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Suggested Activities for Specific Books

Don't Know Much About the Pilgrims

1. Ask students to look up the definition of the word "pilgrim." Ask students to decide which meaning describes the Pilgrims and why?
2. Tell students to imagine that they are Pilgrim children. Direct each student to write a letter home to his or her best friend. It should include but not be limited to:
 - a. The boat trip(s).
 - b. What you saw when you got there.
 - c. How you are spending your time.
3. Ask students to chart the Pilgrims' journey from England to America on a map.
4. Direct students to write a paragraph on the arrival of the Pilgrims from the point of view of the American Indian.
5. Using the question headings in this book, create an anticipation guide for your students. Direct students to check the text to confirm or revise their initial answers.
6. Ask students to look up the definition of the word "plantation." Ask students which definition applies to the Plymouth Plantation?
7. Direct students to create and illustrate a time line depicting the history of Thanksgiving as a national holiday.
8. Divide students into groups. Ask each group to create a three-column chart with the following headings: "Words Used by Pilgrims," "Definition," and "Words We Use Today." Ask each group to complete the chart starting with the words used by the Pilgrims in this book. (Students can find many of the words in the sidebars.)
9. Many people had come to America before the Pilgrims. Ask each student to research one of the people from the "Timeline of New World Explorations Before the Pilgrims." Each student's research should include the country represented, goals of the exploration, lasting contributions, and other interesting facts.
10. Direct students to use a Venn diagram or another graphic organizer to compare their lives today with those of Pilgrim children.
11. Before the Pilgrims arrived, others lived in that region. List the American Indian tribes living in the New England area. Ask students to choose one tribe to research. Students' research should include what effects the Pilgrims and other settlers had on the Native American tribes.

Don't Know Much About the Pioneers

1. Direct students to use the library, the Internet, or other resources to research the Louisiana Purchase. Give students a map of the United States. Ask students to use crayons or colored markers to indicate the United States borders before and after the Louisiana Purchase. Ask students the following questions: What 15 states are within the boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase? When were they admitted to the Union?
2. Discuss with students Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, the Corps of Discovery, and the charge from Thomas Jefferson. Using books like *Animals on the Trail With Lewis and Clark* and *Plants on the Trail With Lewis and Clark* by Dorothy Hinshaw Patent and others available in your school library as well as online sources, direct students to research and enter into an explorer's



journal some of the findings of the Lewis and Clark expedition. This would be an excellent time to discuss the economics of the purchase and of the expedition.

Directions for Explorer's Journal

- Materials: paper bags—smaller unprinted grocery bags for “leather” cover; plain paper—about 10 sheets per student; natural raffia—one string per student(raffia simulates rawhide)
 - Prepare the “leather” cover:
 1. Cut open the paper bag and cut off the bottom so that the paper is flat.
 2. Measure, mark, and cut a rectangle measuring 12 x 18 inches.
 3. Crumple and smooth the paper several times to create the appearance of leather.
 4. Fold the paper in half so that it measures 9 x 12 inches.
 5. Along the folded spine, measure and mark an “x” at 4”, 6”, and 8”.
 - Stack the journal title page on top of the plain paper and place inside the cover tight into the folded spine.
 - Punch holes at the three “x” marks along the spine. (Adult assistance may be required.)
 - Thread the raffia through the holes to bind the cover to the pages.
 - Write name and decorate the title page.
3. The main jumping off point to the west was Independence, Missouri. Ask students to find the absolute location of Independence, Missouri. Direct students to ask the following questions: What would the weather be like in that area? When would you advise the pioneers to begin their journey west?
 4. Discuss with students the prairie schooner and the fact that many prairie schooners had names and slogans. Ask students, if they were pioneers, what would they call their prairie schooners? Direct students to create and illustrate slogans for their prairie schooners.
 5. The “tall tale” is a uniquely American form of folklore. Students should visit their school library to find some tall tales. As a class, read and discuss the tall tales. Direct students to look for common characteristics. Students may make a chart to compare such characteristics as hero or heroine, characteristics, hardships, humor, exaggeration, and geographic area. Ask students to write original tall tales.
 6. Direct students to use a graphic organizer such as a T chart to compare the daily life of the pioneer children with the daily life of children today. You might also include the lives of Pilgrim children.
 7. Ask students to research the diseases pioneers faced such as cholera, smallpox, typhoid, and dysentery. What are the symptoms of these diseases? How do we treat them today? Are they preventable?

Don't Know Much About the Presidents

1. Direct students to use the library, the Internet, or other resources to complete the following:
 - a. Look up the word “president” in an unabridged dictionary. What language does it come from? What does it mean?
 - b. What are the titles of leaders in other countries? List the countries, titles, and current leaders. (A good online source is *The World Factbook*)
2. Give each student a map of the United States. Ask students to locate and mark the birthplaces of all the United States presidents. Direct students to make a key that includes the name of each president, the city and state where each president was born, and each president's birth date.



3. Ask each student to select one president to research. Direct students to compose a paragraph in the style of Kenneth Davis about an important or interesting fact about the chosen president.
4. The time line in *Don't Know Much About the Presidents* contains much information such as the admission of states to the Union, inventions, and "firsts." Using the time line, ask students to create an index for this book containing ten entries for inventions or "firsts."
5. Compare *Don't Know Much About the Presidents* with *So You Want to Be President* by Judith St. George. Ask students to list the differences and similarities, or they may use a Venn diagram.
6. Quotations are listed under many of the president's names. Choose one of the quotations. Read Kathleen Krull's *Lives of the Presidents*, a similar book, or an encyclopedia article. Discuss with students why they think a quotation was selected to highlight a particular president.
7. Divide students into groups. Direct each group to select a president and to read the article about the selected president. Ask each group to write the most important facts in the article and to put the facts in order from least important to most important. Ask each group to share its findings with the class and to justify its decisions.
8. Divide students into groups. Ask each group to use the Davis book to make a list of presidents and their nicknames. Direct each group to research how the presidents acquired the nicknames. Tell each group to select a president who did not have a nickname and to research that president. Ask the group to use its research to give that president a nickname. Ask each group to share its research and nickname with the class.
9. As a class, brainstorm a list of questions to ask an adult who was living at the time of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Direct each student to select an adult to interview using the list of questions. When all the interviews are collected, ask students to compare the adults' recollections.

Don't Know Much About the Solar System

1. Very Early Mornings Jack Skated Upon Ned's Pond is a mnemonic device used to help people remember the order of the planets from closest to the sun to farthest away. List the planets in that order. Direct students to create a new mnemonic device to help them remember this. Ask students if they know of other mnemonic devices for different concepts.
2. Read *My Place in Space* by Robin Hirst (1990) to the class. Ask students to write their universal address.
3. Direct each student to create a space exploration time line from *Don't Know Much About the Solar System*. Using the time lines in *Don't Know Much About the Presidents* that cover the same period of time, ask each student to develop a list of the presidents who were in office during the major events on their space exploration time line.
4. Discuss with students the concepts of revolution and rotation.
5. Ask students to research the name of each planet. Direct students to create a matching game using the information found in their research.
6. Tell students that they are going to create a database of the planets using the planet charts found in the book. Direct students to use the categories as the field names in the database. Students can sort the database to find the most and least according to each category.

Suggested Activities for the Don't Know Much About Series

1. Discuss with students the following criteria for judging nonfiction books, including



- a. Material is accurate and up-to-date.
- b. Informative point of view.
- c. Authority and reputation of author.
- d. Readable and comprehensible.
- e. Quality design.
- f. Lively style.

Ask students if other criteria should be added. Then apply the criteria to the Davis books.

2. Nonfiction books have many features to help the reader process the information. Lead students in brainstorming a list of features they have found in nonfiction books. Discuss how they are helpful in understanding and making connections with the information. Examine books in the series for those features.
3. Time lines are often included in nonfiction books. Examine and discuss the types of time lines used in the series. From one of the titles, choose a time line or part of one and illustrate the important events.
4. At least three illustrators have worked on the *Don't Know Much About* series. Ask students to compare the styles of the illustrators.
5. With the students, analyze the styles used by Davis (question-and-answer format, multiple choice questions, matching games). Ask students to present their next reports in one of the styles. Display the reports in a class book.