

# Envisioning a Common Core Curriculum

Authors throughout this special issue of *American Educator* advocate for a common core curriculum. But what should such a curriculum look like? How specific should it be, and in what ways should it support teaching? As long as it is truly a core curriculum—leaving about one-third of instructional time free for districts, schools, and teachers to add their own materials and projects—we'll venture to say that it should be detailed and specific, but not scripted. It should offer extensive support

for teaching, such as lesson plans and classroom assessments, but using those supports should not be mandatory. The new Core Knowledge Language Arts Program for kindergarten through second grade seems to fit that description. While the program is new, pilot testing has demonstrated its effectiveness, and refinements based on teacher and researcher feedback are ongoing. In addition, the Core Knowledge Sequence, from which it

is derived, has been used in schools across the country for 20 years. We hope this high-quality example will generate discussions throughout schools and statehouses about how detailed and supportive a common core curriculum for our nation ought to be.

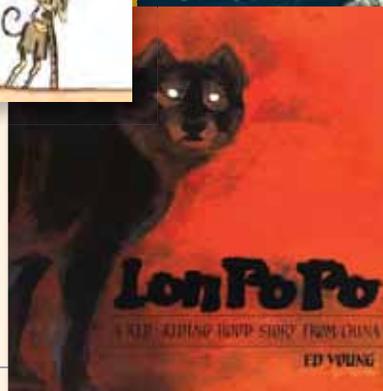
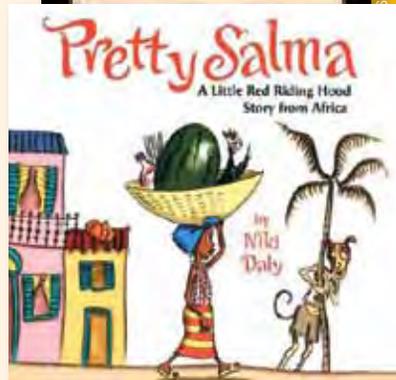
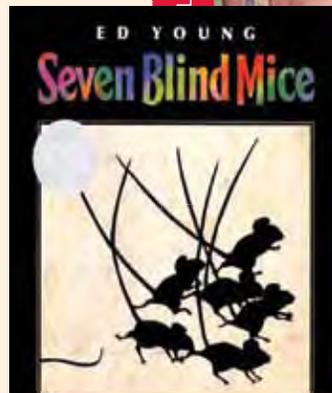
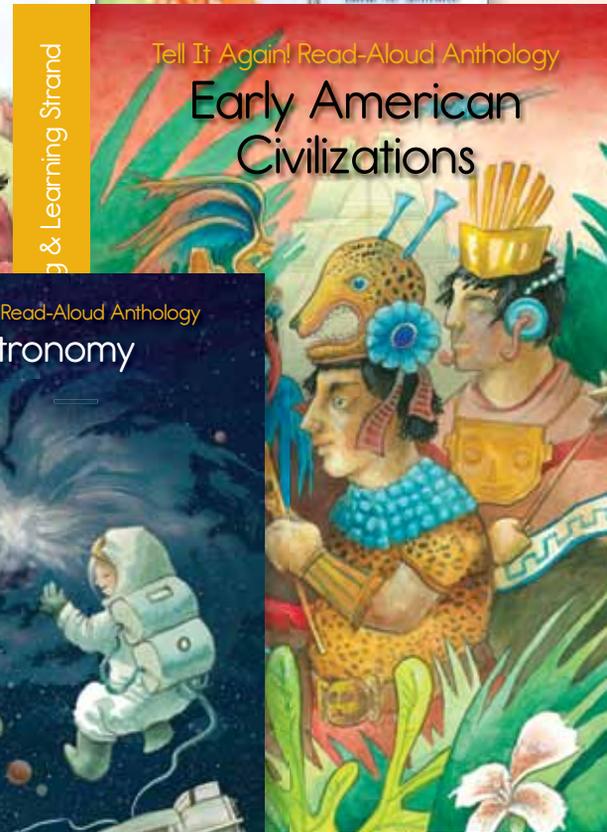
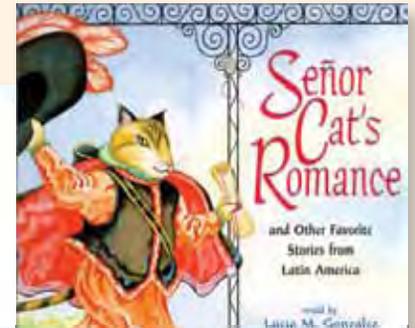
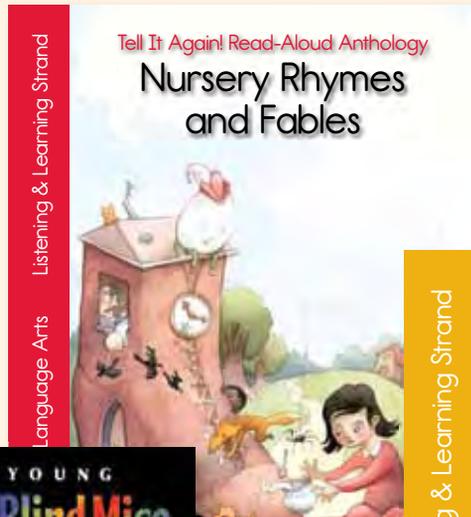
—EDITORS

## Listening and Learning

### How a Carefully Crafted Language Arts Program Builds Knowledge and Strong Readers

The Core Knowledge Language Arts Program for kindergarten through second grade consists of two separate strands: (1) Skills and (2) Listening and Learning. The Skills Strand teaches sounds and the letters that represent them, beginning with the simplest sound-letter correspondences, and presenting reading and writing in tandem as inverse (decoding/encoding) procedures. Automaticity and fluency also are emphasized as students are given fully decodable texts to practice reading aloud independently. The Listening and Learning Strand builds students' listening comprehension—a prerequisite to reading comprehension—by exposing students to complex texts that are read aloud daily, systematically increasing their vocabulary and knowledge. In each grade, 12 subject-matter domains—shown on the next page—are explored through fiction and nonfiction texts.

Although most widely used reading programs could improve their approach to reading skills (such as decoding and fluency), their primary weakness is building comprehension. Based on the mistaken belief that reading comprehension relies more on strategies (like finding the main idea) than on knowledge, they only minimally extend children's knowledge, leaving students unprepared for more advanced texts in later grades. Therefore, here and on the following six pages, we have chosen to show excerpts from the Core Knowledge Language Arts Program's Listening and Learning Strand. To download the *Core Knowledge Sequence* and learn more about the new program, see [www.coreknowledge.org](http://www.coreknowledge.org).



# Comprehension Relies on Knowledge

Building Broad Knowledge: Key Domains Expand Children’s View of the World		
Kindergarten:	Grade 1:	Grade 2:*
1 Nursery Rhymes and Fables	1 Fables and Stories	1 Fairy Tales and Tall Tales
2 The Five Senses	2 The Human Body	2 Early Asian Civilizations
3 Stories	3 Different Lands, Similar Stories	3 Cycles in Nature
4 Plants	4 Early World Civilizations	4 The Ancient Greek Civilization
5 Farms	5 Early American Civilizations	5 Greek Myths
6 Native Americans	6 Mozart and Music	6 Insects
7 Kings and Queens	7 Astronomy	7 Westward Expansion
8 Seasons and Weather	8 The History of the Earth	8 The U.S. Civil War
9 Columbus and the Pilgrims	9 Animals and Habitats	9 Charlotte’s Web I
10 Colonial Towns and Townspeople	10 Fairy Tales	10 Charlotte’s Web II
11 Taking Care of the Earth	11 The Birth of Our Nation	11 Immigration
12 Presidents and American Symbols	12 Frontier Explorers	12 Fighting for a Cause

## Building Subject-Matter Knowledge: Solid Preparation for Academic Courses in Later Grades

<p><b>Literature</b> Fiction is essential, but all stories are not of equal value. The selected fables, stories, myths, etc., in this program are as much a part of building subject-matter knowledge as the texts about science and social studies. Fictional works appear in each of the domains, with stories like “Bear, Gull, and Crow” in the <i>Native Americans</i> domain and “The Grasshopper and the Ants” in the <i>Seasons and Weather</i> domain.</p>	<p><b>Science</b> From insects to rainbows, children are very curious about the natural world. The science domains are sequenced to build knowledge within grades—as kindergartners progress from <i>Plants to Farms to Seasons and Weather to Taking Care of the Earth</i>—and across grades—as children learn about <i>The Five Senses</i> in kindergarten and then <i>The Human Body</i> in first grade.</p>	<p><b>Social Studies</b> Instead of merely “activating” children’s existing knowledge of their families and neighborhoods, these domains enlarge children’s knowledge. Careful sequencing allows content and ideas to build on each other—such as by moving from <i>Kings and Queens</i> to <i>Columbus and the Pilgrims</i> to <i>Presidents and American Symbols</i> in kindergarten, and on to <i>The Birth of Our Nation</i> and <i>Westward Expansion</i> in first and second grades.</p>
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## Building Coherent Knowledge: Big Ideas Draw on Multiple Domains and Subjects

In addition to the domains being carefully selected to build essential subject-matter knowledge, they are also purposefully combined within and across grades to develop coherent knowledge. Take a closer look at the kindergarten domains. Several of the science domains help students better understand agriculture, which is essential to the knowledge being built in the social studies domains since early America was largely an agrarian society. An example of carefully constructed coherence across grades is the progression (illustrated above with solid purple arrows) from *Stories* in kindergarten to *Different Lands, Similar Stories*, then *Early World Civilizations* and *Early American Civilizations* in first grade to *Early Asian Civilizations*, *The Ancient Greek Civilization*, and *Greek Myths* in second grade. Looser but still vital connections are also built in, such as the *Plants*, *Farms*, and *Seasons and Weather* domains in kindergarten supporting comprehension of *Animals and Habitats* in first grade and then *Charlotte’s Web* in second grade (which is illustrated above with dashed arrows).

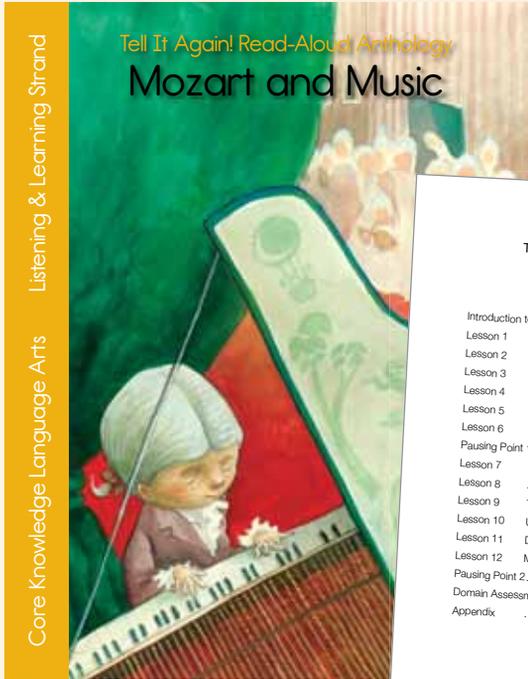
\*Kindergarten and first-grade materials are currently available. Second-grade materials will be available in the summer of 2011.

# Knowledge Takes Time to Build

The Listening and Learning Strand of the Core Knowledge Language Arts Program contains 12 domains per grade, allowing each domain to be studied for at least two weeks using a variety of texts and content-related activities. This focus on

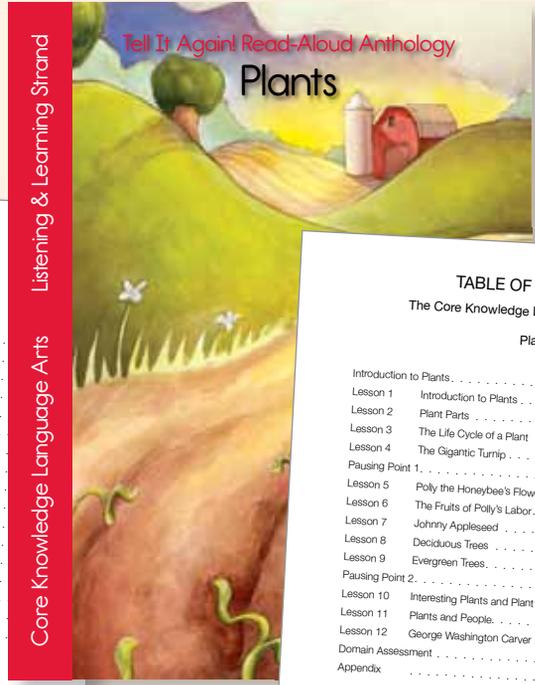
one topic at a time is the most efficient way to build students' knowledge and vocabulary. Mastering new topics and new words requires hearing, thinking about, and discussing them repeatedly. Sticking with a topic is also more engaging and

enjoyable, since the details (e.g., Mozart was a child prodigy who, at 5 years old, covered himself in ink as he began writing a concerto) are almost always more interesting than the introduction (e.g., Mozart was a composer).



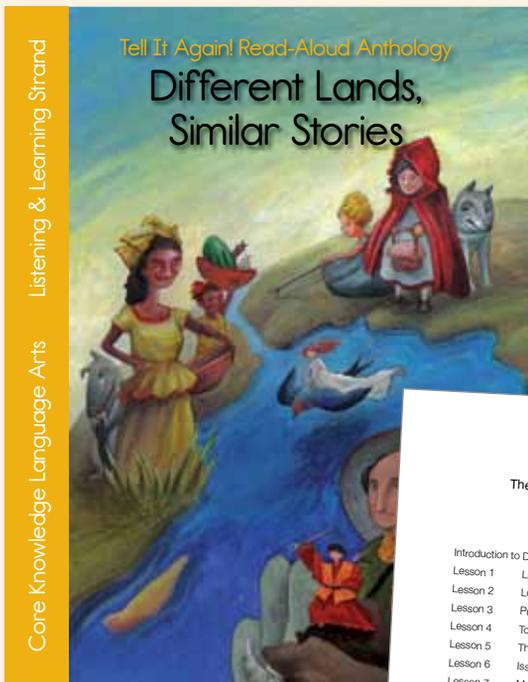
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## Why Emphasize Read-Alouds?

Reading aloud to children is absolutely essential to building the knowledge that enables comprehension. Written language contains vastly more sophisticated vocabulary, ideas, and syntax than spoken language. So listening to a text read aloud has benefits that listening to a lecture, watching a movie, or engaging in a class

discussion cannot provide (although these activities have their own benefits). In addition, students' reading comprehension is not as advanced as their listening comprehension until they are 13 or 14 years old. The need for read-alouds in the early grades is obvious: young children cannot read at all, and children ages 5 to 8 are focused on decoding and gaining fluency. But even after age 9 or so, when most children can read some texts with comprehension, listening comprehension still far surpasses reading comprehension. Eighth-graders, for example, may be able to read their grade-level science textbook, but would still benefit from their teacher reading aloud a more advanced text, such as a popular book for adults by Isaac Asimov. Reading aloud is critical throughout elementary and middle school, even after students become independent readers. The knowledge and vocabulary they gain while listening will support their silent reading and allow them to move more quickly into advanced texts.

# Read-Alouds Make for Rich Lessons

To maximize students' learning, each read-aloud comes with a complete lesson, including clear objectives for both the language arts skills and the content knowledge to be mastered, core vocabulary, comprehension questions, and a

broad array of extension activities. There are also "Guided Listening Supports" that prompt teachers to explain vocabulary and ask questions to actively engage students in processing and responding while they listen.

The lesson on the following three pages presents the "Teddy Roosevelt's Hero" read-aloud, which is part of the *Presidents and American Symbols* domain in kindergarten.

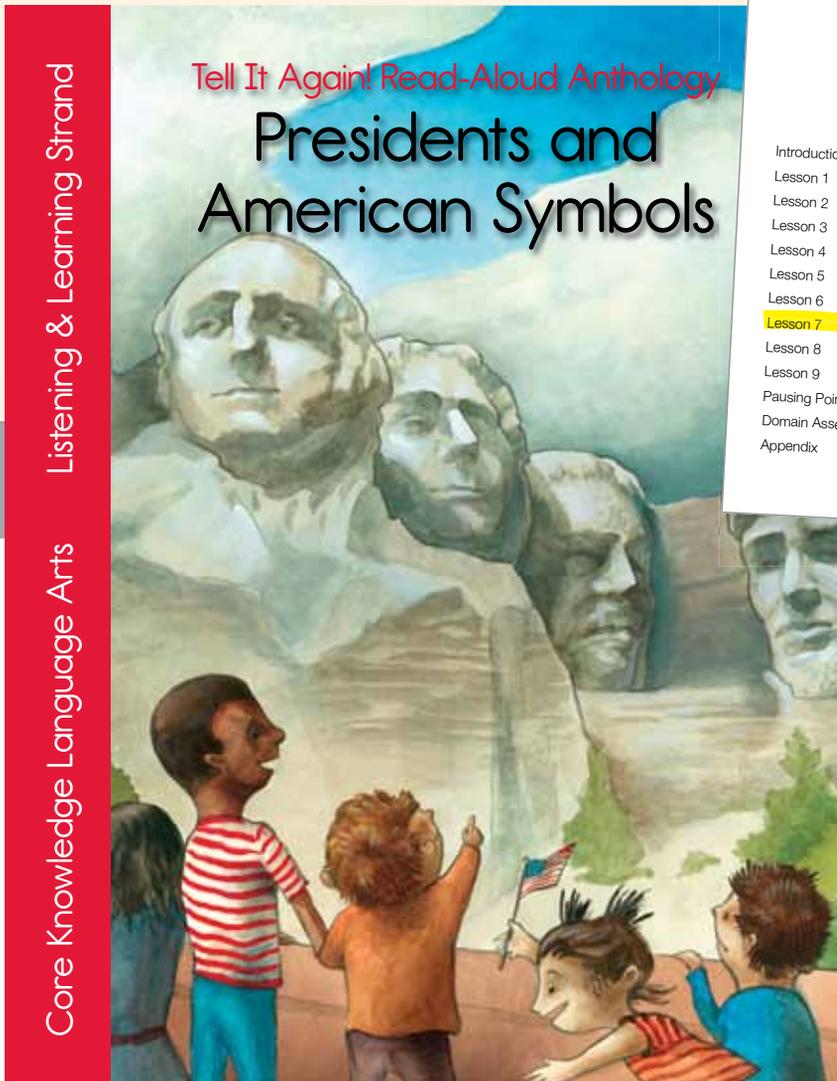


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recommended that you cover the *Kings and Queens* domain prior to this domain, because it will be beneficial to draw on students' background knowledge of kingdoms to make a comparison between a king and a president.

If you have already taught the *Columbus and the Pilgrims* domain, you may also draw on what students already learned about the Pilgrims who chose to leave England and later started a colony in America. This connection is important in two ways: Students will realize the Pilgrims wanted the *freedom* to worship as they pleased instead of what the king wanted; students will also understand what the colonies were, and how the Pilgrims were one of many groups of people to set up colonies in North America. It is important to draw on this background knowledge so that students can have a context when they learn about how George Washington fought against England and won freedom for the colonies, which then became the United States of America. Students start out by learning about two of our country's founding fathers, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. They will hear about the legend of Washington and the cherry tree, and his role as a general in the American Revolution and as the first president. They will then continue on to learn about Jefferson's writing talent and the Declaration of Independence.

Students will also learn that when the colonists decided to fight for their freedom from England, they themselves were keeping freedom from a large number of African-American slaves. The domain then covers Abraham Lincoln, the president of our country during the Civil War, and his role in ending slavery only about two hundred years ago.

Finally, the domain segues to Theodore Roosevelt, who remembers as a child when Abraham Lincoln died, and how this hero made an impact on his growth as an adult and later his presidency. Students will also learn about Roosevelt's love for the outdoors and how he worked for nature conservation.

The domain concludes with a story about the carving of Mount Rushmore, which commemorates the four presidents presented in this domain: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt.

You will find the Instructional Objectives and Core Vocabulary for this domain below. The lessons that include Student Choice/Domain-Related Trade Book Extensions, Image Cards, Parent Letters, Instructional Masters, and Assessments are also listed in the information below.

## Why Presidents and American Symbols Are Important

This domain explores the lives and legacies of four famous presidents and introduces students to several national symbols, including the American flag, the Statue of Liberty, the White House, and Mount Rushmore. Students begin by learning the basics about our government, what a president is, what a president does, and how a person becomes president. It is highly

# Teddy Roosevelt's Hero



## Lesson Objectives

### Core Content Objectives

Students will:

- Recognize Theodore Roosevelt as an important president of the United States
- Know that Theodore Roosevelt overcame childhood health problems
- Know that Theodore Roosevelt loved the outdoors

### Language Arts Objectives

Students will:

- Use agreed-upon rules for group discussions, i.e., listen and listen to the speaker, raise hand to speak, take "excuse me" or "please," etc. (L.K.1)
- Carry on and participate in a conversation over four turns, staying on topic, initiating comments or responding to partner's comments, with either an adult or another student of the same age (L.K.3)
- Identify and express physical sensations, mental processes, and emotions of self and others (L.K.4)
- Listen to and understand a variety of texts, including stories, fairy tales, fables, historical narratives, informational text, nursery rhymes, and poems (L.K.11)
- Describe illustrations (L.K.13)

- Answer questions that require making interpretations, judgments, or giving opinions about what is heard in a read-aloud, including answering "why" questions that require recognizing cause/effect relationships (L.K.17)
- Make personal connections to events or experiences in a read-aloud and/or make connections among several read-alouds (L.K.19)
- Learn new words from read-alouds and discussions (L.K.20)
- Retell important facts and information from a read-aloud (L.K.21)

### Core Vocabulary

**education, n.** What someone has learned  
*Example:* Because of her good education, Leah knew a lot about history.  
*Variation(s):* none

**expert, n.** Someone who knows a lot about a subject  
*Example:* The zookeeper is an expert on wild animals and can tell why they behave the way they do.  
*Variation(s):* experts

**judge, v.** To form an opinion about a person or a situation  
*Example:* You should not judge a person by his or her looks; you should get to know the person.  
*Variation(s):* judges, judged, judging

At a Glance	Exercise	Materials	Minutes
Introducing the Read-Aloud	What Have We Already Learned?		10
	Personal Connections		
Presenting the Read-Aloud	Purpose for Listening		10
	Teddy Roosevelt's Hero		
Discussing the Read-Aloud	Comprehension Questions		10
	Word Work: Expert		
Complete Remainder of the Lesson Later in the Day			
Extensions	Image Review		15
Take-Home Material	Parent Letter	Instructional Master 7B-1	

# 7A

## Teddy Roosevelt's Hero



### Introducing the Read-Aloud

10 minutes

#### What Have We Already Learned?

Remind students that they have heard the stories of three former U.S. presidents so far in this domain. Tell students that you are going to say a statement about one of these great men and they are to name which of the three presidents the statement is about. Tell students their three choices: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln.

- This president was admired for his honesty and has a cherry tree legend about him. (George Washington)
- These two presidents were two of the Founding Fathers who helped create the United States of America. (George Washington and Thomas Jefferson)
- This man had a talent for writing, and wrote the Declaration of Independence, a statement saying that the colonists were free from England and had the right to live, to be free, and to be happy. (Thomas Jefferson)
- This general fought England for American independence during the American Revolution. (George Washington)
- This man became the first president of the United States. (George Washington)
- This man became the third president of the United States. (Thomas Jefferson)
- This man known as "Honest Abe" was president during the U.S. Civil War and hid a paper under his hat that said all slaves were set free. (Abraham Lincoln)

Ask: "Which of these three presidents do you admire the most? What things have they done to make you feel this way?" Remember to repeat and expand upon each response, using richer

and more complex language, including, if possible, any read-aloud vocabulary. If a student's response includes inaccurate factual information, refer back to earlier read-alouds and/or illustrations to correct any misunderstandings.

#### Personal Connections

Ask: What is a hero? Explain that heroes are people you admire and respect, and look up to because they have done good things in their lives.

Have students share who their heroes are. Ask what these people have done to cause students to admire them so much. Tell the students that today they will be listening to a story about another one of the past presidents of the United States, President Theodore Roosevelt. Explain to the students that, during the read-aloud, they will hear about one of President Roosevelt's heroes.

#### Purpose for Listening

Tell students to listen for the struggles that Roosevelt had as a child, and how he overcame those problems as he became an adult. Ask students to identify Theodore Roosevelt's hero and hero of Theodore Roosevelt's father.

Teddy Roosevelt's Hero



Show image 7A-1: Theodore Roosevelt

Everybody gets scared sometimes, but we can learn what to do about it. Today we are going to hear a true story about someone who decided that he would never let being scared stop him from doing what was right. This is a story about young Teddy Roosevelt.

His mother called him "Theodore" when she introduced him to her friends. His own friends called him "T. R." for short. His father called him "Teddy" when saying something he especially wanted his son to remember. "Teddy," he might say, "there is nothing more important than a good **education**," and Teddy Roosevelt would listen.<sup>1</sup> Teddy always listened to what his father said.

Show image 7A-2: Young Teddy watches Lincoln's funeral train<sup>2</sup>

One day when Teddy was six years old, he and his younger brother, Elliott, were visiting their grandparents in New York City, where all the Roosevelt family lived. Teddy's friend, Edith Carow (CARE-oh), was with them, but the children were not playing as they usually did. They stood by a window with Mr. Roosevelt, Teddy's father, and watched a train slowly moving by, not far from the house. Mr. Roosevelt said, "Inside that train is Abraham Lincoln, the president of the United States. President Lincoln died, and that train is taking him back to his home for his funeral."<sup>3</sup>

Teddy asked, "Why is the train moving so slowly, Father?"

"A lot of people loved Abraham Lincoln, Teddy, and thought he was a very good man.<sup>4</sup> People are sorry he died. They want Lincoln's family to know this, and they are gathering along the train tracks to show how much they will miss him."<sup>5</sup>

1 An education is what someone has learned.



2 Describe what you see in the picture.

3 A funeral is when people gather to honor someone who has died.

4 Who remembers something good that Abraham Lincoln did?

5 People are gathering out of respect for Abraham Lincoln. They want to say good-bye.

woman named Alice Lee. He studied to become a lawyer and wrote a book about the U.S. Navy, which navy officers agreed was the best book on the subject. Then he started to work in the government of the state of New York. Always doing a dozen projects at once, he did all of them well.

Four years after Theodore and Alice married, Alice gave birth to a baby girl, whom they named Alice. Theodore had never been so happy. He loved his wife and new daughter and was now one of the New York government leaders, doing work he knew well and helping people. Only two days after little Alice was born, however, Theodore's lovely young wife became sick and died.



Show image 7A-7: Roosevelt out West

12 Back then, far west of New York, there was much open land and many cowboys.

Heartbroken, Teddy asked his older sister, Anna, to care for the new baby. Then he left New York and traveled to South Dakota to a land of wide-open prairies.<sup>12</sup> He bought a cattle ranch, working alongside the cowboys he hired to move herds of cattle, trying to stay too busy to think about his sadness. There he began to feel healthy again. He wrote, "My ranch-house stands on the brink. From the low, long veranda, shaded by leafy [trees], one looks across [to grassy] meadowland, behind which rises a line of [steep] cliffs. This . . . is a pleasant place in . . . summer evenings when a cool breeze stirs along the river and blows in the faces of the tired men, who [lean] back in their rocking-chairs [what true



Show image 7A-3: Lincoln

6 Does it sound like Mr. Roosevelt admired President Lincoln? Why or why not?

7 or form an opinion about

8 What do you think it means that someone "hardly had two pennies to rub together"? Teddy's father is saying that some of the best people he has known have been poor.



Show image 7A-4: Frail Teddy Roosevelt

(Point to Teddy's mother in the picture and note how she is peeking in on him because she is worried about him.)



9 followed his father's advice. Does this suggest to you how Teddy felt about his father?

10 someone who knows a lot about something

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Show image 7A-5: Active Teddy Roosevelt

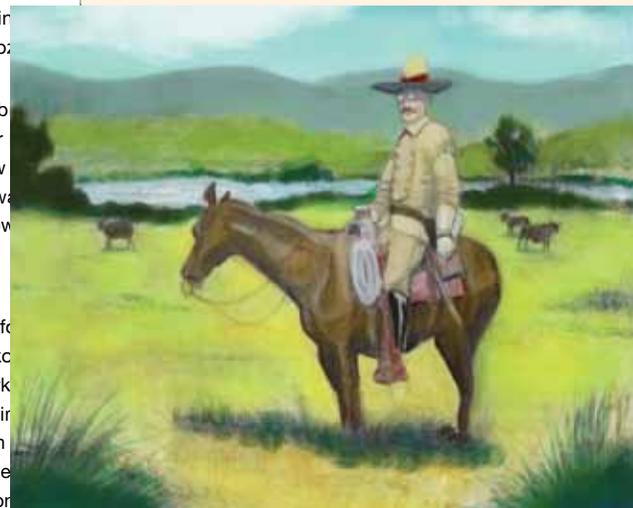
Teddy listened. Through years of long, hard effort, he turned himself into someone who was all action. He built up his body by lifting weights, becoming a strong swimmer and learning to wrestle and box. He spent more and more time outdoors, climbing high mountains, hiking for miles and miles, and fishing and hunting.

Teddy built up his mind, too. His love for the outdoors led him to learn all about wild animals, birds, and fish. He became such an **expert**<sup>11</sup> that famous scientists said, "Young Roosevelt

Teddy thought about this. "Do you think President Lincoln was a good man, Father?" Teddy greatly admired his father and wanted to know how his father felt about the president.

Mr. Roosevelt replied, "I think Abraham Lincoln was a great man, Teddy, and a great president. A great president does a lot of good things. Abraham Lincoln was from a poor family, but he worked hard. He was smart and so many people liked him that he was elected president. Remember, Teddy, you should **judge**<sup>7</sup> a man not by his clothes he wears or whether he lives in a fancy palace, but by what he tries to do and why. Why, some of the best people I have known hardly had two pennies to rub together."<sup>8</sup>

But Teddy Roosevelt rarely got out to meet different kinds of people in different parts of town. Mostly he stayed quiet at home because he had medical problems that made it hard for him to breathe. His mother worried that if he tried to be too active, he might get sick and die.<sup>9</sup> His father thought differently. "Teddy," he said, "only you can decide how you will live. I suggest you push your body instead of being afraid to push it too hard. Look me in the eye and tell it, 'I will not let you beat me. I will not just watch while other people do all the important and exciting things. I will truly live my life!'"





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13 or people who had broken the law



← Show image 7A-8: Roosevelt the cowboy

American does not enjoy a rocking-chair?), books in gazing sleepily out at the [hills] in the after-glow of sunset. However, Teddy did not look quite like other cowboys. He wore glasses, and his cowboy outfit had been made by a clothing designer back East. He also served as a deputy sheriff, a special kind of policeman—while living in the West. He had chased three outlaws<sup>13</sup> for days before catching and punishing them.

← Show image 7A-9: Roosevelt as a young politician

Teddy loved the West, but little Alice was in the East. She was his daughter, so at last he went home. He decided, "I must use every day I have in this world to do important things." He started working in government again so he could help other people. Theodore Roosevelt did not know it then, but he himself would one day become president of the United States.



### Discussing the Read-Aloud

15 minutes

#### Comprehension Questions

(10 minutes)

1. Who was Teddy Roosevelt's hero as a child? (his father)
2. Why did Teddy's father admire Abraham Lincoln? (Lincoln came from a poor family, worked hard, was a good leader, and was a kind, honest man.)
3. What was Teddy's problem as a child? (He had medical problems that made it hard for him to breathe.)
4. What do you think gave Teddy the courage to build up his body and mind, even though he was a sick child? (the love and support of his father)
5. What kinds of things did Teddy do because he enjoyed the outdoors? (climbed mountains; hiked; hunted; fished; learned about wildlife; etc.) What kinds of things do you enjoy doing outdoors? (Answers may vary.)

6. Think Pa  
Roosevel  
president

#### Word Work: Expert

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1. In the read-aloud today, we heard that Teddy Roosevelt became an expert in the outdoors and about animals.
2. Say the word *expert* with me.
3. An expert is someone who knows a lot about a topic.
4. Someone is an expert if he or she knows how to do something very well or can answer most questions about a topic.
5. Tell about someone you know who is an expert in something. Try to use the word *expert* when you tell about it. (Ask two or three students. If necessary, guide and/or rephrase the students' responses: "One person I know who is an expert in \_\_\_\_\_. S/he is an expert in \_\_\_\_\_.")
6. What's the word we've been talking about?

Use a *Making Choices* activity for follow-up. Directions: I am going to describe some people. If any of the people I describe sound like an expert, say, "expert." If any of the people I describe don't sound like an expert, say, "not an expert."

1. someone who can answer all your questions about any type of bird (*expert*)
2. someone who is just beginning to learn to read (*not an expert*)
3. someone who takes apart a watch, but cannot put it back together again (*not an expert*)
4. someone who knows how to fix any problem with any computer (*expert*)



Complete Remainder of the Lesson Later in the Day

## 7B

### Teddy Roosevelt's Hero

#### Extensions

##### Image Review

Show images 7A-1 through 7A-9. Have the students describe what they see in each picture and what they have learned about the person who is associated with the picture. As the students share, encourage them to repeat and expand upon each response using rich and more complex language, including, if possible, any new vocabulary.

##### Parent Letter

Send home Instructional Master 7B-1.