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Activity Guide

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America The Beautiful

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ABOUT THE STORY

In this version of the song “America the Beautiful,” artist Wendell Minor creates scenes of America that perfectly illustrate the well-known and beloved verses of Katharine Lee Bates’ son.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katharine Lee Bates wrote “America the Beautiful” after a visit to Pikes Peak in Colorado, from which she saw a vista of the United States spread out before her. Her verses have touched and inspired Americans for more than a hundred years.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Wendell Minor creates illustrations for children’s books based on his love for the outdoors. He wants to help young people experience the beauty that he finds in the world of nature. “If we lose touch with nature,” he says, “then we lose touch with ourselves.” Mr. Minor lives in Connecticut with his wife and cats.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask children if they know the words to “America the Beautiful.” Have them sing or recite the verses they know. Then tell them that the book they will read includes all the words to the song, as well as information about the song’s author.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

“What are ‘amber waves of grain’?”

“What does the second verse describe?”

“To what ‘strife’ does the third verse refer?”

“Why do you think Katharine Lee Bates decided to write this poem?” (Draw conclusions)

“How does the poet feel about her country?” (Make inferences)

Vocabulary

Write these words and definitions on the chalkboard. Have children copy them and then draw lines matching each word with its definition.

spacious
liberating
impassioned
alabaster
strife

freeing
white
roomy
strongly felt
conflict

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Music: Singing Together

Have children work together to perform “America the Beautiful.” Divide them into three groups. Group 1 can sing the first verse, Group 2 can sing the second verse, Group 3 can sing the third verse, and all three groups can sing the final verse. If possible, have the class perform the song for other classes.

Art: Choose a Picture

Small versions of each illustration are located at the end of the book. Ask children to look at these and choose which illustration they like best. Each child can write a brief description of his or her favorite and explain how the painting reflects the meaning of America.

Social Studies: America’s Beautiful Places

The map at the back of the book shows some of America’s beautiful places. Have children locate another beautiful place on the map that they have visited or want to visit. If you wish, you can copy the map onto a piece of paper or the chalkboard and add each child’s “beautiful place” to it.

Music: Other Patriotic Songs

Have children work in small groups to find the words to another patriotic song, such as “The Star-Spangled Banner” or “God Bless America.” Groups can write out the words and then compare the song to “America the Beautiful.” Encourage children to decide which song they prefer and to explain their preference to the rest of the class.

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to be sure the sites are suitable.

The View from Pikes Peak

Children can use the keywords Pikes Peak views to see the views that inspired Katharine Lee Bates to write “America the Beautiful.” Have them look at the views they find and write a brief description to share with the rest of the class.