



This guide was written and compiled by Peggy Howell, Librarian—Fairfax County Public Schools

About Carolyn Reeder

Carolyn Reeder was born in Washington, D.C., and has lived and worked there her entire life. Reeder became interested in being a teacher when she was 12 years old and helped teach a neighbor to read. A graduate of American University in Washington, D.C.—where she received both a B.A. degree and an E.Ed. degree—Reeder taught upper grade elementary classes as well as primary reading at Georgetown Day School. Now she is giving her full time to writing. She is married, and she and her husband Jack have two adult children.

Reeder and her husband have both been interested in the Shenandoah region of Virginia, and they have hiked there and searched out historical sites. Together they have researched and written three nonfiction books about the area. It is no wonder that this self-described “history buff” has written a number of historical fiction books set in Virginia for upper elementary and middle school students.

Shades of Gray, her first novel about the Civil War, was awarded a Scott O’Dell Award for Historical Fiction as well as the Jane Addams award. Besides writing, Reeder enjoys reading, cycling, and going to the theater.

Historical Fiction

Introduce the following elements of historical fiction with your class before reading the books:

1. The setting should be accurate by including appropriate details of clothing, food, social relationships, and speech idioms. Children might want to make a list of items to look for in a book to check the accuracy. A Venn diagram comparing the elements in a historical novel to the present day can be completed.
2. Historical facts presented in the story should be accurate.
3. Historical facts should be incorporated within the story and not control the story or override the story.
4. Historical characters in the story should be portrayed in a way that is true or at least possible for the time.
5. Fictional characters must seem true to the time period, especially in speech and actions.
6. Stereotypes should be avoided.
7. The book must present a good plot with all the elements of good literature.

Suggested Activities for Books by Carolyn Reeder

Across the Lines

1. Direct students to complete a T-chart (page 11) listing situations that Edward and Simon faced throughout the battles and the book.
2. Ask students to write journals or letters as if they were living in Richmond during the siege.



3. Direct students to research the battle and compare nonfiction accounts to events in the novel. Ask them to determine if the novel was accurate.
4. Direct students to write newspaper articles about the events that took place in Richmond.
5. Ask students to list the different characters that Simon and Edward met in the book. Students may role-play some of these relationships.
6. At the end of the book, Edward and Simon did not meet but acknowledged each other. Ask students why they did not meet. Direct children to develop a dramatization describing what would have occurred if they had met and what they would have said to each other.
7. Ask students to imagine Simon's life after the war and during Reconstruction. Students may write journals or letters about events they would expect to occur in his life following the war.
8. Discuss with students what Edward's life on the plantation was like after the war. Ask students to imagine the changes on the plantation and in Richmond. Students may make diary entries or write newspaper articles.
9. Students can draw cartoons relating to the battle.
10. Ask students to compare and contrast life in Richmond before and after the war. Students may draw pictures to illustrate.

Captain Kate

1. Direct students to map the route that Kate had to take on the C & O Canal. A downloadable map is available at www.nps.gov/choh/.
2. Ask students to plot a story map showing the events that occurred during the trip down the canal and how the characters changed during the trip.
3. At the beginning of the book, Kate was very stubborn and determined that she was in charge of the boat. Ask students what happened during the trip to change her mind and how did the author show this change?
4. Research canals, especially the C & O Canal. Use a Venn diagram to compare the way that Kate had to travel down the canal with the way ships traverse canals now.
5. Direct students to research what Kate would have seen in Georgetown in the 1860s. Direct students to compare their research findings with what Kate might see today.
6. Ask students to research the ecology of the Potomac area to answer the question, "What differences are there since the 1800s?"
7. Tell students to imagine that they were on the boat. Ask them to write how they might have felt as they traveled down the canal, giving examples from the book.

Foster's War

1. Direct students to locate San Diego, California, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and Japan on a world map.
2. Lead students in brainstorming what they know about Pearl Harbor and World War II. Encourage children to read nonfiction books about the period.
3. Ask students to list words and phrases that are not familiar to them and to discuss how they are used in the book. Such words would include Frigidaire, oilcloth, rationing, black market, canteen, and warden. Use these words and events in a story to show children how life was different during the war than it is now.
4. Direct students to compare Foster's school to the school the students attend today.
5. Read the Uncle Remus story of the briar patch. Ask students to write how this story fits into the events of the novel.



6. Explain what internment means. Read books about the internment of Japanese Americans, such as *Baseball Saved Us* by Ken Mochizuki, *Bracelet* or *The Invisible Thread* by Yoshida Uchida, or *So Far From the Sea* by Eve Bunting.
7. Lead a class discussion about the ways that Foster helped in the war efforts. Compare these with how young people can help do things today.
8. Ask students to compare Foster's friends' attributes and actions.

Grandfather's Mountain

1. After reviewing persuasive writing, direct students to write a persuasive letter to the president protesting the building of the park.
2. Discuss with students why many of the villagers disagreed with Grandpa. Direct students to read newspapers or weekly news magazines to see if there is a comparable disagreement about land use or another item today. Ask them to write about how this is being handled.
3. Ask students how Grandpa made up his mind on what to do about the park. Ask students to complete a decision chart to show the pros and cons of the park construction and how they affected Grandpa.
4. Direct students to make a personality trait chart for Grandpa, listing at least six traits and telling how they are shown in the book. Students may include Grandpa's likes and dislikes, his thoughts and actions, what others think and say about him, and what the author says about him.
5. Ask students to research the park and debate the reasons for its construction during the depression. Students may check the web site for the park at <http://visitshenandoah.com/history.htm>.
6. Direct students to role-play a TV show interviewing Grandpa, a park ranger, a CCC worker, and another person in the area who opposed Grandpa.
7. Ask students to design one poster to advertise the coming of the park and another poster to ask people to vote against the park.

Shades of Gray

1. Ask students to describe Will's relations with his aunt and uncle. Why did Will feel that his uncle was a traitor? How and why do his feelings toward his uncle change throughout the book?
2. Locate the Piedmont region of Virginia on a map and research the struggles of the Civil War that occurred there. Discuss what happened in the Shenandoah Valley and how what happened may have had an effect on Will's attitude toward his uncle.
3. Direct students to keep journals while they read as if they were Will, expressing the feelings he might have had. They could also keep journals as if they were Aunt Ella, telling how she might have felt having Will come to live with them.
4. Lead students in developing a chart of the characters and how they responded to Will's arrival.
5. Lead children in discussing types of conflict in literature and then determine the conflicts in this story. Will faced conflicts of self against self as his attitude changed and conflicts of self against society in relations with the people of the town.
6. Ask students to define conscientious objectors and find examples in history and other wars.
7. Divide students into groups and direct them to debate how people on each side felt about the war, using examples from the book as well as from their nonfiction readings.



Suggested Activities for Books About the Civil War

Preparation for Reading

1. Read a picture book relating to the Civil War, such as *Pink and Say* by Patricia Polacco.
2. Ask students to complete a KWL Chart to determine their background knowledge before a study of the Civil War.
3. Review a map of Virginia concentrating on the areas involved in the war. A good place to see maps of battles by state is <http://americancivilwar.com/statepic/index.html>.

Language Arts Activities

1. Historical fiction books contain words and phrases from the period about which they are written. Define slang words and idioms, and ask students to maintain a list of words or phrases new to them. Students should define these words either from context or with the help of other texts. The lists may be kept in the individual language arts notebooks or on a word wall. Students may illustrate the words or phrases they find most interesting.
2. Help students analyze the book by modeling questioning skills. Read some of the selected text aloud and think aloud, expressing questions that you might have about words on the story. Show students how to list their questions on sticky notes and attach to the books they are reading.
3. Compare characters in the stories using a Venn diagram.
4. Ask students to identify and describe the character they liked best and explain why. Students should tell how the character changed during the course of the book and give examples.
5. Direct students to write journals using the language of the period and expressing the feelings that a young person of the time might have had. Students might want to select a minor character in the book or even make up an additional character and place him or her in the context of the story.
6. Ask students to write a letter to or from one of the characters.
7. Compare books about the period.

Social Studies Activities

1. Review with students how to use an atlas, and, if possible, locate historical maps of the period and ask students to follow the story using these maps.
2. As a class, prepare a time line of events in the books and compare it to actual historical events of the time.
3. Review or introduce primary sources using Internet sites such as the Library of Congress Memory Page, <http://memory.loc.gov>, which includes photographs and music of the period.