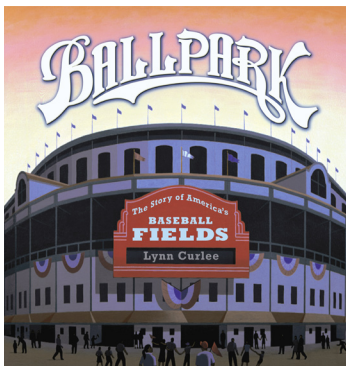


Launching Nonfiction Author Studies:
A focus for teaching the Common Core State Standards with books by

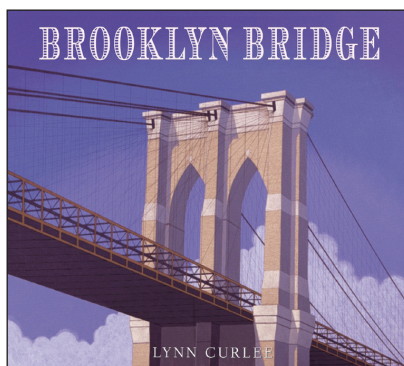
LYNN CURLEE



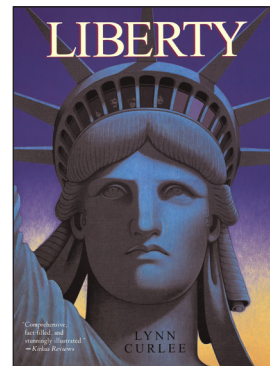
Books



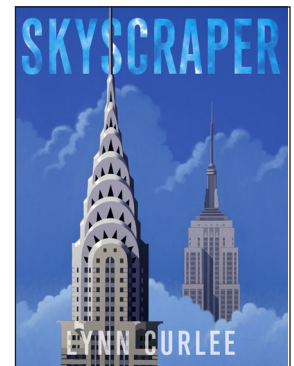
*Ballpark: The Story
of America's
Baseball Fields*



Brooklyn Bridge



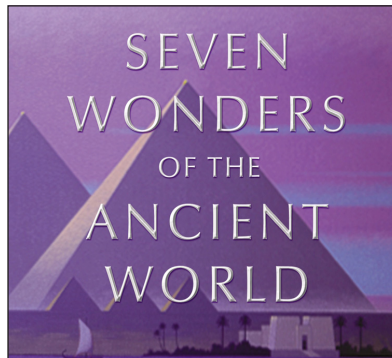
Liberty



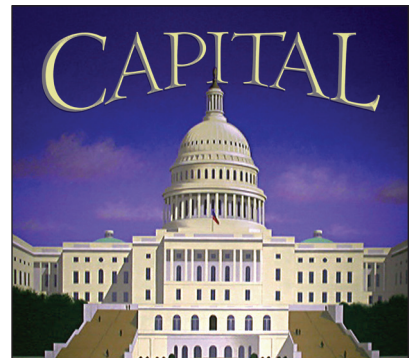
Skyscraper



Parthenon



*Seven Wonders of the
Ancient World*



Capital

Background Information

Books by Lynn Curlee introduce the history, beauty, and unique qualities of landmarks and famous places. Whether the books are about single landmarks in the United States—*Brooklyn Bridge*, *Liberty*, *Capital*—or multiple sites—*Seven Wonders of the Ancient World*, *Ballpark*, *Skyscraper*—each title combines poetic language, information about awe-inspiring creations, and full-page acrylic paintings that work together to create a sense of time and place. While explaining the majesty of each landmark or place, Curlee also reveals the intriguing stories of the people who made these structures possible.

Activities for Launching Your Author Study

CCSS Connection: The activity below involves students in examining the craft of writing informational text and engaging in collaborative discussions with partners to build on each other's ideas (SL.4–6.1)

1. **Golden Lines.** After reading one or more books by Lynn Curlee, have students select five sentences that are powerful examples of how he describes that landmark or the challenges of creating and maintaining it. Ask students to share their examples with a partner or small group, discussing what makes these sentences examples of powerful writing. Here are some quotes from *Liberty* to get you started:

- “Draped in the heavy robes of an ancient Roman goddess, she seems to move forward, her sandals treading upon broken chains, which symbolize the forces of oppression and tyranny” (p. 1).
- “She is not pretty, but she is beautiful, her features majestic and severe, her glance stern and full of concentration” (p. 1).

CCSS Connection: The activities below ask children to write opinion pieces on topics, supporting a point of view with reasons and information (W.4–5.1); write informative/explanatory texts and convey ideas and information clearly (W.4–6.2), and write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences (W.4–6.3).

2. The Brooklyn Bridge was called the “eighth wonder of the world” when it opened in 1883. Does it deserve this title? Give reasons to support your opinion. (Refer to *Brooklyn Bridge*.)
3. Explain what Lynn Curlee means when he calls the National Mall “an open-air museum of US history and a shrine to the promise of America” (p. 40). (Refer to *Capital*.)
4. Imagine you could step into the shoes of one of the people below and tell how you designed or worked on a landmark structure:
 - As John A. Roebling, designer and chief engineer of the Brooklyn Bridge, describe the challenges you faced.
 - As Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, describe how you designed and created the Statue of Liberty.
 - As Pierre L’Enfant, explain how you designed the capital city for our young nation, but were later fired from your position.



Why Author Studies?

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

Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020
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