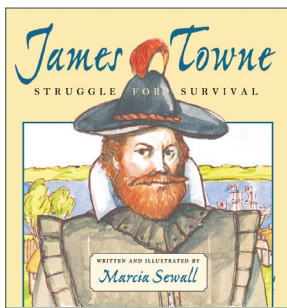


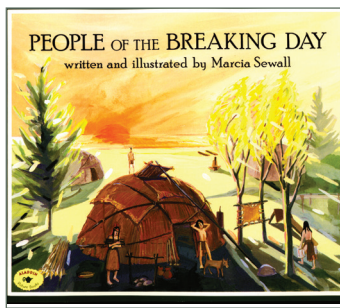
Launching Nonfiction Author Studies:
A focus for teaching the Common Core State Standards with books by
MARCIA SEWALL



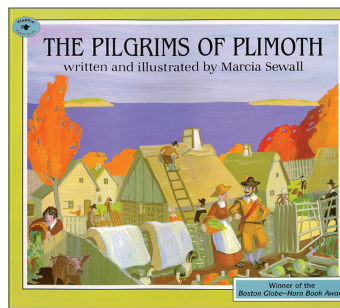
Books



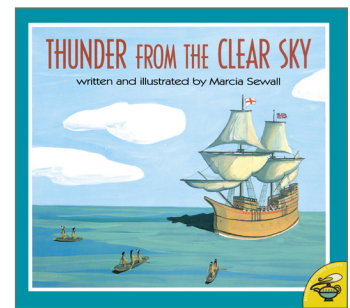
*James Towne:
Struggle
for Survival*



*People of the
Breaking Day*



*The Pilgrims
of Plimoth*



*Thunder From
the Clear Sky*

Background Information

What was it like for the Wampanoag Indians before the arrival of the Pilgrims? What was life like for the Pilgrims once they arrived? How did the Wampanoag Indians and the Pilgrims view each other? Why was the settlement of James Towne such a struggle? These questions are dealt with in books by Marcia Sewall, making them useful material for social studies inquiries into the early settlement of our country. Informative watercolor illustrations complement and extend the text. These books, told from different perspectives—Wampanoag Indian, Pilgrim, and a settler seeking a better life—help children understand that there is no single story of the past. There are, instead, multiple stories.

Activities for Launching Your Author Study

CCSS Connection: The activity below gives children practice in referring to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly (RI.4.1) and using writing to gather relevant information from print (W.4.8).

1. **Comparison Chart.** *People of the Breaking Day* and *The Pilgrims of Plimoth* are companion texts that are powerful sources of information when read together. *People of the Breaking Day* describes the lives of the Wampanoag Indians before the arrival of the Pilgrims. *The Pilgrims of Plimoth* deals with the arrival and settlement of the Pilgrims and other settlers. After reading both books, complete the chart on the corresponding page to compare the roles of men, women, and children.

WHAT WORK DID MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN DO?

WAMPANOAG INDIANS

PILGRIMS

Men		
Women		
Children		

2. **Written Conversation: Writing about the Life of a Wampanoag Child.** This activity makes note-passing acceptable! In fact, it makes it required. Students use the information from *People of the Breaking Day* and *The Pilgrims of Plimoth* to have a *written conversation* with a partner. There's no talking, only writing. Follow these steps:

- Pair the students.
- Tell them they will be writing *simultaneous* notes to each other about the life of a Wampanoag child. That is, they will both be writing comments at the same time. They will switch papers three times. When they switch, they should comment on what their partner has written and add new thoughts and ideas. It's just like a conversation, only there's no talking.
- Students should write for the entire time—approximately two-to-three minutes before each switch. **When writing, consider the following features of the life of a Wampanoag child:** chores, home, family, foods eaten, celebrations, and spiritual beliefs. Above all, do not stop writing. Raise questions. Wonder about things. Make connections to your life. Stay on the topic.
- After the three switches, have a class conversation about the life of a Wampanoag child.
- Follow this up by having a written conversation about the life of a Pilgrim child.

CCSS Connection: The activity below provides practice with determining the central idea of a portion of a text and how it is conveyed through details (RI.2–6.2) and determining the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text. (RI.3–6.4).

3. **Annotating a Two-Page Spread.** After reading *James Towne*, which details the settlement of the colony and its struggle to succeed and prosper, have students annotate a two-page spread. Each spread consists of written text, illustration, and a quote from one of the settlers.

Annotation requires writing on the text itself, so make copies of the spread for each student to write on. When students annotate, they make a record of their thinking. This is an activity that supports active construction of meaning.

Here are some ways to annotate a two-page spread:

- Define unfamiliar words.
- Rewrite words in the quote that have unfamiliar spellings.
- Underline important words and phrases.
- Ask questions about information that is puzzling.
- Ask questions about topics you want to investigate further.
- Translate—or put an idea in your own words—so that you understand it better.
- Summarize the information presented. What's the big idea?
- Predict what will happen next.
- Make a drawing or sketch that will help you remember the information.
- Connect the information given to other parts of the book or to other books.



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

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