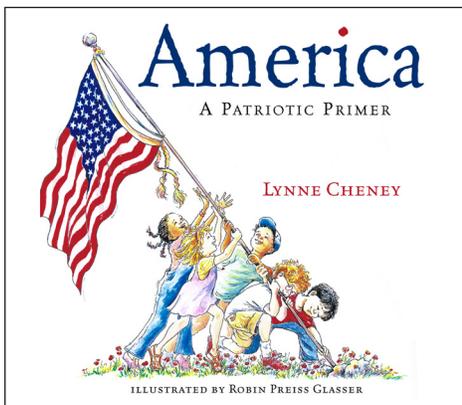


Launching Nonfiction Author Studies:  
A focus for teaching the Common Core State Standards with books by

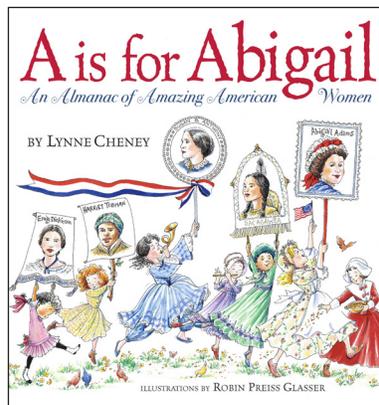
# LYNNE CHENEY



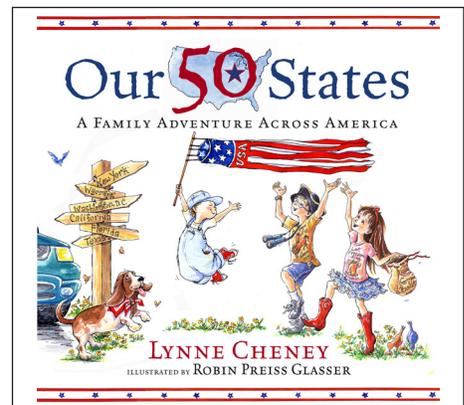
## Books



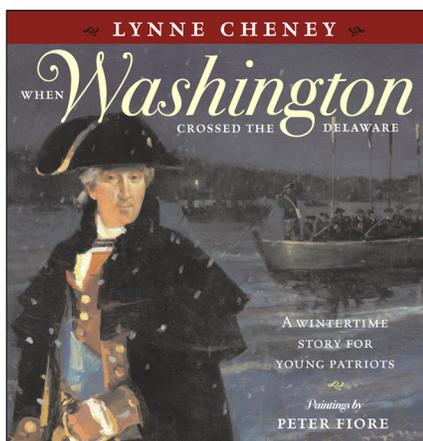
*America:  
A Patriotic Primer*



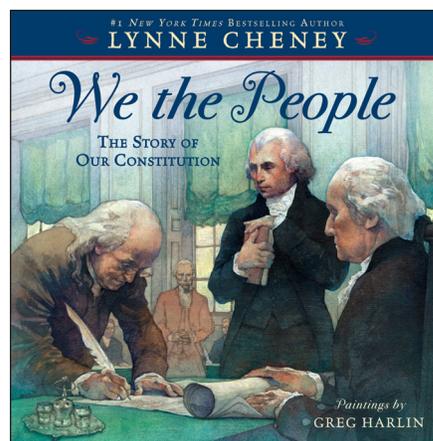
*A Is for Abigail:  
An Almanac of Amazing  
American Women*



*Our 50 States:  
A Family Adventure  
Across America*



*When Washington  
Crossed the Delaware:  
A Wintertime Story for  
Young Patriots*



*We the People:  
The Story of  
Our Constitution*

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## Background Information

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Lynne Cheney's books cover different topics in American history and geography. *A Is for Abigail: An Almanac of Amazing American Women*, *America: A Patriotic Primer*, and *Our 50 States: A Family Adventure Across America* follow a similar format. They feature a variety of information and illustrations, and they are excellent choices for browsing. They even have endnotes at the back of the book to offer more resources and information. *A Is for Abigail* and *America* are both organized according to the alphabet. *Our 50 States* is organized according to a travel route across the US. All of these books can be used as mentor texts for writing, especially in terms of structure and content. The illustrations by Robin Preiss Glasser are also models of inventiveness for young artists.

Two books, *When Washington Crossed the Delaware* and *We the People* explain issues and events in American history. These books are well illustrated and also contain many quotes from a variety of people involved in our history. Use books by Lynne Cheney to show how an author can use different formats to introduce information. The choice depends on the author's purpose for writing.

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## Activities for Launching Your Author Study

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CCSS Connection: The following activity focuses on examining the craft and organization of nonfiction text (RI.1–4.5) and writing factual information using a mentor text (W.1–2.2).

1. **Write Your Own American History A-B-C.** *America: A Patriotic Primer* is organized according to the alphabet. For each letter of the alphabet, there is a single page or two-page spread. For example, A is for America, B is for our nation's birthday, and C is for the Constitution. Each page is also well illustrated, using a variety of page layouts. The words and the illustrations work well together. After reading and examining the book, ask students to use the same format to write additional pages about American history. Have students brainstorm a list of topics they can write about and do some research to add interesting information and illustrations to their work.

Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- A is for the American astronauts.
- B is for the Boston Tea Party.
- C is for Congress.
- D is for democracy.
- E is for our economy...

If you are ambitious, you can do a whole class book from A to Z. If you are very ambitious, you can also do an A-B-C book of famous women, using *A Is for Abigail* as a mentor text. If you are *very, very* ambitious, you can also do a book about states, following your own travel path and using *Our 50 States* as a mentor text. In each case, the alphabet or a travel route provides a useful way of organizing information.

CCSS Connection: The activity below asks students to identify the reasons an author gives to support points in a text (RI.1–5.8)

2. **Find the Evidence.** Based on research and careful thinking, authors make claims that they back up with evidence and reasons. In *We the People* and *When Washington Crossed the Delaware*, Lynne Cheney made claims about *persistence*. Find the evidence she used to support these claims.



## FIND THE EVIDENCE: THE QUALITY OF PERSISTENCE

*Persistence* means that a person keeps trying to accomplish something even though it is difficult or other people might try to interfere. Was George Washington persistent? Were his men? Were the framers of the Constitution? Lynne Cheney thinks so and she tells you why.

- In *When Washington Crossed the Delaware*, she says that Washington and his men were “models of persistence.” What evidence does she give to support this?

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- In *We the People*, she says that the story of the Constitution is “a tale of persistence.” What evidence does she give to support this?

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- Is persistence a good quality? Why?

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## Why Author Studies?

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Beyond seeing the author as a person—a writer with information and a point of view to share—author study (studying several books by one author) provides us with a rich yet manageable way of looking at the decisions an author makes when creating a work of nonfiction. These decisions are about content, word choice, illustration, and original thoughts and interpretations.

Thinking about how an author creates nonfiction raises many questions for young readers and writers to think about: After researching a topic, what information goes into the book? What doesn't? Why? How should the book begin in order to grab the reader's attention? How should it end in order to keep the reader thinking about the topic? What information is best introduced through pictures, photographs, graphs, or tables? What features like sidebars and primary sources would add interest to the page? In what ways are the author's books similar? How are they different? As students engage in author study they think about how an author answered these questions.

Not surprisingly, these same questions are highlighted in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The Standards emphasize reading informational text to determine key ideas and details, an author's point of view, how the author structures and crafts information, how new vocabulary is introduced, and how visual material works together with written text. It's a match! That is, by engaging in author studies students are also meeting many Common Core Standards for reading and understanding informational text.

This guide features books and suggested activities that can be used to jumpstart a nonfiction author study. This will open the door to critical inquiry and focused discussion of informational text. By aligning activities to Common Core State Standards, students learn content while becoming critical consumers of that content. That's powerful instruction.

—Myra Zarnowski, Queens College, CUNY

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*Guide written in 2014 by Myra Zarnowski, a professor in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education at Queens College, CUNY.*

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