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# OX-CART MAN

Author: Donald Hall

Illustrator: Barbara Cooney

Publisher: Viking

## THEME:

A visit to a colonial village reveals a time when people had a close relationship with the land, animals, and people they needed for everyday life and survival.

## PROGRAM SUMMARY:

The feature book describes the day-to-day life of an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century New England family throughout the year. LeVar is inspired by the story to visit Old Sturbridge Village, Massachusetts, a hands-on living history museum where he discovers what life was like in the early 1800s. He learns about training oxen, blacksmithing, bartering, and early printing methods.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Discuss how the ox-cart man's family meets many of its basic needs through things they grow or raise. What necessary items did the family have to buy?

The ox-cart man and his family made use of almost everything in order to live. Discuss with students ways that they reuse items, or parts of items.

Invite students to tell about jobs they do at home. Compare and contrast their present day jobs with those done by the children in the story.

Discuss why the work of the ox-cart man's family changed with the seasons. What present day jobs are different from season to season? (Students might think of jobs that are typically done outdoors or jobs that are done "in season," such as professional athletes, house painters, construction workers, gardeners, and the like.)

## CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

As a class, plot the sequence of events of the story on a circular timeline. Discuss this type of story pattern, in which the story ends in the place that it begins. Contrast it with the more common beginning-middle-end story plot that has a linear pattern. Ask students if they can think of other circular stories. (**Reading Rainbow** feature book, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, is one.)

Enlist the aid of parent volunteers to bake bread and make butter with the students in the classroom.

With help of the school library media specialist, have students research jobs that people had in colonial times (e.g., blacksmith, cooper, tailor, whitesmith,

hatter, farrier, miller, wheelwright, silversmith, tanner, cobbler, housewright, pewterer, towncrier, clockmaker, cabinetmaker, barber, and others). Prepare a simple reproducible page with three headings — "Name of job", "Description of work" and "Interesting facts about the job" for students to use to record what they've found. Have them illustrate the border of the page with sketches of items associated with the job. Bind the pages into a reference book for the classroom library.

Set up a chart for each of the four seasons. Divide the charts into two columns: "What we do" and "What the ox-cart man's family does." As a class, brainstorm activities that they do in each season of the year, e.g., go swimming, go fishing, build a snowman, plant a garden, rake leaves, cook outdoors, etc. Then, based on the program and the book, list the activities of the ox-cart man and his family during each of the four seasons. Discuss the two charts—do the students do any of the same things that a family in the 1800's did?

As a class, make a calendar for the ox-cart man's family. Students will need to make decisions about which of the family's activities are recorded for each month. (Not all of the months are specifically mentioned in the story.) They can illustrate and label the activities for each month on separate pieces of paper and then assemble the months into a chronological year.

If possible, arrange a field trip to an historical home in the community, a living history museum, an historical society, or a museum that contains exhibits related to life in early America. Have students notice items or activities that were shown in the program. If such a visit is not possible, contact the local historical society or public library to see if pictures of your community in the "olden days" are available for checkout and bring them into the classroom.

Have students interview their grandparents or other older family members or friends about their lives when they were children. What were their schools like? What games did they play? What kinds of jobs did they have at home? Allow students to think of the questions they would like to ask and prepare an interview questionnaire. Have students bring the responses back to school and share their findings.

Make name samplers. Using graph paper, have students print their names in block letters by marking an "X" in the squares needed to form the letters. Cut a rectangle around the names leaving a 1-inch border between the name and the edge of the paper. Pin the rectangles (make sure the pins are in the border areas around the name) to individual pieces of muslin or thin cotton cloth. Using embroidery floss or a single strand of crewel yarn, have students stitch the X's on the graph paper, making sure that the thread goes through the cloth as well. Have adult (or older student) volunteers supervise and assist as

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needed. After the stitching is completed and the threads are tied off, remove the pins and *gently* pull the paper from the cloth backing, leaving the stitches in place. Enlist a volunteer to machine stitch along the border about one-half inch from the edge to keep the edges of the sampler from fraying.

Several items in the story are described from the point of origin to the finished product. Have students make mini-flowcharts of these items. For example, on an outline of a mitten, students might write “sheep>yarn at spinning wheel>daughter knits>5 pairs of mittens.”

**RELATED THEMES:**

bartering  
Colonial America  
farm life  
markets and stores

**RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:**

Program #133 — Saturday Sancocho

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Donald Hall is one of America’s most renowned poets. He is the recipient of a *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the Robert Frost Medal of the Poetry Society of America, among other awards. He states that he heard the story of *Ox-Cart Man* from his cousin, who heard it as a boy from an old man, who also heard it as a boy from an old man. Donald Hall makes his home in New Hampshire.

**ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:**

Barbara Cooney’s love of drawing and art as a child was nurtured by her mother, an amateur painter. After growing up on Long Island, New York, Barbara studied art history at Smith College and pursued painting and illustration at the Art Student’s League in Manhattan. Along with her responsibilities as the wife of a country doctor, mother of four children, ambitious gardener, and gourmet cook, she has illustrated more than one hundred books for children in her long career. Her efforts resulted in two Caldecott Medals, for *Chanticleer and the Fox* and *Ox-Cart Man*. Barbara Cooney lives and works in South Bristol, Maine.

**BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:**

**ROUND TRIP**

by Ann Jonas (Greenwillow)

**A WINTER PLACE**

by Ruth Yaffe Radin, illus. by Mattie Lou O’Kelley (Little, Brown)

**WAGON WHEELS**

by Barbara Brenner, illus. by Don Bolognese (HarperCollins)

**SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:**

**PIONEER CHILDREN OF APPALACHIA**

by Joan Anderson, photos by George Ancona (Clarion)

**THE PUMPKIN MAN FROM PINEY CREEK**

by Darleen Bailey Beard, illus. by Laura Kelly (Simon & Schuster)

**MY VILLAGE, STURBRIDGE**

by Gary Bowen, illus. by Gary Bowen & Randy Miller (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)

**COLONIAL KIDS: AN ACTIVITY GUIDE TO LIFE IN THE NEW WORLD**

by Laurie Carlson (Chicago Review Press)

**COLONIAL PLACES**

by Sarah Howarth (Millbrook)

**COLONIAL LIFE**

by Bobbie Kalman (Crabtree)

**COLONIAL DAYS: DISCOVER THE PAST WITH FUN PROJECTS, GAMES, ACTIVITIES, AND RECIPES**

by David C. King (Wiley)

**...IF YOU LIVED IN COLONIAL TIMES**

by Ann McGovern, illus. by June Otani (Scholastic)

**WARM AS WOOL**

by Scott Russell Sanders, illus. by Helen Cogancherry (Bradbury)

**COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG**

by Edward B. Singer (Image Bank)

**KATIE’S TRUNK**

by Ann Turner, illus. by Ronald Himler (Macmillan)

**KIDS IN COLONIAL TIMES**

by Lisa A. Wroble (Rosen/Power Kids Press)



Donald Hall, "Ox Cart Man" from *Old and New Poems*. Copyright © 1990 by Donald Hall. Reprinted with the permission of Houghton Mifflin Company. Few contemporary American writers have devoted themselves more fully to the art of poetry than Donald Hall. Born in New Haven, Connecticut, and educated at Harvard and Oxford, he retired from teaching in 1975 and returned to his family's farm in New Hampshire, determined to make his living as a freelance man of letters. Donald Hall, "Ox Cart Man" from *Old and New Poems*. Copyright © 1990 by Donald Hall. Reprinted with the permission of Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved. Source: *Old and New Poems* (1990). More About this Poem. Related. *Ox-Cart Man* is the title of a 1979 book written by Donald Hall and illustrated by Barbara Cooney. It won the 1980 Caldecott Medal.[1] The book tells of the life and work of an early 19th-century farming family in New Hampshire. Hall originally published "Ox-Cart Man" as a poem in the October 3, 1977 issue of *The New Yorker*. Hall revised the poem greatly to create the children's book and chose Barbara Cooney for its illustrations.