

## Ox-Cart Man

### ABOUT THE STORY

Read by the author, this poetic recounting of a year in the life of a New England family in early nineteenth century America recalls a simpler time in history. Dependent upon the land for all things, family life forms an annual cycle of planting, growth, harvest, handcraft, trade, and conservation. The story is from the oral tradition of folk tales, handed down by word of mouth through many generations of New Englanders.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Donald Hall, a New Englander, fashioned a distinguished literary career that has produced more than thirty books of poetry and prose. His poems, short stories, and essays have appeared in virtually every major American and British literary magazine. While a professor at Michigan University he created, over the span of almost two decades, some sixty radio programs of poetry, criticism, and talks for the BBC.

### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

When *Ox-Cart Man* received the Caldecott Award, Barbara Cooney joined the exclusive group of artists whose work has earned them that distinction more than once. Her *Chanticleer and Fox* was granted the award twenty years prior. Ms. Cooney has illustrated more than a hundred books for children.

### INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask what the group thinks life was like before we had cars, supermarkets, electricity and all the things we take for granted today. Discuss briefly and point out New England and Portsmouth, New Hampshire on a map. Introduce the book as a story of how one family lived in New England in the early 1800s.

### READING ACTIVITIES

#### **Comprehension/Thinking Skills**

- “How many people were in the Ox-Cart Man’s family?”
- “What did the Ox-Cart Man do in October?”
- “How did the family spend winter?”
- “What did they do in the spring?”
- “How do you think they spent summer?” (Predict)
- “Do you think people in Ox-Cart Man’s day worked harder than people today? Explain your answer.” (Make judgements)

### Vocabulary

The following words may be unfamiliar to the group. Define and review each before reading the story. After reading, have the children use words in sentences describing the family’s activities.

loom	flax	Barlow knife
spinning wheel	honeycombs	yoke
yarn	emroidery	tapped

### CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

#### **Social Studies: Life Long Ago**

Have children work in groups to find out about life in the United States in the early 1800s. Each group can learn about a different aspect of life at that time: clothing, food, schools, and transportation are some possible topics. Then groups can report to the rest of the class on what they have learned.

#### **Art: A New England Year**

Children can work in pairs to create a calendar page for one month of the year. For each page, children can plan and draw an illustration showing what Ox-Cart Man and his family would be doing. When children are finished, bind their pages together into an Ox-Cart calendar.

#### **Language Arts: What Did They Do With It?**

Have children choose one of the following items that Ox-Cart Man sold in Portsmouth Market. Each child can write a story describing what the buyer did with the item.

a bag of wool	shingles	goose feathers
linen	turnips	candles

#### **Science: How To Make Maple Syrup**

Have students work together to learn how maple syrup is created. Provide them with information about the sugar maple and maple syrup making. Point out that sugar for sweetening would have been very expensive in the early 1800s, so many people made sugar out of maple sap or used honey for sweetening. If possible, take a field trip to nearby farms or nature centers that demonstrate how maple syrup is made.

### INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to any of the Websites listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to make sure the addresses are current.

#### **Ox-Cart Man’s Crops**

Children can find out about the crops Ox-Cart Man grew by visiting the site below. Have them determine which of the crops he brought to market were native to North America and which came from the Old World. The website is located at: <http://horizon.nmsu.edu/garden/history>

Try this website to view 19 different drafts of Donald Hall’s poem, “Ox-Cart Man”: <http://wwwsc.library.unh.edu/specoll/exhibits/drafts.htm>

You might also try another Website on New Hampshire history: <http://www.state.nh.us/nhinfo/history.html>