



**Farnsworth Middle School
A School to Follow**

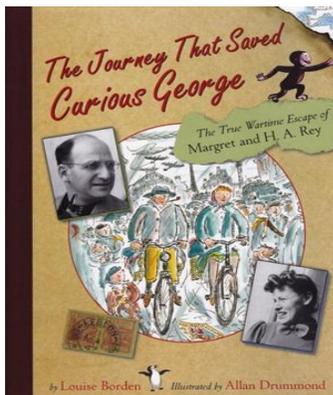
Cultivating a Rich Literacy Classroom: Nonfiction Text Selections

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A balanced literacy program provides students with opportunities to interact with texts from a variety of genres. The dawn of the New York State Common Core Learning Standards has paved a natural gateway for students and teachers to regularly engage in reading, discussing, and writing nonfiction. This shift in the standards has inspired educators to design and teach co-curricular lessons and activities, connecting multiple content and special areas. Reading books about artists, musicians and inventors, as well as social, cultural, and political icons, expands the depth and breadth of our understanding for how their contributions have shaped history. Infusing supplementary nonfiction texts into the curricula also presents students with other perspectives to consider. This takes them beyond the bare bones offered in traditional textbooks. Having access to a diverse selection of nonfiction resources is a critical component of inquiry-based learning. These texts serve to bridge what is being taught in the classroom with real-world experiences and applications. Nonfiction is written and published in numerous formats that appeal to students who possess a wide range of interests and reading abilities.

Borden, L. (2005). *The Journey That Saved Curious George*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.



Summary: Louise Borden masterfully chronicles the lives of Hans and Margaret Rey- the beloved creators of *Curious George*. In the text she also traces their dramatic exodus from Paris. The Reys narrowly escaped the devastation inflicted by Hitler's army as his forces invaded France. This was the beginning of a month-long journey that led the Reys through five countries. Their final destination was New York City where Hans and Margaret quickly established a new life.

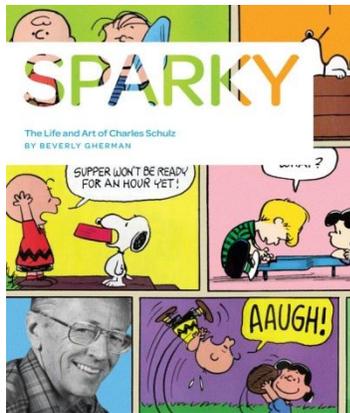
On June 12, 1940, the Reys fled Paris on bicycles that Hans built using spare parts. The couple left with little more than the clothes on their backs and a treasured document that Hans safely secured in the basket attached to his bike- a manuscript for their children's book featuring a monkey named Fifi (later re-named *Curious George*).

Hans and Margaret Rey were born, educated, and raised Jewish in Hamburg, Germany. Hans was eight years older than Margaret. Their families were friendly and lived in close proximity to one another. In 1926, Hans left home to embark on a series of adventures that would greatly influence his work as a children's author and illustrator. During this time he traveled up and down the Amazon River where he was able to study and draw monkeys in their natural habitat. In 1935, Margaret, who had been working as a photographer in London, traveled to Rio de Janeiro to collaborate with Hans. Their talents significantly complimented one another, creating a dynamic team. Shortly after her arrival, the couple married and returned to Europe where they began to write and illustrate children's literature. Nine years after Hans Rey left his home in

Germany, Adolph Hitler rose to power and life in Europe, especially for the Jews, took a perilous and tragic turn.

Annotation: *The Journey That Saved Curious George* would make an excellent source to include in a text set compiled for a co-curricular study focusing on people and events associated with the World War II Era. Original photographs, illustrations, and an array of primary documents are interspersed throughout this picture book. These additional pieces contribute to Borden's effort to share the authors' compelling story. While researching the Reys' escape route to avoid Hitler's invasion of Paris, Louise Borden discovered these extraordinary texts and visuals. They are part of a large collection of personal effects that were donated to the Grummond Children's Literature Collection located at the University of Southern Mississippi.

Gherman, B. (2010). *Sparky: The Life and Art of Charles Schulz*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.



Summary: Charles M Schultz was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on November 26, 1922, the only son of Carl and Dena Schultz. When he was just about one week old, Charles' uncle nicknamed his nephew Sparky, a name that he carried throughout his life. "For some reason the baby reminded him of Sparky, the sad eyed horse from the popular comic strip 'Barney Google' who unexpectedly became the big winner of a race." Charles and his father enthusiastically read the comic section of the newspaper each day. As a young boy he demonstrated an aptitude for illustrating and by the age of six was drawing his favorite cartoon characters. Charles also excelled in school and was promoted to advance two grade levels beyond his peers. While he flourished in elementary school, Schultz fell behind academically in Jr. High and never caught up. Sparky especially felt the social impact of being physically smaller and younger than the rest of his classmates.

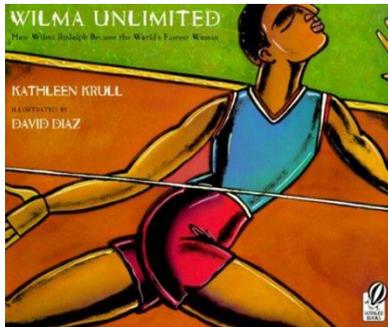
Charles realized early on that in order to become a successful creator of comics he needed to study the craft and process of others already established in the field. Mickey Mouse, Popeye, and Buck Rogers were a few of his favorites. Schultz's mother recognized and fostered her son's talent for drawing. After he graduated from high school Dena Schultz encouraged her son to take a correspondence course from Art Instruction Inc., in Minneapolis (in which lessons and exercises were mailed to students and returned when completed).

Sparky's aspirations to design and publish comics were placed on hold when our country joined the allied forces and became fully engaged in World War II. In November of 1942, at the age of twenty, he was drafted to serve in the United States Army. This experience was life-changing as Charles developed some close friendships. He also honed his natural leadership qualities which eventually led him to the rank of sergeant. By the time the war had ended, in 1945, Schultz exuded a self-confidence that would propel him to launch a thriving career.

In this biography, Beverly Gherman reveals Schultz's inspiration behind the characters he breathed to life in his beloved Peanuts comic strips. She skillfully portrays a loving man who was completely devoted to his five children. Gherman weaves many interesting details into the text that highlight the evolution of Sparky's extensive career.

Annotation: *Sparky- The Life and Art of Charles Schultz* is an amazing tribute to the man, the artist, who brought Charlie Brown and Peanuts into our homes for over fifty years. Charles was noted as "one of the most gifted and insightful observers of human behavior known to us." Schultz's characters, whose experiences were no different than their human counterparts, modeled realistic responses to innumerable universal dilemmas. This book is a wonderful choice for free reading and recommended as a mentor text for teaching a unit on writing biographies.

Krull, K. (1996). *Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World's Fastest Woman*. New York, New York: Harcourt Brace and Company.

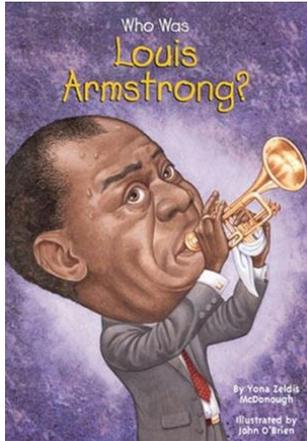


Summary: Wilma Rudolph was born on July 23, 1940, in Clarkesville, Tennessee, into a loving family that consisted of her parents and 19 brothers and sisters. She was a small and often sickly child, who by the age of five was stricken with Polio. Young Wilma exuded an inner strength and determination that helped her to fight through this debilitating disease, one that left her with a paralyzed leg. Though doctors insisted that she would never walk again, Wilma continued to receive treatments that required her to travel 50 miles from home. She worked independently each day to exercise her twisted appendage, and in the end, defied her physician's bleak prognosis; by the age of twelve, Wilma was walking and running like the rest of her siblings.

Ms. Rudolph went on to become the star of her high school basketball team, leading it to the state championships. A coach from the Tennessee State University, who happened to be in attendance for the game, was impressed with her ability to swiftly move up and down the court. Wilma was offered a full sports scholarship that made it possible for her to be the first in her family to attend college. She would however forgo playing basketball and instead serve as a critical member of the university's track and field team. At the age of twenty one, Wilma traveled to Rome to compete in a world-wide athletic contest- "She was the first African American woman to win three gold medals in a single Olympics"

Annotation: Resilient, determined, and dedicated- Wilma Rudolph transcended the medical, racial, and socioeconomic adversities stacked against her. Wilma's story is an inspiration for all young girls and women. Teachers may want to consider incorporating this book into studies with a focus on: Civil Rights, Health (specifically- the effects of Polio), as well as recognizing and celebrating American Olympic heroes and heroines.

Zeldis-McDonough, Y. (2004). *Who Was Louis Armstrong?* New York, New York: Grosset & Dunlap.



Summary: Louis Armstrong has been defined as one of the greatest Jazz musicians of all time. His innovative style, spontaneity, and devotion to his craft continues to influence contemporary Jazz artists. Armstrong's roots reach back to the epicenter of Jazz, the Storyville Section of New Orleans. Louis came from a very poor family where his maternal grandmother was known to be his primary care giver.

As a young child Louis dreamed of becoming a musician. He was mesmerized by the by the range of sounds that the trumpet could make and wondered what it might be like to play a horn. Earning the funds from a part time job, Louis proudly purchased a cornet from a local pawnshop for \$5. He taught himself the basic notes by listening to and observing the bands in town. He also rallied his friends to form a singing group. They sang as they walked throughout the streets of the infamous section of New Orleans, collecting loose change for their performances.

Louis's life however dramatically changed when he was just twelve years old. In the spirit of celebrating New Year's Eve, he fired a gun into the air and as a punishment was sent to a reform school- the Colored Waif's Home for Boys, where he remained for two years. It was during this time that Louis would meet one of his two mentors, who would inspire him to become an accomplished musician. Professor Davis, the school's band director, recognized the young Armstrong's innate talent for music. He taught him to move beyond playing by ear, by learning to read musical notes. Davis encouraged Louis to play a variety of instruments. He eventually promoted the boy to step into the role of the school's marching band leader.

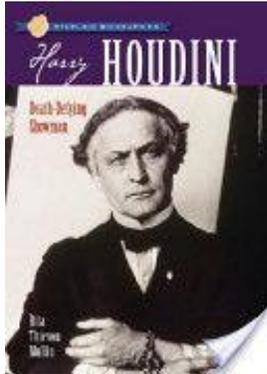
After being released from reform school, at the age of fourteen, Louis worked selling newspapers, unloading boats, and selling coal from a cart. He longed to join the world of musicians and spent every free moment in the local Jazz clubs, listening to the best that New Orleans had to offer. Over time he developed a relationship with a horn player by the name of Joe "King" Oliver. Oliver took the young boy under his wing and served as Louis's surrogate father. He purchased a cornet for the budding musician and taught him how to refine his craft.

Louis Armstrong led a full and rich career that included music and film. He played for diverse audiences across the United States and in Europe. The boy, who dreamed of playing the horn, rose above poverty, prejudice, and segregation to become a musical legend.

Annotation: "*Who was Louis Armstrong?*" – is one in a series of high interest, low level biographies that would be appropriate for struggling secondary readers and ELL students. These texts include detailed information about U.S. presidents, musicians, writers, and artists, entertainment icons, and other world-wide political and historical figures. Each biography is illustrated and provides a wealth of facts related to the person and time period about which the book is written. In this particular text, Yona Zeldis McDonough infuses an overview about the evolution of Jazz music in America, including the names of a variety of Jazz instruments and key

content vocabulary terms. She discusses and defines significant historical events such as World War I, the Jim Crow Laws, and The Great Migration.

Thieven- Mullin, R. (2007). *Harry Houdini: Death-Defying Showman*. New York, New York: Sterling Publishers.



Summary: Hungarian born Ehrich Weisz (known today as Harry Houdini) came into the world with a spirit and determination that would fuel his passion to become the most creative and sophisticated magician of the 19th century. The Weisz's immigrated to Appleton Wisconsin in 1876, in search of a better life. They moved to Milwaukee two years later. The Weisz's struggled financially and as a young boy, Erich regularly worked to support his family- selling newspapers and shining shoes. Between jobs, Erich enjoyed engaging in a number of athletic activities which included practicing acrobatic stunts. At the age of 12, he hopped a freight car and ran away from home. One year later, Erich rejoined his family who had since settled in New York City. He took on a variety of jobs to contribute to their ability to survive. Young Weisz had a profound sense of love and devotion for his mother.

Robert – Houdin, a French magician, inspired Erich and his younger brother Theo to pursue a career in magic. The duo formally began their journey when Erich was just 17, performing before civic groups, in music halls, at sideshows, and at New York's Coney Island Amusement Park. Gradually Erich added an "i" to the end of his idols name and began to refer to himself as Harry Houdini. The young men continued to perform together as the Houdini Brothers until the late 1800's. At that time Harry met Beatrice (Bess) Raymond, who would become his life-long companion. In 1894, shortly after they were married, Bess took Theo's place in the act. The breadth of their success and fame took them to places across the globe.

One of the many strategies that led Harry Houdini to great notoriety and fortune was his ability to shock and amaze people. Through multiple publicity stunts, which he performed prior to his shows, Houdini captured the interest of many who longed to see more of what this death-defying showman had to offer. For example, Houdini escaped from a prison cell that held President James Garfield's assassin. He disentangled himself from a straightjacket while hanging upside down, and broke free from a packing crate that had been nailed shut and plunged under water.

Annotation: *Harry Houdini Death-Defying Showman* is part of the Sterling Biographies book series. Colorful images and rare documents, personal artifacts, and photographs beckon readers to journey back in time, to take a historical walk with the renowned magician. This text would be an excellent choice to offer students who are studying the experiences of the first wave of European immigrants.