

Travels With Charlie: In Search of America Book Club

Overview:

Students will read *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* by John Steinbeck as a class or book club selection. This text is based on Steinbeck's travels throughout the United States in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement. While on his trip, he interviews local people in the regions that he visits in an attempt to reconnect with the country that he has written about in the past. Students will participate in discussions of the text through personal interpretation and insights and/or literature discussion questions provided in link. In addition, students will analyze the geographical themes and their influence on the social and cultural differences in the regions of the United States.

This activity may take approximately 2 weeks.

GRADE

9-12

THEME

Four Freedoms

LENGTH

This activity may take approximately 2 weeks.

DISCIPLINE

Social Studies; Language Arts: Reading; Language Arts: Writing

VOCABULARY

Cold War; Civil Rights Movement; Jim Crow Laws

Enduring Understandings/ Essential Questions:

1. The United States is a country made up of several regions.
2. The differing geographical factors affect the political, economical and social aspects of the regions.
3. Social structures and cultural factors differ in the regions of the United States.
4. External forces shape human behaviors and beliefs in the different regions.
 - How do the geographical factors affect the regions of the United States?
 - What are the causes of the differing social structures and cultural differences in the regions?
 - How do these different factors reflect in the Civil Rights Movement?

Objectives:

- Students will read *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* by John Steinbeck.
- Students will analyze the geographical factors that affect the regions and how they are reflected in historical events of the time.
- Students will discuss the text, looking at elements of literature, theme and author's message, etc.

Background:

In the 1960s, particularly following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and the intensification of American military activity in Vietnam, long-held beliefs and cultural norms shifted dramatically in America. Attitudes about race, sexuality, and gender roles were challenged as diverse social groups united to fight for civil rights and protest the Vietnam War.

After resigning his forty-seven year tenure with *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1963, Norman Rockwell embraced the challenge of creating imagery that addressed the nation's pressing concerns in a pared down, reportorial style. *The Problem We All Live With* for *Look* magazine is based upon an actual event, when six-year-old Ruby Bridges was escorted by U.S. Marshals to her first day at an all-white school. While the neutral title of the image invites interpretation, Rockwell's depiction of the vulnerable but dignified girl clearly condemns the actions of those who protest her presence and the issue of desegregation. Letters to the editor were a mix of praise and criticism, but that did not stop Rockwell from pursuing his course.

In September 1960, years after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling stating that separate was not equal in America's public schools, four African American students were selected to begin the integration process in the public elementary schools of New Orleans, Louisiana. One six year old Ruby Bridges, was assigned to a first grade class at the William Franz Elementary School. The integration of the schools was not welcome by many white Americans in the south, and parents refused to have Ruby in their child's class. As a result, she was the only student in the first grade class taught by Boston native, Barbara Henry. For many months, angry parents protested her attendance at the school.

Norman Rockwell's painting, *The Problem We All Live With*, shows a young African American girl symbolizing Ruby Bridges being escorted to school by U.S. Marshalls despite the barrage of racial slurs and threats. The young girl who posed is Lynda Gunn, Rockwell's neighbor in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he lived for his last twenty-five years.

Background for *Travels With Charley: In Search of America* by John Steinbeck

Following World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in the Cold War (1945-1991). In addition, the Civil Rights Movement had heated up. John Steinbeck, author of several books set in different locations in the United States, felt separated from the country he wrote about. He set out in September 1960 to get back in touch with the country and its people. He was curious about the political thinking in the different regions of the United States. His trip took him from Maine to New Orleans before beginning his return route to his home in New York.

John Steinbeck was one of the witnesses to the events that occurred on a daily basis outside of the William Franz School in New Orleans, Louisiana as a first grader named Ruby Bridges was escorted into school by four U.S. Marshalls.

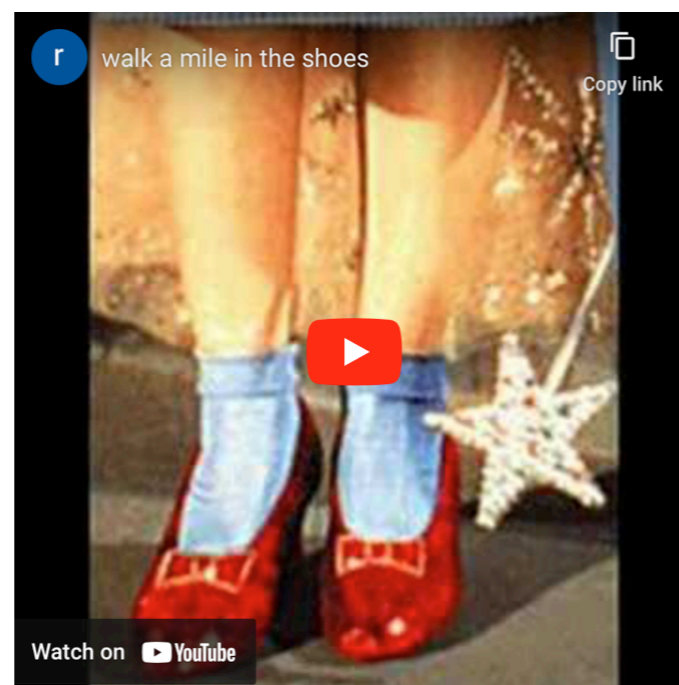
Steinbeck's book, *Travels With Charley: In Search of America* was initially recognized as a travelogue. After his death in 1968, his notes became public and it was realized that there were some discrepancies between the notes and the published text. It is now recognized as a work of fiction. A link to the *New York Times* article written by Charles McGrath regarding the change is included in the materials section.

Materials:

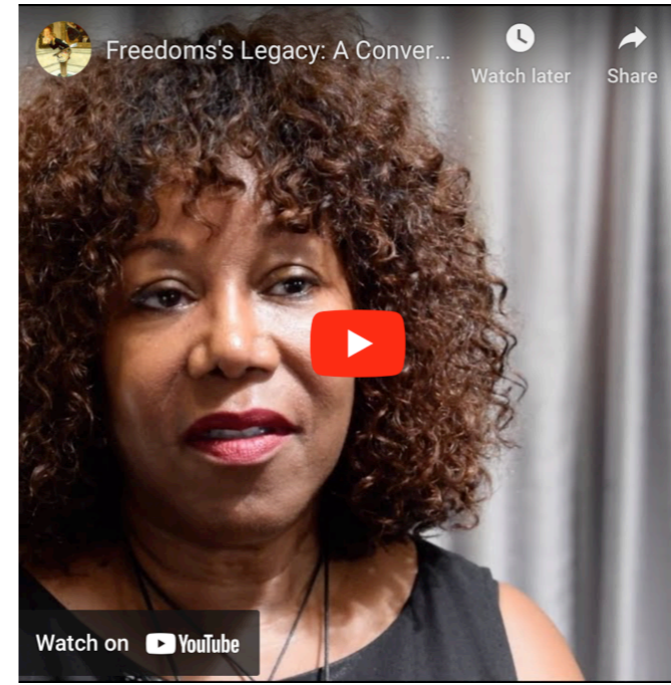
Multimedia Resources:



Norman Rockwell (1894-1978)
The Problem We All Live With, 1963
Illustration for *Look*, January 14, 1964, pp. 22-23
Oil on canvas
Norman Rockwell Museum Collection, NRM.1975.01



Walk a Mile in Her Shoes/Ruby's Shoes



A Conversation with Ruby Bridges Hall
Norman Rockwell Museum



Walk a Mile in Her Shoes/Ruby's Shoes

Classroom Supplies

- Multiple copies of text: *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* by John Steinbeck
- Book club guide included or the original guide from [Litlovers website](#). The following site contains
- photos related to text as well as a map of Steinbeck's route, [Good Reads](#).
- Optional: [A copy of related article for each student](#)
- [Five Themes of Geography](#)

Videos in Media Resources

- American Geography Close-up

Activities:

- **Initiating Activity: Jigsaw Activity**– Divide students into 5 research groups. Assign each group a region of the United States to research and complete a Geographical Themes sheet. Each group will teach the other groups about the region that they researched. Students may wish to create some sort of visual to assist them with their presentation. (This work may be completed over the first couple of days while they are reading the text.)
- Provide students with a copy of the text. Assign pages to read and set dates for book discussions. The text may be divided into 2 or 3 sections to read and discuss depending on what is best for students.
- Students may use a map (one is provided) to plot Steinbeck's route and stops. They may jot significant information at each stop. This information may include information about the place, people, Steinbeck's reflections, or their own thinking in response to the text. Consider this: does the region's information reflect the views of its people in regard to the Civil Rights Movement?
- In addition, they should use strategies such as post-it noting, text coding, double entry journal entries, etc. to record questions, thoughts and noticing. They should bring these notes to discussions.
- A set of discussion questions adapted from [litlovers.com](#) has been included. Students may be given the questions to consider as they are reading or they may be used to guide the discussions if needed.
- **Optional:** Read and discuss the *New York Times* article about the book. What are the students' thoughts about the article after reading the text?

Assessment:

- Did students adequately research and prepare a presentation for Jigsaw activity?
- Are students prepared for and participate in book discussions?
- Are students justifying responses with relevant text support?
- Are students able to differentiate similarities and differences between regions of the United States?
- Are students able to identify individuals who impacted and were impacted in the 1960s?
- Are students able to identify and explain events that were important during the 1960s?
- Are students able to make significant connections to past events and its impact on our lives today?

Standards:

This curriculum meets the standards listed below. Look for more details on these standards please visit: [ELA](#) and [Math Standards](#), [Social Studies Standards](#), [Visual Arts Standards](#).

– Applied Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.10

By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 11-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2

Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3

Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Including Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.10

By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.



