

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

LOUISE BORDEN



Books



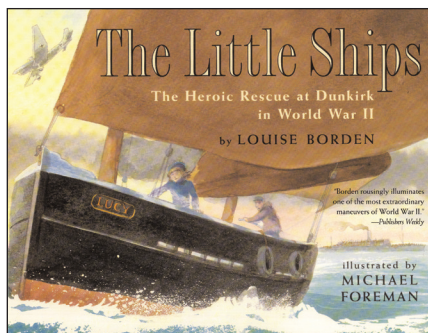
America Is...



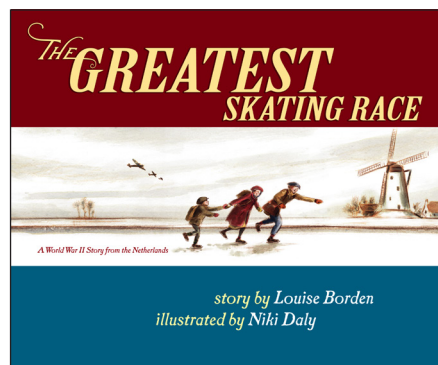
*Fly High!
The Story of
Bessie Coleman*



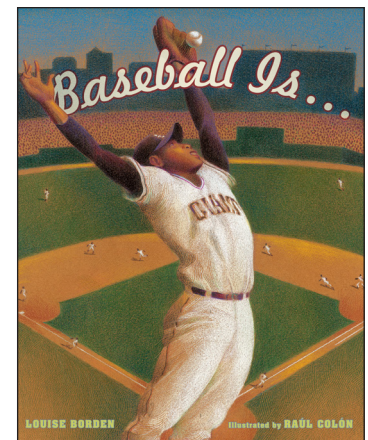
*Touching the Sky:
The Flying
Adventures of Wilbur
and Orville Wright*



*The Little Ships:
The Heroic Rescue at
Dunkirk in World War II*



*The Greatest Skating Race:
A World War II Story
from the Netherlands*



Baseball Is...

Background Information

Books by Louise Borden introduce children to historical events. Two books, *The Greatest Skating Race* and *The Little Ships*, narrate history from the point of view of a child who showed courage and determination in the face of dangerous circumstances during World War II. These stories show how children have achieved heroic feats. Two other titles, *Fly High!* and *Touching the Sky*, deal with pilots, a particular interest of the author, whose father was an officer in the Army Air Corps and took her flying in his own plane. Each of the books listed above is told in free verse, full of descriptive details that bring the past to life.

Activities for Launching Your Author Study

CCSS Connection: The activity below deals with acknowledging differences in points of view among characters (RL.2–4.6).

1. **Writing and Presenting Poems for Two Voices.** *The Greatest Skating Race* takes place in the Netherlands during World War II. It tells how, after German soldiers arrest a neighbor, a young boy named Piet successfully takes the family's two children across the border into Belgium to stay with their aunt. This involves skating across frozen canals and even facing hostile soldiers. Yet inspired by a great Dutch skater who set an amazing record in the Eleven Towns Race, the greatest skating race in the world, Piet succeeds, arriving safely with both children at their aunt's house.

You can use Paul Fleischman's book *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* to show how Piet and Johanna, one of the children he guided to Belgium, feel about this experience. A poem for two voices has lines read by two speakers. Some of the lines are for SPEAKER #1 only, some for SPEAKER #2 only, and some for BOTH SPEAKERS to read together. Both speakers say the words in the middle.

Ask students to complete the poem on the next page by adding more information about the trip—confronting German soldiers, feeling tired, being unsure of which way to go, and finally arriving.



PIET

BOTH

JOHANNA

<p>My grandfather told me that he had an important task for me.</p> <p>I am a good skater, a very good skater, a skater like my hero—Pim Mulier. I will skate with Johanna and her brother, accompanying them to their aunt's house in Belgium.</p>	<p>We would be traveling together.</p>	<p>My mother told me that it was no longer safe to stay in our home.</p> <p>My brother and I are to stay with our aunt Ingrid. It's safe there. I can skate there with Piet, but I am worried that my younger brother isn't strong enough.</p>
---	--	--

2. *The Little Ships* tells how, during World War II, a small but sturdy fishing ship was one of many boats used to save British and French soldiers who were trapped by the Germans across the English Channel at Dunkirk. This story is told by a young girl who accompanies her father on this mission. After reading and discussing the book, have students tell the story from the perspective of her father or one of the rescued soldiers.

CCSS Connection: The activity below highlights the meaning of one specific word as it is used in a text (RL.3–5.4).

3. In *Fly High!*, authors Louise Borden and Mary Kay Kroeger make use of the word *somebody* to show how Bessie Coleman, the famous aviator, became determined to become a *somebody* and then told other people to do the same. Here are some quotes from the book:

- “With more schooling, she could be *somebody*.”
- “In Chicago, you could be *somebody*.”
- “Every day she read the pages of the *Chicago Defender*, a newspaper published by Robert Abbott. Robert Abbott was *somebody*...”
- “Those French lady pilots, they are *somebody*.”
- “Some day she would be a *somebody* on Chicago’s South Side.”
- “She would fly high and be *somebody*.”
- “You can be *somebody* too.”

First, discuss each quote, especially how the word *somebody* helps you understand the life story of Bessie Coleman.

Second, in a small group, make a list of all the things Bessie Coleman did to become *somebody*. Select the six most important things she did to illustrate. Cut out the circle template on the next page and have the students illustrate and label each of these sections. Paste the circle back together in chronological order and have the students explain how each section shows what Bessie did to become *somebody*. For example, one important thing Bessie did was to go to a famous flying school in France.



FLY HIGH! CIRCLE TEMPLATE



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
TEACH.SimonandSchuster.net • KIDS.SimonandSchuster.com

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

This guide, written to align with the Common Core State Standards (CoreStandards.org) has been provided by Simon & Schuster for classroom, library, and reading group use. It may be reproduced in its entirety or excerpted.