



BALDERDASH!

By Michelle Markel
Illustrated by Nancy Carpenter

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Ages 5 to 8 · F&P Text Level Gradient: V

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

A picture book biography about John Newbery, pioneering author and publisher—for whom the Newbery Medal is named—and the revolution in children's books that he led.

It's 1726, when children read preachy poems and fables, religious texts, and manuals that told them where to stand, how to sit, not to laugh, and other rules, because the future champion of children's books, John Newbery, is just a boy. *Balderdash!* is the story about his belief: that reading should be a delight for every reader.

Bal • der • dash

/ 'bôld r , daSH/

noun: nonsense, poppycock, malarkey, moonshine, flummery, or bunk

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This teacher guide contains discussion questions and activities aligned with the Common Core State Standards. See inside for reference to the Reading and Writing strands and grade-specific standards.



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. In class, look up “balderdash” in the dictionary. Share the word’s meaning and lead a discussion about how the subtitle of the book hints at its subject matter. Instruct students to take cues from the subtitle and write a paragraph that explains why the book is titled *Balderdash!*

Correlates with CCSS SL. 2-4.1, W. 2-4.1, L. 2-4.1, 2-4.2, 2-4.4.

2. Explain to the class that as a child John Newbery loved to read, but there were very few books for children at that time. Ask students to write down the titles of five of their favorite books, and instruct them to write a sentence summarizing why each title is among their favorites. Afterwards, ask students to share their list with a partner, or with the class.

Correlates with CCSS W. 2-4.1, L. 2-4.1, 2-4.2.

WHILE READING: QUESTIONS RELATED TO TEXT & ILLUSTRATION

1. Ask the class to answer the following questions about the dedication:

- What is the purpose of a dedication page?
- Why do you think the book is dedicated to YOU?
- Why do you think the author calls readers “lucky”?
- Consider the subtitle of the book and discuss why the boy on the dedication page is crying. Do you notice the boy reappear throughout the book? How does he change, and when does that begin to happen? Why do you think his appearance changes?

2. Explain to students that “setting” includes when and where a story takes place. Then have them study the first double-page spread in the book, the library scene depicting adults reading. Direct students to examine the characters’ clothing, accessories, and hairstyles, and have them share what the illustration reveals about the book’s setting.

3. Next, instruct students to look at the second double-page spread. Have them explain why the text begins with “Oh, no” and why “CHILDREN HAD TO READ” is written in capital letters. Lead a discussion about what the illustration reveals about children’s opinions of the books they were given.

4. In a class discussion, ask students to answer the following questions:

- Who is the boy with the pitchfork?
- What do you think John Newbery read as a lad?
- Why do you think he became so interested in publishing books for children?

5. Explain why people thought fun books would turn children “wild.” Lead the class in a discussion about what this concern says about people’s attitudes toward children in the 1700s. Ask students to share whether or not they think books have the power to change readers’ behavior.

6. John Newbery wrote messages to “mums and dads” in the books he published for children. Ask students to share examples of what he might have told them. As a class, discuss the possible reasons why he thought parents needed these messages.

7. A simile is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two unlike things by using “like” or “as.” Explain the following simile to the class: “The children gobbled them up like plum cakes.”

8. Define “boisterous” for the class. Then discuss why the word is used to describe the birth of children’s books.

9. Describe St. Paul's churchyard. Using Google Maps, take a virtual walk through the neighborhood of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, explaining that while it is very different today, you can still get a sense of the city during John Newbery's time. Ask students to share why this was a good place for Newbery to set up his bookstore and publishing business.

10. Explain to children that a philosopher is someone who is concerned with studying and developing ideas about life and knowledge. John Newbery admired a great philosopher who once said, "Reading should be a treat for children." Ask students if they can identify the philosopher in the illustration. In the bottom left hand corner of the page explain how this philosopher began to shape changes in people's attitudes toward children and what they read.

11. Take a look at the illustration of the back room in John Newbery's bookshop. Instruct students to identify any items they can recognize in the illustration. Lead a discussion about how these tools are used for creating and publishing books.

12. As a class, study the double-page spread titled "The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes." Explain the phrase "rags to riches." Ask students to share what they think John Newbery wanted readers to learn from "The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes." Discuss how Newbery applied the ideas in this story to his own life.

13. The last illustration is set in the present day. Have students compare the children pictured here to those pictured reading in John Newbery's bookshop. Ask them to explain why the little girl is turning a page, and to identify the man she sees behind the page. Next ask them to share where else they have seen this image of a page turning in the book, and why they think this image is used twice.

Correlates with CCSS RL. 2-4.1, 2-4.3, 2-4.4, 2-4.5, 2-4.7; L. 2-4.1, 2-4.3, 2-4.5; SL. 2-4.2, 2-4.3.

14. Lead a class discussion about why John Newbery is called the "father of children's books."

AFTER READING

1. Founded in 1745, the Moravian Book Shop in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania is the oldest bookstore in the United States. In its earliest years, it served as both a bookstore and a publisher. Many of the books sold there during its early years were religious, or about nature. Instruct students to take the information they learned from John Newbery's story and discuss what year the Moravian Book Shop might have started selling children's books. Have students write a story for the Philadelphia newspaper about the day the bookstore began stocking children's books.

Correlates with CCSS RL. 2-4.7; W. 2-4.3; L. 2-4.1, 2-4.2, 2-4.3.

2. Some of the earliest children's books included rhymes that taught the alphabet. Allow students to work with a partner, and assign them several letters of the alphabet. Ask them to write and illustrate rhymes about their assigned letters. Bind the work and ask students to think of a title for the book. For inspiration, consider sharing an online exhibit of 18th- and 19th-century children's alphabet books with the students, such as the University of Washington's exhibit at the Children's Historical Literature Collection, "Looking Glass for the Mind: 350 Years of Books for Children." Suggest that students create rhymes and illustrations in the style of these books. Allow time in class for students to share their rhymes.

Correlates with CCSS W. 2-4.3; L. 2-4.1, 2-4.2, 2-4.3.

3. John Newbery wrote messages to parents in the books he published. Ask students to write a paragraph about the book they most want their parents to read and why. Point out the publisher information for *Balderdash!* Then have them write down the title, author, illustrator, publisher, and copyright info for the book they recommend to their parents.

Correlates with CCSS W. 2-4.1; L. 2-4.1, 2-4.2, 2-4.3.

4. Lead the class in a discussion of vocabulary associated with publishing. Terms used in the book include “type sticks,” “galley,” “chases,” “copperplate engravings,” and “quoins.” Have students look up the meaning of other publishing terms, such as “blurb,” “typeset,” “spine,” “jacket,” “front cover,” “jacket flap,” and “copyright.” Direct the class to examine books in the classroom or school library to identify examples of these various elements of publishing.

Correlates with CCSS L. 2-4.4.

EXTENSION STRATEGIES

1. Work with your school librarian to create a bookshelf or display of John Newbery Medal and Honor books. Have students select a book they would like to read, and create literature circles around each book. For more resources on literature circles, consult ReadWriteThink’s online lesson plan titled “Literature Circles: Getting Started.” Create literature circles based on the books students select for their independent reading.

Correlates with CCSS W. 2-4.8.

2. Children of John Newbery’s generation read “chapbooks,” small pamphlets containing tales or ballads. Sometimes these “chapbooks” featured a collection of poetry. Ask students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to identify poems about books and reading. Then have them write and illustrate a “chapbook” that includes five poems.

Correlates with CCSS W. 2-4.8; L. 2-4.1, 2-4.2, 2-4.3.

3. John Newbery’s books were pirated in the United States. Both imported and pirated editions were available and popular during the colonial period. Discuss books, reading, education, schools, and leisure time in a study of colonial history, and include a reading of *Balderdash!* for students to understand children’s literature in that time period.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle Markel writes informative, enjoyable children’s books at her home in Los Angeles. She’s the author of *Tyrannosaurus Math* (a CCBC Choices Reading List selection), *The Fantastic Jungles of Henri Rousseau* (a PEN/Steven Kroll Award winner and a Parents’ Choice Gold Award winner), and *Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers’ Strike of 1909* (a Jane Addams Children’s Book Award winner, a Bank Street College of Education Flora Stieglitz Straus Award winner, and an NCTE Orbis Pictus Honor book). Like Giles the Gingerbread boy, she loves cream, custard, and good books.

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ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Nancy Carpenter is an illustrator of more than thirty books for children, including *Queen Victoria’s Bathing Machine* by Gloria Whelan, an ALSC Notable Children’s Book and CBC/NCSS Notable Social Studies Trade Book; *Apples to Oregon* by Deborah Hopkinson, an ALSC Notable Children’s Book and SCBWI Golden Kite Award winner; and *Lucky Ducklings* by Eva Moore, a Parents’ Choice Gold Award winner. Her unique multimedia approach to illustration has garnered numerous honors, including two Christopher Awards and the Jane Addams Children’s Book Award. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her family.

