conventions |
| <i>Eye in the Sky</i> | Technology | Humor | Suspension of Disbelief |
| <i>Horse Thieves</i> | Immigration | Elegy | Readers Theatre |

THEME CONNECTIONS IN *STAGES OF HISTORY*

The chart below deals with the Themes for Thought featured on pages 10–11 of the student edition of *Stages of History*. It illustrates how each theme can be traced from play to play.

| PLAY TITLE | CONFLICTS | CHALLENGES | JOURNEYS | POSSIBILITIES | MYSTERIES | DISCOVERIES |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------------|--|--|---|
| <i>The Roanoke Riddles</i> | cultural, between whites and Native Americans; personal, between Wanchese and Manteo | survival | to a new world | a new way of life in a new environment | what <i>really</i> happened to the colony at Roanoke | the unexpected; the difficulties of learning the historical truth |
| <i>The Scarlet Cloak</i> | between Tories and Patriots | escaping capture | to Washington's headquarters | new forms of government | why Deborah's ride has been forgotten | Deborah's sense of herself and of Washington's personality |
| <i>Bitterroot</i> | cultural, between whites and Native Americans; personal, between Sacagawea and her brother | communication and survival | across unfamiliar country | expanding a nation's boundaries | what Sacagawea was <i>really</i> like | unexplored country and unknown peoples |
| <i>Ghosts of the Alamo</i> | cultural, between U.S. settlers and Mexicans | resolving political and cultural differences | into new regions for settlement | forming bonds between cultures | what <i>really</i> happened at the Alamo | the difficulties of learning the historical truth |
| <i>Streets of Gold</i> | between one's material and emotional needs and desires | finding a home | into unfamiliar territory | forging a new home in an unknown land | why some people achieve success and others fail | gold; one's own values |
| <i>Freight</i> | racial, between whites and black slaves; personal, between Harriet and Abby | escaping to freedom | out of slavery | emancipation | how so many slaves escaped to freedom | the meaning of freedom; one's own values and capabilities |
| <i>Eye in the Sky</i> | military, between North and South | making the best use of new technologies | into the sky | the inventive spirit | why human knowledge doesn't end human conflict | one's own abilities and limitations |
| <i>Horse Thieves</i> | between people and an untamed land | survival | into new regions for settlement | a better life for oneself and one's children | what kind of personal sacrifice is worthwhile | one's own abilities and limitations; one's own values |

The Play as History: Revolution

The word “revolution” had a somewhat different meaning during the American Revolution than it does today. It was considered a drastic but legitimate means of restoring social order and justice. The Colonists fought a *revolution* to regain their rights as British subjects. They didn’t try to *overthrow* the British king or government; that would have been called a *revolt*, not a *revolution*. The French Revolution (1789–1799), in which the government was overthrown and the king beheaded, gave the word “revolution” its modern meaning—a violent means of social change. And yet, the American Revolution can be thought of as a kind of transitional revolution. After all, Americans did set up a new kind of government—one without a king.

At the time of *The Scarlet Cloak*, there was much uncertainty about the American Revolution and what it was supposed to achieve. Ask students to quote different characters expressing varied expectations, hopes, and worries about the revolution.

The Play as Literature: Exposition

The Scarlet Cloak is the only play in this collection without some kind of narrator—a character who tells the story to the audience. This lack of a narrator makes *exposition* difficult. Exposition is the information needed by the reader or viewer to understand the plot. A narrator can simply tell the audience whatever it needs to know. But in *The Scarlet Cloak*, exposition must arise from dialogue between the characters. In the first scene, for example, the audience learn that Deborah lives in Connecticut, that her father is a military officer, that George Washington’s troops have surrounded Boston, and many other facts. The trick of writing exposition is to make it seem a natural part of the dialogue. Ask students to point out examples of exposition throughout *The Scarlet Cloak* and to discuss how well it is handled.

The Play as Theatre: Scene Changes

The Scarlet Cloak is the only play in this collection that is interrupted by scene changes. The “Word About Staging” at the beginning of the play warns against clumsy scene changes—especially the use of blackouts or a drawn curtain. There is nothing wrong with presenting scene changes in full view of the audience, with lights lowered and music playing in the background. Ask your students how visible scene changes might actually enhance a production. For example, breaking the illusion of reality can help viewers maintain an objective, critical point of view (see “The Play as Theatre: Alienation” for *Ghosts of the Alamo* on page 22, and “The Play as Theatre: Theatricalism” for *Streets of Gold* on page 27). Visible scene changes might even add suspense; as spectators watch scenery being moved, they’re likely to wonder where the play will take them next, and what is about to happen.

DISCUSSING *THE SCARLET CLOAK*

Thinking While Reading

Have students share their responses to the Thinking item that appears on page 55 in the student book:

The 19th-century Scottish thinker Thomas Carlyle wrote that “the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here.” Carlyle said nothing about great women—and less than nothing about the ordinary men and women who have contributed to history in small but important ways. Indeed, you’re not likely to find the story of Deborah Champion in many American history books. As you read this play, consider why this is so.

Discussion Questions

1. At the opening of the play, how does Deborah feel about her life? What does she do about it?

Deborah is bored with spinning, the local news, and life in general. She hasn’t gotten married like most young women her age; students might guess that she isn’t much interested in devoting her life to a man. However, she is extremely interested in George Washington and the progress of the war. When the possibility arises of making a dangerous ride to meet Washington, she jumps at the chance.

2. Why do you think that Colonel Champion decides to send his daughter on a dangerous mission?

Answers may vary. Some students might say that Deborah convinces him she can do the job. Others might assume that he believes that a woman has a better chance of getting through to Washington than a man would. Others might take Colonel Champion at his word: He is sending Deborah mainly because he’s curious to know more about Washington and thinks his daughter will observe the general

more keenly than any of his men could.

3. At the time of this play, what is the relationship between the American colonies and England?

Some colonists in the play affirm their loyalty to King George, while others are interested in independence. But the American colonies are still ruled by Great Britain, and independence will not be declared until the following July. As the “Understanding the History” piece for this play explains on pages 53–54, the colonists and the British are fighting over disagreements about taxation and about how much control the colonists should have over their own affairs.

4. Why do some characters assume that if the colonies become independent, George Washington will be king rather than president?

At that time, most countries—including Spain, France, and England—had kings or queens. Many American colonists believed that only such a monarch could keep a country from falling apart. Although other colonists wanted to avoid monarchy, the office of president hadn’t been invented yet.

5. Why does Deborah at first refuse to call Aristarchus a slave? Why does she finally change her mind?

Aristarchus was born into slavery and—as Deborah finally admits—he is still a slave. But Deborah considers Aristarchus a friend and loathes the idea of thinking of him as a slave. She disapproves of slavery, even though it does exist in the Northern colonies as well as in the Southern ones. She finally decides that the truth will serve better than a more pleasant fiction.

6. What danger does the Tory Gentleman pose to Deborah and Aristarchus?

continued

Tories were colonists who remained loyal to England. Because the colonies were still under British rule, Deborah and Aristarchus were legally traitors to their government because of their revolutionary activities. The Tory could collect a bounty if he turned them in, and the pair would likely be hanged or imprisoned.

7. What opinions about George Washington do characters in this play hold or mention? Which turn out to be closest to the truth?
- At first, Deborah has a glamorized, heroic image of Washington—which is why she assumes he must be bored as long as the war is at a standstill. On the other hand, Aristarchus suspects that Washington is less heroic than practical. To some people—including Aunt Betty—Washington is a living legend: a physical and moral giant who is invulnerable to gunfire and destined to be king. Others are more skeptical; Colonel Champion has heard that Washington is an “incompetent backwoods Indian fighter” with no idea of how to command troops. Washington’s own view of himself is marked by humility; he feels unequal to his task and considers his power an illusion. Near the end of the play, Deborah describes Washington as a man who hates to command, but who is a natural leader. She says that Washington will never stop until the colonies win “their due.” Answers will vary as to whose opinion is most accurate, but students should support their opinions with information from the play or other sources.*

8. In the end, why does Deborah say that she finds Washington daunting?
- Answers may vary. During their conversation, Washington reveals his knowledge of the complexities of America’s situation—and also a keen understanding of himself, his abilities, and his limitations. These qualities—along with Washington’s gruff manner—are enough to amaze and daunt Deborah. She comes to the conclusion*

that Washington really is “America’s man of destiny.”

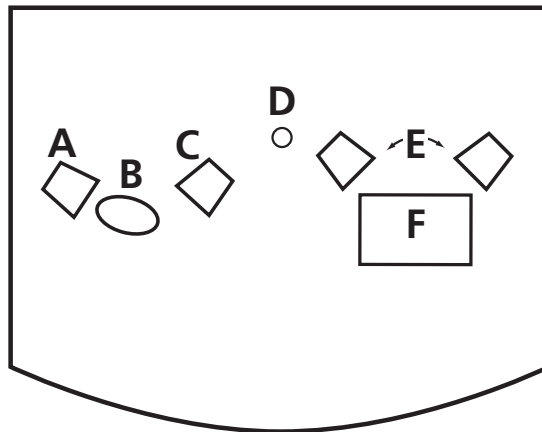
Activities

- Have students read Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem “Paul Revere’s Ride.” (It can be found in many anthologies, or online at www.eserver.org/poetry/paul-revere.html.) Then look up the facts about Paul Revere’s ride in an encyclopedia or on a Web site. What liberties did Longfellow take when he retold the story? As you read this play, consider why Paul Revere’s ride became famous, and Deborah Champion’s did not. Students might try writing a poem or song about Deborah Champion’s ride.
- In 1789, George Washington became president of the new United States of America. Ask students to work in small groups to speculate on what had become of Deborah Champion and Aristarchus by that time. For example, do they think that Deborah would ever marry or that Aristarchus was ever legally freed? (Little is known of Deborah’s life, and slavery didn’t become illegal in Connecticut until 1848.) Students might present their ideas in the form of a skit or a short story.

Connections

The scarlet cloak that Deborah Champion wore on her ride has been preserved. The Connecticut Historical Society Web site (www.chs.org/textiles/cloak_det.htm) features photographs and descriptions of the cloak. The Web site describes the calash as “an over-sized, collapsible bonnet designed to cover the head without crushing the wearer’s cap or coiffure.”

PRODUCING *THE SCARLET CLOAK*



Suggested Staging

The floor plan above indicates the setting for the first scene of the play:

- A. Deborah's chair
- B. Deborah's spinning wheel
- C. Aristarchus' chair
- D. An upright pole to suggest a doorframe separating the two rooms
- E. Two chairs
- F. Table covered with papers

Throughout *The Scarlet Cloak*, stage pieces must be removed and replaced by others on a scene-by-scene basis. If you have a smooth stage floor, putting felt on the bottom of furniture and stage pieces will help slide them around. Also, put bits of masking tape on the floor to mark where furniture and stage pieces need to go.

Lighting

Changes in lighting levels will help set the scenes throughout *The Scarlet Cloak*. For example, the morning scene in the Champions' house should be well-lit, while Deborah's and Aristarchus' night rides should be darker. Gels—colored, transparent, flexible sheets of gelatin—can further enhance the feeling of each scene. The Lee Lighting Gel Pack, an assortment of gels, is available from Filmtools Online:

www.store.yahoo.com/cinemasupplies/leeliggelpac.html

Doubling in *The Scarlet Cloak*

Actors sometimes play more than one part in a play. This is called *doubling*. *The Scarlet Cloak* has a cast of 16 speaking parts. It can easily be performed by 11 actors if doubled along these lines.

FEMALE

1. Deborah Champion
2. Mrs. Champion
Mrs. Percy
3. A Farm Woman
1st Virginia Lady
4. Betty Blessing
2nd Virginia Lady
5. A Servant Woman at Washington's
Headquarters
6. Martha Washington

MALE

1. Aristarchus
2. Colonel Champion
1st British Sentry
3. A Corporal
A Tory Gentleman
4. 2nd British Sentry
5. George Washington