

Writing to Explore with Peter Lourie



Classroom Guide

Hudson River: an Adventure from the Mountains to the Sea

- The Hudson runs for 315 miles from a tiny pond in the Adirondack Mountains all the way down through the heart of New York State to New York City and the sea. My canoe journey down the entire length of the river is presented in slides and narration. In preparation for my visit, children might:
- Study the Adirondack and Catskill Parks, their geography, their history.
- Study logging in New York State, running logs from Mount Marcy and the north all the way down to the saw mills in Glens Falls. What happened to the great log drives?
- Study the concept of wilderness and the ecological debate between developers (building homes along) and ecologists (preservation of green spaces).
- Study the natural process of bogification. Lake Tear is tiny and becoming tinier as a result of the water turning to bog and then to land.
- Study Mount Marcy as the highest mountain in the state, above the tree line (discuss the tree line).
- Study canoes as vehicles for native Americans and then the first European explorers to travel our land, the voyageurs, for instance, Lewis and Clark, etc.
- Study the anatomy of rapids (this will appeal to teachers who run whitewater in their spare time).
- Study or take stock of the class's camping and hiking experience, making camp, putting up tents, cooking, drinking the water? not the Hudson water! Why not?
- Study the history of Adirondack Guides.
- Then move into the power dams along the Hudson and discuss the use of water for electricity. Hydro-electric? What does it mean? Is it completely safe? Compare it to nuclear (Indian Point) or the burning of coal to generate electricity (around Newburgh, Central Hudson).
- Discuss the Champlain and Erie Canals and the history of settling the west. They come together half way down the Hudson at Waterford. Discuss the dynamics of locks. Forty miles of the

Classroom Guide for *Hudson River: an Adventure from the Mountains to the Sea* by Peter Lourie (Boyd's Mills Press, 2002; Snake Mountain Press, 2013) ISBN: 978-0984863723. Copyright © 2013, Peter Lourie. It may be copied for educational use but may not be reprinted or resold for commercial purposes. www.peterlourie.com.

www.peterlourie.com

Writing to Explore

with Peter Lourie

Hudson from the southern section of the Champlain canal. Lots of material here to work on. See Cheryl Harness' "The Amazing Impossible Erie Canal."

- Study the various tribes that lived along the Hudson.
- Halfway down the river, after 160 miles, suddenly we have the big cities of Troy and Albany, capital of New York. And the tides. Discuss the ebb and the flood tide. The effect of the moon.
- Study Henry Hudson's 1609 journey in the Half Moon as far north as Troy and Albany. From here down to New York City the river drops only a few feet. This part of the river, described by native Americans as Water That Flows Two Ways, forms the longest inland estuary in the world.
- Discuss estuaries. Sea life, and the salt line that shifts with the rains and the droughts.
- Commercial fishing is all but dead along the river. Discuss the PCB travesty, the pollution of the lower river.
- Talk about industry that once was so important to the life of the river. Now the industry is gone, factories abandoned. Get suggestions on how to renew life of the river, how to make the river come back into people's lives. Tourism? New types of cottage industries? Should private property prevent public access?
- Then the Lighthouses. Perfect for exploring ghost stories and the shipping that has died along with the extinction of big industries on the lower Hudson. Brick, ice, gravel, coal. The big industries are no longer. Yet the river lives. Motorboats on weekends plow their way around. Not many canoes.
- Henry Hudson called the Hudson, the Great River of the Mountains. Study the Hudson Highlands, that lovely 15-mile stretch of hills the Delaware Indians called the Endless Mountains. Painted by the first school of American artists, Cole and Church, etc. The Hudson River School. Here we have Breakneck and Storm King Mountains and West Point at World's End, so called because the sailing ships couldn't get past the curve in the river and many went down. Currents and winds here very tricky.
- Study the environmental movement and how the Hudson has gotten cleaner. From the first Earth Day until now. What a difference Pete Seeger and his sloop Clearwater have made! Great opportunity to talk about the environmental movement, its difficulties, its challenges, its rewards.
- Discuss the literature of the Hudson. Washington Irving, in particular.

Classroom Guide for *Hudson River: an Adventure from the Mountains to the Sea* by Peter Lourie (Boyd's Mills Press, 2002; Snake Mountain Press, 2013) ISBN: 978-0984863723. Copyright © 2013, Peter Lourie. It may be copied for educational use but may not be reprinted or resold for commercial purposes. www.peterlourie.com.

www.peterlourie.com

Writing to Explore

with Peter Lourie

- Finally, New York City. The Enterprise. The ruined piers of the Canard Line. The shore of Manhattan all but forgotten. From Mt. Marcy to the Trade Center. How different this end of the river is. New York was made from the bricks of the Hudson River brick yards. New York was made great by shipping supplies down the Erie and Champlain canals. New York was a land of pirates in the late 1600's. New York where the Hudson flows out to sea.
- Also, discuss why we love rivers so much. Always changing. Their movement, their newness. Explore a river as metaphor.

The Writing

I first had the idea of canoeing the Hudson in 1989. I worked for a year reading about and traveling up and down the river. During this "research" phase I interviewed lots of people and got to know a little of what I'd face in a three-week, 315-mile trek. I kept many notes on my journey and wrote a first draft of the book after the long process of selecting the right material. Knowing what to leave out was the hardest part. After I came up with a first draft, my editor and I worked on many other drafts, whittling down the material to only fifteen pages of text. This took a year. Then the book was designed with photographs, and I was still editing. Finally in 1991 the book was shipped to Hong Kong to be printed. Then it was shipped to bookstores in March 1992.

Suggested Writing Assignments

1. Keep a one- or two-day journal of some weekend trip or of a walk down a street, perhaps with family members, or alone. Record everything. Sights, sounds, smells, but especially feelings and interactions with people. Try to capture the personality of the people you write about. This exercise might focus on only one person, a person who in some way helps the reader understand more about the street, the place.

In class, begin to edit the journal. Throw out anything that doesn't contribute to the overall effect. Try to make one good page out of many pages. Begin the writer's difficult task of selection.

2. What is adventure? Imagine an adventure you'd like to take. Begin research for this adventure. Outline your trip and outline your research (ex. What books to read? Who to talk to? What can you research using a computer and a modem?). Make a list of equipment you'll need. Write a page or two on why this adventure is so exciting to you and why it might interest other people.

Classroom Guide for *Hudson River: an Adventure from the Mountains to the Sea* by Peter Lourie (Boyd's Mills Press, 2002; Snake Mountain Press, 2013) ISBN: 978-0984863723. Copyright © 2013, Peter Lourie. It may be copied for educational use but may not be reprinted or resold for commercial purposes. www.peterlourie.com.

www.peterlourie.com

Writing to Explore

with Peter Lourie

3. Interview someone for your school newspaper. Either on tape or with pen and paper, the old-fashioned way. Also try using a camera to take a snapshot that you can use when you write about this person later. Capture the person's character in your description, then let his or her words do most of the work of creating a "personality."
4. Research other river books, novels, picture books, nonfiction. After you've read at least five river books, decide what river(s) interest you and write an essay telling why. Make the river or rivers you like come alive on the page. In other words, imagine from your readings what it is like to actually live on the river.
5. What makes the Hudson River unique? Focus on either the people, the history, or the place. Give lots of specifics to support your thesis.
6. If you live near the Hudson or the Connecticut River or any river or stream, go to that river or stream and describe it in a new way, as no one has ever done before. Is the river you see, the same river that someone up or down river sees? How is your river different from other rivers?