Just for Teachers: Web-based Lesson Plans Incorporating Indiana’s Environmental Literature into the Middle School Classroom

http://www.bsu.edu/ourlandourlit/special_projects/teacher/index.html

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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Abstract

This creative project, done in conjunction with the Our Land, Our Literature seminar at the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry, is a web-based resource created to assist middle school teachers (grades six through eight) in incorporating themes and ideas concerning the environment, and more specifically the literature that touches on Indiana’s environment, into their curricula. The project includes five-day lesson plans for five authors: Charles Major, Gene Stratton Porter, James Whitcomb Riley, Dorothy Fry Arbuckle, and Oliver Johnson. In addition to these five lesson plans, work done during the seminar is presented, including the Charles Major author entry created during the seminar.

Acknowledgements

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- The Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry provided me with the amazing opportunity to learn in a unique setting. Without this opportunity, this project would have never been possible.
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Introduction

When I was in the fourth grade, each student was required to research Indiana and create a scrapbook about the state, including items such as the state bird, state flower, and industry. It wasn’t until I participated in the Our Land, Our Literature seminar at the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry that I realized these attributes were just a small part of the state in which I had lived for over a decade.

The Our Land, Our Literature seminar began in the fall of 2002. Fifteen students came together with Dr. Barb Stedman for a semester-long project to create a website showcasing Indiana’s environment and the authors who wrote about the state. Throughout the semester, my classmates and I learned about Indiana’s environment, researched authors who wrote about the environment, traveled the state, and developed a website to share our work (www.bsu.edu/ourlandourlit). My classmates and I began to hear lectures from various members of the university and community about Indiana’s environment, and I realized that I actually knew very little about this topic. Through the seminar I was learning so much, including the fact that Indiana was once rich with wetlands. I decided that I wanted to create a web-based resource for middle school teachers to assist them in incorporating themes and ideas concerning the environment into their curricula. More specifically, I wanted to focus on literature, particularly fiction and poetry, that discusses the environment, environmental issues, and nature in Indiana.
Content

In the original plan for the project I intended to develop six one-week lesson plans that would touch on at least fourteen different authors, including Charles Major, Dorothy Hamilton, Gene Stratton-Porter, Crystal Thrasher, Oliver Johnson, Scott Russell Sanders, Jamie Lee Cooper, and Beverly H. Renner. Several of these authors were to be discussed in the classroom each week. I chose these authors after reading the book, Indiana Books by Indiana Authors: a Guide to Children’s Literature, by Ruth Jeannette Gillis. This guide includes authors who have written children’s books about Indiana’s environment. Many of the authors I had chosen were being researched by other students in the seminar, which provided a very strong link between the website and my project.

My original plans changed soon after I began working on the project, however. I realized that some of the authors whom I had chosen for the project did not have enough pertinent environmental aspects in their works to be included in the project, such as Dorothy Hamilton. Her works are about Indiana but present little discussion of the environment or nature. In addition, some of the authors whom I chose had so much in their works pertaining to the environment that an entire week was needed in order to cover all of the issues the text presented. I narrowed the list of authors, keeping only those who had the most pertinent material concerning the environment: Gene Stratton Porter, Charles Major, Dorothy Fry Arbuckle, Oliver Johnson, James Whitcomb Riley, and Scott Russell Sanders.

While researching for the Sanders lesson plan, however, I found that while he has written many wonderful works concerning the environment in Indiana, the inspiration for his children’s books came from his childhood in Ohio. Therefore, because Sanders’ works were
irrelevant to the project, he was dropped from my list of authors to include on the website. In the end, I showcased five authors in my project.

In order to provide consistency, each lesson plan (devised to follow the Indiana Academic Standards) follows this format: grade level, subjects covered, an overview of the author, objectives, and procedures to carry out the plan. The procedures are divided into five days and outline what is to be taught for each subject on that day, including special activities. (Originally, my lesson plans were to be seven days and focused on the assessment of the students. After beginning, however, I reduced the lesson plans to five days and focused them on activities to measure learning.) In addition, each lesson plan incorporates other webpages in the site by providing links to the author pages, environmental issues, and the regions in which the texts are set.

**The Authors**

**Dorothy Fry Arbuckle**

Born in Illinois in 1910, Dorothy Fry Arbuckle moved to northwestern Indiana as a young woman. While in Indiana, she wrote two children's novels concerning northwestern Indiana, *The After-Harvest Festival* and *Andy's Dan'l Boone Rifle*. In these novels, Arbuckle specifically discusses the area known as the "Great Marsh," which covered an area from South Bend to the Illinois border. In addition, the novels discuss the abundance of many different types of wildlife, including passenger pigeons, whooping cranes, panthers, American bison ("buffalo"), and bobcats, and how the populations of these animals were decreased due to the trapping of wildlife.
My Arbuckle lesson plan deals with pioneer life in northwestern Indiana, focusing on the "Great Marsh" and the relationship between the pioneers and the Native Americans they encountered. In this plan, students research the specific tribes that lived in northwest Indiana at the time of the pioneers, the Miami and Pottawatomie tribes. In addition, students discuss the species mentioned in the novels that are now endangered, extinct, or extirpated from Indiana.

James Whitcomb Riley

James Whitcomb Riley was born in Greenfield, Indiana, in 1849, but spent most of his life in Indianapolis. Riley was known as "The Hoosier Poet" as well as "The Children's Poet." He wrote many poems that celebrate the natural world as he experienced it throughout his life in Indiana.

In this lesson plan, several of Riley's poems are used in the classroom, including "Autumn," "A Hint of Spring," "A Summer Afternoon," "The Frog," "The Katydid," "The Rose," "The Clover," "The Jaybird," "The First Bluebird," and "The Yellowbird." For each day of the plan, a different topic regarding nature is discussed, such as the seasons, amphibians and insects, birds, and plant life. After reading the poetry, students write their own original poetry about the topic using a variety of styles, such as rhymed stanzas, limericks, haikus, and free verse.

Oliver Johnson

Oliver Johnson was born in Indianapolis in 1821, and his stories give a firsthand view of what central Indiana was like during settlement times. The oral history *A Home in the Woods: Pioneer Life in Indiana* is a collection of stories that Johnson told to his grandchildren about his life in Indiana from the 1820s to the 1840s. His grandson, Howard
Johnson, wrote down these recollections concerning early pioneer life. In the text, environmental issues such as deforestation and hunting are discussed.

While this lesson plan, like the Arbuckle and Major plans, focuses on pioneer life, a different aspect of that life is the center here. While the students are reading and discussing the book, they also explore the daily life of pioneers in a typical pioneer village. For example, students research the types of jobs held in a typical pioneer village, such as blacksmiths, glass blowers, general store owners, and village doctors.

**Gene Stratton Porter**

Gene Stratton Porter, born in 1863, spent much of her life near Geneva, Indiana. It was there that she began to explore the Limberlost swamp, which was an extensive wetland area. The Limberlost became a constant source of inspiration for Stratton Porter and influenced both her fiction and non-fiction works.

The main focus of this lesson plan is the Limberlost wetland area, as described in the novel *A Girl of the Limberlost*. In this lesson plan, students learn about the wetlands and explore environmental issues such as wetland destruction, deforestation, and habitat destruction. In addition to a trip to the Limberlost Restoration project, where the wetlands are slowly being re-established, students also make their own wetland in the classroom, and view how the wetlands are essential to the absorption of water in addition to the cleansing function of the wetlands.

**Charles Major**

Charles Major was born in Indianapolis in 1856. He later moved to Shelbyville, Indiana, where he practiced law and wrote three novels that were set near the Big Blue River in Indiana.
During the seminar, I researched Charles Major in great depth and wrote his author entry, which can be found on the Our Land, Our Literature website (www.bsu.edu/ourlandourlit/Literature/Authors/majorc.html). Through my extensive research, I became very familiar with Major’s life and his works, particularly *The Bears of Blue River, Uncle Tom Andy Bill: A Story of Bears and Indian Treasure*, and *A Forest Hearth: a Romance of Indiana in the Thirties*.

Major’s novel *The Bears of Blue River* is considered a classic example of Indiana juvenile literature and was a popular boys’ novel in the early twentieth century. It was very surprising to see how terribly violent it is by today’s standards. I decided to use only *The Bears of Blue River* in the lesson plan in order to show students how that violence affected the population of the black bear in Indiana. The focus of this lesson plan is pioneer life in Indiana, and more specifically the hunting and killing of the black bear, which is now on the state’s extirpated species list. Related environmental issues are discussed, such as deforestation and species that are extirpated, endangered, or of “special concern” in Indiana.

**Special Activities**

In each lesson plan there are a number of special activities that relate to the text and the lessons that are taught. Most of these activities take place in the natural setting, or the setting in which the activity would naturally occur. As a Special Education major, I was taught by Dr. David Feldman that students should be taught activities in the natural setting, and I have experienced and truly believe in this philosophy. By learning in this setting, students will retain the knowledge more easily, and the lesson will have more meaning. In order to relate this project to my major, I designed each lesson to take the students into the
natural setting in order to give them hands-on experience with the things about which they are reading. For example, in the Gene Stratton Porter lesson plan, a trip to the Limberlost Swamp is suggested, in order for the students to experience a wetland. In the Oliver Johnson lesson plan, a trip to Connor Prairie in Fishers, Indiana, allows the students to experience a typical pioneer village. I believe that these activities will help the students better understand the text.

**Webpage Construction**

In order to put these five lesson plans onto the *Our Land, Our Literature* website, along with the Charles Major entry and other materials that I wrote during the semester, I had to learn how to use Dreamweaver MX and Fireworks MX. (Dreamweaver is Macromedia's web design and development software; Fireworks is their web graphics editing software.) In addition, I learned how to scan images and find and download images from the internet, including the non-copyrighted clip art that accompanies my lesson plans.

Before the beginning of the seminar, I had had no experience in any aspect of webpage or graphics editing. By the end of the semester, however, I was able to use both Dreamweaver MX and Fireworks MX to create simple webpages, using templates created by our seminar's development team. Furthermore, I learned how to upload files to the Ball State server and execute the many other meticulous tasks associated with webpage construction.

Appendix A contains printouts of the actual webpage lesson plans, and Appendix B is my Charles Major author entry, all of which I created using the above software and related technology.
Related Activities

I participated in many other activities during the seminar that are directly related to this creative project. Throughout the course of the semester, our seminar group went to the Limberlost Swamp near Geneva, Indiana, in order to work on a key 4.37-acre section of land and other former Limberlost areas now being restored to wetlands. Our three days of work there included searching for and marking drainage tiles, surveying the land, planting native prairie plants, planting more than eighty red oak saplings (which will eventually provide a corridor to shelter animals passing between two wooded areas), and harvesting prairie seed. My experiences at the Limberlost were so amazing that I decided to include a trip to Geneva in the Stratton Porter lesson plan.

In addition to our travel to the Limberlost, the seminar took two weekend trips to explore the natural landscape of Indiana. Our first trip was to western and southern Indiana, where we were able to view and experience a number of places important for their natural features, such as Cedar Bluffs, a Nature Conservancy property near Bloomington, a limestone quarry, and Wyandotte Caves. The second trip led us to northwest Indiana, where we were able to view the sand dunes and the sandhill cranes at the Jasper-Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area. These trips greatly influenced my lesson plans, as they provided me with firsthand experience with the regions and habitats that were written about by Major, Arbuckle, and Johnson.

At the end of a semester of long, hard work, the seminar hosted an event at the Minnetrista Cultural Center, in Muncie, which unveiled our final project, the website, as well as showcased the special projects that other students and I began during the semester. I
presented a sample of my work regarding Charles Major's fiction to an audience of fifteen to twenty people, including public school educators, throughout the course of the evening.

Finally, in addition to creating two author entries and working on my project throughout the semester, I was a member of the seminar's research team. The research team was responsible for researching and writing all entries for the "Environment" and "Regions" sections of the website. My research and writing about air pollution, water pollution, and urban sprawl did not directly contribute to the creation of my lesson plans; however, they did help to develop my understanding of the balance of nature that is significant to all five of the authors' writing.

It is my hope that the lesson plans that I have created will become used in middle school classrooms all over Indiana. I feel that these plans will give students a firm background in Indiana's environment and provide them with an appreciation for the state in which they live. I didn't learn of these things until my fourth year in college, and I feel that I would have had a greater appreciation for the state had I known its rich diversity earlier in life. Through these lesson plans, I can show students that Indiana isn't a flat, boring state, but a state that was once rich in its environmental diversity with wetlands and wildlife.
Works Cited


This portion of the site is dedicated to teachers. These five lesson plans will help incorporate Indiana's environmental literature into the middle school classroom. Click on an author's name below to view the five-day lesson plan.

Charles Major
Gene Stratton Porter
Dorothy Fry Arbuckle
James Whitoomb Riley
Oliver Johnson
Dorothy Fry Arbuckle

Grade Level:
6-8

Subjects:
Science: Environment
Social Studies: History
English: Literature

Overview:

Dorothy Fry Arbuckle wrote two novels regarding early life in Indiana, *The After Harvest Festival* and *Andy's Dan'l Boone Rifle*. These novels discuss what it was like to be a pioneer, including the relationship between Native Americans and pioneers. They also discuss the abundance of wildlife that lived in the area, and how the population of animals lessened because of trapping.

Purpose:

The purpose of this lesson plan is to make a connection between Indiana's environment and literature, and to give students a view on early life in northwest Indiana.

Objectives:

1) To explore natural disasters, including forest fires, floods, and tornadoes.
2) To explore the wildlife that is now extinct or extirpated from Indiana.
3) To explore the relationship between pioneers and Indians.
4) To explore the habitat known as the "Great Marsh."

Procedures:

This is intended to be a five-day lesson plan that helps students connect Indiana's environment and literature.

Day 1
Social Studies:

First, determine the students’ pre-existing knowledge of the pioneers. Ask the students to share what comes to mind when they hear the word “pioneer,” and keep track of their answers.

After getting responses from the students, begin the lesson on pioneers and early settlers in Indiana.

Discuss with the students:
1) The various reasons that people began to move west.
2) Factors that led some pioneers to settle in the Indiana territory, such as the river systems located there.
3) The pioneers’ attitudes toward the wilderness.
4) The relationship between the pioneers and the Native Americans.

English:

Read aloud the first two chapters of The After Harvest Festival. After today, the students will be responsible for reading the remainder of the novel for homework. Nightly assignments will be different for every class, depending on the grade level.

Day 2

Social Studies:

Discuss the various aspects of daily life of the Native American tribes that used to live in northwest Indiana and that are discussed in the book.

1) Miami tribe
2) Pottawatomie tribe

Science:

Determine the students’ pre-existing knowledge of natural disasters. This will help you decide how extensive the lesson should be.

Discuss how each of the following natural disasters occurs, and its effect on wildlife and their habitat:

1) Forest fires
2) Floods
3) Tornadoes

English:
Creative writing: Have the students write a short essay detailing their thoughts of what was read in class the previous day, including the daily life of pioneer children vs. a typical day in their own lives.

**Day 3**

**Science:**

Discuss with the students the various environmental habitats of the Great Marsh, including the Kankakee River, the wetlands, and the prairies.

**English:**

Library time: Split the class into groups and give the students time in the library to research the Native American tribes that lived in Northwest Indiana. This will lead to activities on days four and five of the lesson plan.

**Day 4**

**Social Studies:**

Activity #1: Based on the research done on day three, students will use Popsicle sticks to make a Native American dwelling.

**Science:**

Discuss the species mentioned in the book that are now extinct, endangered, or extirpated from Indiana.
1) Passenger pigeons
2) Whooping cranes
3) Panthers
4) American Bison ("buffalo")
5) Bobcats

**English:**

Library time: Take the students to the library to finish their research for the activity done on day five.

**Day 5**

**Social Studies:**

In their groups, students will give a short oral report on what they think may be a typical day in the life of Native Americans, based on their research.
English:

After a short review, have the students write a poem on one of the extinct, endangered, or extirpated species of Indiana.
James Whitcomb Riley

Grade Level:
6-8

Subjects:
English: Literature
Science: Environment

Overview:

James Whitcomb Riley was known as “The Hoosier Poet” as well as “The Children’s Poet.” He wrote many poems that celebrate the natural world as he experienced it throughout his life in Indiana.

Purpose:

The purpose of this lesson plan is to read Riley’s poetry pertaining to nature and relate it to personal experiences that students have had growing up in Indiana.

Objectives:

1) To explore natural life in Indiana, as compared to the rest of the United States and the world.
2) To write original poetry and prose regarding similar personal experiences with nature.
3) To explore different types of poetry.

Procedures:

This is intended to be a five-day lesson plan that helps students explore personal feelings and experiences with nature, as well as explore different types of poetry.

Day 1

English:

Read “Autumn,” “A Hint of Spring,” and “A Summer Afternoon.”
Activity #1: Students will write rhymed stanza poetry relating things they have experienced with the season of their choice. Students may write about things they have seen in a season or how a certain season makes them feel about nature.

Science:

Discuss with the students the cycle of the seasons in Indiana and the extremes that are experienced. Compare our cycle of seasons with the seasons in other regions of the United States and the world.

Day 2

English:

Read “The Frog” and “The Katydid.”

Activity #2: Students will write an original limerick about species they have experienced in nature, such as amphibians and insects.

Science:

Discuss with the students the specific amphibians and insects that are found in Indiana.

Activity #3: Mini-research project—Have each student in the class choose a different state and research the different types of amphibians and insects found there. Each student will present their findings to the class. As a group, compare and contrast the types of amphibians and insects found in other states.

Day 3

English:

Read “The Rose” and “The Clover.”

Activity #4: Students will write an original haiku about the different types of plants they have seen in nature, such as shrubs and trees.

Science:

Discuss with the students the different types of plant life found in Indiana. Compare and contrast these types of plants with plants found in other parts of the United States and the world.

Day 4

English:


Activity #5: Students will write an original free verse poem about what they have seen and experienced with birds in nature. For example, they can write about the state bird, the cardinal.

Science:

Discuss the different types of birds that are most commonly found in Indiana.

Day 5

Activity #5: Take students on a hike in a local forest or park to get more firsthand experience with nature. Once the students are back in the classroom, have the students work collaboratively on a mural, making sure they include the amphibians, insects, plants, and birds that they've written about and discussed in class.
Oliver Johnson

Grade Level:

6-8

Subjects:

Science: Environment
Social Studies: History
English: Literature

Overview:

Howard Johnson, grandson to Oliver Johnson, wrote down the recollections his grandfather told him concerning early pioneer life in Marion County, Indiana, in the book *A Home in the Woods: Pioneer Life in Indiana*. This oral history touches on environmental issues such as deforestation and hunting.

Purpose:

The purpose of this lesson plan is to connect Indiana’s environment and literature, and to give students insight into pioneer life in Indiana.

Objectives:

1) To explore pioneer life.
2) To examine the mass clearing of the land (deforestation)
3) To examine the effect of hunting on the local wildlife

Procedures:

This is intended to be a five day lesson plan that gives students insight into pioneer life in Indiana.

Day 1

Social Studies:

First, determine the students’ pre-existing knowledge of the pioneers. Ask them to

share what comes to mind when they hear the word “pioneer,” and keep track of their answers.

After getting responses from the students, begin the lesson on pioneers and early settlers in Indiana.

Discuss with the students:
1) The various reasons that people began to move west.
2) Factors that led some pioneers to settle in the Indiana territory, such as the river systems located there.
3) The pioneers’ attitudes toward the wilderness.

Science:

Determine the students’ knowledge of general environmental issues. This will help give you an idea of how extensive the environment lesson should be. On day two, deforestation will be discussed. Students will need enough background information in order to be able to discuss this environmental issue.

English:

Read aloud the first two chapters of *A Home in the Woods*. After this day, students will be responsible for reading the rest of the book on their own time.

**Day 2**

**Social Studies:**

Discuss with students the different aspects of life in a typical pioneer village, such as glassblowers, blacksmiths, general store owners, and doctors.

**Science:**

1) Define deforestation.
2) Discuss with the students the effects of deforestation on the wildlife in the area.

**English:**

Library time: Take the students to the library in order to research daily life for the pioneers. This will lead into an activity on day three.

**Day 3**

**Social Studies:**

Activity #1: Split the class into groups of four. Give each group a long piece of
butcher paper, Lincoln logs, markers, felt, and any other materials that are necessary for them to create a 3-D pioneer village.

**English:**

**Activity #2:**
1) Creative writing: After the activity, have students write a creative story about what they feel would have been a typical day in the life of a pioneer.
2) Discuss the students’ responses to the creative writing activity.

**Day 4**

**Science:**

**Activity #3:** Field trip--Take the students to Connor Prairie to experience typical pioneer life.

**English:**

**Activity #4:** Creative writing--After returning from Connor Prairie, give the students the opportunity to write about their favorite aspect of pioneer life. Have them write about what job they might like to have in a pioneer village.

**Day 5**

**English:**

Creative writing: Allow the students to pick out their favorite part of the book so far, and ask them to explain to the class why it is their favorite part of the book. Then, have the students write their own outcome to that part of the book.
Gene Stratton Porter

Grade Level:

6-8

Subjects:

Science: Environment
English: Literature

Overview:

Gene Stratton Porter is a prolific writer regarding Indiana’s environment. Most of Porter’s works are focused on her experiences at the Limberlost, located near Geneva, Indiana.

Purpose:

The purpose of this lesson plan is to help students make connections between Indiana’s environment and literature. In addition, this lesson plan will give students a view of what Indiana used to look like before the wetlands were drained for farming.

Objectives:

1) To learn about the wetland habitat.
2) To explore environmental issues presented in the text, such as wetland destruction, deforestation, and habitat destruction.

Procedures:

This is intended to be a five-day lesson plan that provides an in-depth look into Indiana’s natural wetland environment.

Day 1

Science:

After determining the students’ pre-existing knowledge of the wetlands, begin the
science lesson.

Discuss with the students:

1) Where the Limberlost wetlands were located
2) What a wetland area looks like
3) What types of plants and animals can be found in a wetland
4) The different types of wetlands, such as bogs, swales, marshes, and wet prairies.

English:

Read aloud the first two chapters of *A Girl of the Limberlost*. After today, students will read the remainder of the book in nightly assignments.

**Day 2**

**Science:**

Discuss with students the destruction of the Limberlost and the reasons they were drained.

**English:**

Creative writing: Have the students write a creative story about what they think the wetlands looked like before they were drained and clear-cut.

**Day 3**

**Science:**

Discuss with the students the habitat destruction due to the draining of the wetlands and the species that used to live there.

**English:**

Give the students fifteen minutes to pick a passage that they enjoyed from the previous night’s reading. Then have each student share with the class why they enjoyed the passage. Use this to lead into a discussion of the previous night’s reading.

**Day 4**

**Science:**
Activity #1: Take a field trip to Geneva, Indiana, to take a tour of the Limberlost restoration project and of Gene Stratton Porter’s home. If the trip to Geneva is not possible for your classroom, simply extend the activity on day five to a two-day lesson.

**English:**

After touring the Limberlost restoration project, give the students some time to reflect on what they saw. Then have them write a short poem about what they have experienced.

**Day 5**

Activity #2: Create your own wetland

Split the class into groups of three and have them create their own mini-wetland, as explained on the website [http://www.baylink.org/lessons/wetland_right.html](http://www.baylink.org/lessons/wetland_right.html). On this website you will find a listing of the required materials for the activity, detailed procedures for the teacher to create two mini-wetland demonstrations, and guidelines for the students to create their own wetlands.

Alternate discussion questions:

1) Why does farmland often flood?
   *Wetlands act as nature's sponge. When the land is drained, the water has nowhere to go and ends up flooding the land instead of being absorbed by the land.*

2) What is the cleansing function of wetlands?
   *Wetland vegetation filters out toxic pesticides and herbicides from surrounding farm fields.*

3) How does the destruction of the wetlands affect the topsoil, and why is this a concern?
   *Topsoil is lost because of the destruction of the wetlands. This is a major area of concern for the Wabash River, which runs through the Limberlost, because the silt gets washed into the river, thereby suffocating fish eggs.*

Activity #3: Research project

In addition to creating the wetland, students can research what birds, insects, amphibians, and mammals would be left without food or habitat, whether for migration or for breeding, if the wetlands disappeared.
Our Land, Our Literature is an electronic exploration of Indiana's environmental literature created by student scholars at the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry in Muncie, Indiana.

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Comments or questions: e-mail the webmasters at landandlit@bsu.edu.
Charles Major

Grade Level:

6-8

Subjects:

Science : Environment
Social Studies : History
English : Literature

Overview:

Charles Major’s children’s novel, *The Bears of Blue River*, discusses early life in Indiana. It touches on environmental issues that are still pertinent today, such as deforestation and endangered species.

Objectives:

1) To explore pioneer life in Indiana.
2) To examine the deforestation of Indiana by early settlers.
3) To examine the reckless hunting and killing of black bears, which eventually leads to the animal’s placement on the extirpated species list.

Procedures:

This is intended to be a five-day lesson plan that provides an in-depth look into early life in Indiana. More or less time can be spent on this lesson per the teacher’s inclination.

Day 1

Social Studies:

First, determine the students’ pre-existing knowledge of the pioneers. Ask the students to share what comes to mind when they hear the word “pioneer,” and
write the students’ responses on the board in order to keep track of what has already been said.

After getting the students’ ideas, begin the lesson on pioneers and early settlers in Indiana.

Discuss with the students:
1) The various reasons that people began to move west.
2) Factors that led some pioneers to settle in the Indiana territory, such as the river systems that led them through the dense forests.
3) The pioneers’ attitudes toward the vast wilderness.

Science:

Determine the students’ knowledge of the environment. This will help you decide how extensive this environment lesson should be. On day 2, deforestation and endangered species will be discussed. If the students have very limited knowledge of environmental issues, provide them with enough background to be able to discuss these two topics.

English:

Read aloud the first two chapters in The Bears of Blue River. After today, the students will be responsible for reading the rest of the book at home. Nightly reading assignments will be decided upon by the teacher, depending on the class and grade level.

Day 2

Science:

1) Define deforestation.
2) Define endangered, threatened, and extirpated species.
3) Provide examples of each for clarity.

English:

1) Activity #1: research reports. Students will choose an endangered animal in Indiana from the endangered species list. They will then research the species and write a report based on their findings. In the report, students should be sure to include a description of the species, including its size, behavior, life span, natural habitat and the food that it consumes. In addition, the students should discuss the status, current population, threats to the species, and ways that they can be protected. Students will have two weeks to complete the report.
2) Library time: Take students to the school library in order to begin researching
their endangered species.

Day 3

Social Studies:

Students will be split into four groups, and each group will be assigned a season. They will then come up with a short skit to be performed tomorrow in class showing a typical day in the life of a pioneer in that season.

Science:

1) Activity #2: adopt-a-tree. The class will take a field trip to a local park. Once there, the students will then pick a tree to “adopt.” Using sketchpads and pencils, students will draw a picture of their tree. They will also include a separate drawing of the shape of the leaf for their tree, using as much detail as possible. If students have trouble drawing the detail of the leaf, they can also place the leaf on the ground with the paper over it and rub the pencil over the paper. This will provide an accurate reproduction.
2) The environment lesson will take place while at the park. Discuss the effects of deforestation with the students. In addition, talk about the black bear and its introduction to the endangered species list.

English:

1) To gauge what the students have learned from the reading so far, have them write a short essay answering the following question:

   In chapter 3, Balser and his friends go into the woods alone to pick berries. They are very self-sufficient and hunt for food to make lunch. What difficulties would you have finding and preparing your food that Balser and his friends did not have? If you were a child in pioneer times, how would your life be different from how it is now?

2) Discuss the students’ responses to the essay question.

Day 4

Social Studies:

Activity #3: Students will perform the plays about pioneer life that they created on day three.

English:
1) Creative story: Have the students write a creative story telling what would have happened to Balser if Liney had not come back to help him and had not blinded the bear with the fire.
2) Discuss the students’ responses to the creative story activity.
3) Library time: Take the students to the school library in order to continue researching the endangered species.

**Day 5**

**Social Studies:**

Activity #4: This activity will be a follow-up to the endangered species reports. Duplicate the outline of a T-shirt on a piece of paper. Each student will draw a picture of his or her endangered species on a “T-shirt,” along with a message.

**Science:**

Activity #5: With permission, the students and teacher will collaborate and choose a spot on school grounds to plant a tree. Talk with the students about what needs to be done to care for the tree. To follow up with this activity, have the students water the tree once a day for a week, and then once a week until the end of the school year.
Appendix B
Charles Major (1856-1913)

**Hoosier Connection:** Charles Major was born in Indianapolis in 1856. He and his family moved to Shelbyville, Indiana, in 1869, where he practiced law. He wrote three novels set near the Big Blue River in Indiana.

**Works Discussed:** *The Bears of Blue River, Uncle Tom Andy Bill: A Story of Bears and Indian Treasure, A Forest Hearth: A Romance of Indiana in the Thirties*

Charles Major was born on July 25, 1856, in Indianapolis. In 1869, he and his family moved to Shelbyville, Indiana. He spent three years at the University of Michigan studying law, and was admitted to the bar in 1877. He later returned to Shelbyville where he maintained a small law practice until he succumbed to liver cancer in 1913. It was in Shelbyville that he cultivated his passion for historical romances. He wrote many novels that were set in the time of Henry VIII, and in his lifetime he was well known for these historical romances. In addition, he also wrote early nineteenth-century adventure stories set in Indiana on the banks of the Big Blue River. Two of the three novels are still considered classic Indiana juvenile literature.

*The Bears of Blue River* is set in the early nineteenth century in Shelby County on the banks of the Big Blue River. In Major's narration, the landscape of early Indiana is clearly defined: Back "in the 'twenties,' when Indiana was a baby state...great forests of tall trees and tangled underbrush darkened what are now her bright plains and sunny hills..." (3).

The story outlines the adventures of a young boy named Balser Brent, who loves hunting and killing wild animals. He is especially passionate about killing bears, and does so many times throughout the course of the novel. The mischievous Balser spends most of his time in the forest, finding himself in many dangerous situations, often of his own will. This novel is an excellent example of many pioneers' desire to tame "savage" nature. Jeanette Vanausdall says that "there is in Major's book an unmistakable reveling in destruction that speaks to and satisfies a primal lust for the total conquest of nature" (41). This can clearly be seen when the great one-eared bear endangers Balser and his friends, and he vows to kill the bear at any cost:
[H]e arose to his feet, and gave notice to all persons present that there would soon be a bear funeral, and that a one-eared bear would be at the head of the procession. He would have the other ear of that bear if he had to roam the forest until he was an old man to find it. (78)

Balser and his group of friends eventually do find the one-eared bear, but after a long and grueling battle, Balser is too battered and bruised to load the gun with the fatal bullet. He bestows the honor of killing the bear upon his friend Tom.

Balser then called off the dogs, and Tom, as proud as the President of the United States, held the gun within a yard of the bear’s head and pulled the trigger. The great brute rolled over on his side, his mighty limbs quivered, he uttered a last despairing growl which was piteous—for it was almost a groan—and his fierce, turbulent spirit left forever. Balser then drew his hunting knife from the bear’s body, cut off the remaining ear, and put it in the pocket of his buckskin coat. (100-01)

The dead bear’s ear becomes a trophy, a token of courage and honor for Balser.

**Uncle Tom Andy Bill: A Story of Bears and Indian Treasure** is the sequel to *The Bears of Blue River*, but is told from a different point of view. In this novel, much of the focus is on Tom Andy Bill Addison and his adventures with Balser Brent. Again, the boys find themselves in dangerous situations, including being attacked by bears and recovering hard-earned gold from a band of treacherous robbers. Their journeys take them as far south as the Wyandotte Caves in search of even more gold, which was hidden there by Indians. As in *The Bears of Blue River*, the destruction of Indiana’s natural landscape is also showcased when Tom and Balser acquire land in order to build a cabin and start a farm. To do this, they must clear the land and tear down the trees to make it suitable for farming:

After our cabin was built, Balser and I moved in and began clearing the land. It was a big undertaking for two boys of seventeen years old, but we went at it with determination and made fair progress from the start. You have no idea of the magnitude of the task. The ground was almost covered with great trees, many of them four feet in diameter, and between the trees flourished an undergrowth that would make the hair on a dog’s back look thin by comparison. It was hard, slow work, but Balser and I took our time to it; and for the first three or four years we were contented with a small clearing. (249-50)

The last of Major’s novels set in Indiana, *A Forest Hearth: A Romance of Indiana in the Thirties*, has less of an emphasis on the natural landscape and more focus on a sentimental love story that takes place on the banks of the Big Blue River. There are, however, some very colorful descriptions of the early Indiana landscape:
Vividly I remember the white-skinned sycamores, the gracefully drooping elms, and the sweet-scented honey locusts that grew about the cabin and embowered it in leafy glory. Even at this long distance of time, when June is abroad, if I catch the odor of locust blossoms, my mind and heart travel back on the wings of a moment, and I hear the buzzing of the wild bees, the song of the meadow-lark, the whistle of bob-white, and the gurgling of mingling tones of a perfect orchestra by the soft-voiced babble of my wee girl-baby friend. I close my eyes, and see the house amid the hollyhocks and trees, a thin line of blue smoke curling lazily from the kitchen chimney and floating away over the deep, black forest on the north and east. I see the maples languidly turning the white side of their leaves to catch the south wind's balmy breath.... (17)

Another passage shows how some viewed the natural landscape. When Rita, the heroine of the novel, makes a comment that offends her friend Diec, he leaves by way of the forest path. After realizing how upset he really is, Rita feels remorseful and wants to apologize. However, the thought of the "black terrible forest," as "darkness was rapidly falling," causes her too much fear to even try following him (25).

In his novels, Charles Major provides a colorful picture of the early landscape in Indiana and insight into the mindset of pioneers concerning their natural surroundings.

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Sources:


Image:

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Our Land, Our Literature is an electronic exploration of Indiana's environmental literature created by student scholars at the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry in Muncie, Indiana.

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