

**CLASSROOM PUBLISHING PROJECT THAT TIES ROSALYN SCHANZER'S BOOKS TO
THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**
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ALPHABET BOOK; COMPLEXITY OF TEXT AS A FUN LEARNING ACTIVITY

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Rosalyn Schanzer's award-winning books *WITCHES! The Absolutely True Tale of Disaster in Salem*; *GEORGE VS. GEORGE: The American Revolution as Seen from Both Sides*; and *WHAT DARWIN SAW: The Journey that Changed the World*, lend themselves well to the Alphabet Book project below. It's crammed to the brim with CCSS standards - and it's FUN, guaranteeing success from Start if you jigsaw the research by giving groups their own letters to investigate.

Introduction

Alphabet Books were the rage in Europe and America during the colonial era and are still popular with a broad range of readers from toddlers to seniors. They are also proven mainstays in many K-12 classrooms. What can be more alluring than tackling a major project that involves hunting down clues to the most informative meaning of words and then creatively voicing ideas and producing artwork to illustrate them for a waiting audience?

In this **Alphabet Book Project**, students will collaborate with their classmates and peers, all working together toward a big splash; a finished book celebration at the project's end. So much sharing and exchanging of ideas, opinions, and self expression! Excitement, yes, but without much pressure; although everyone will be part of a large scale enterprise, each student will contribute only a small part of the work. Thus, the project parallels and models the real world of work, preparing students for careers and college-style research.

Rosalyn Schanzer's books easily lend themselves to student use as the informational and research base for developing a nonfiction alphabet book. Teachers should also make certain that students access the detailed bibliographical print and digital sources Schanzer cites at the front and back of all of her works. Other pertinent material can also be found here:

<http://www.rosalynschanzer.com/pdfDocuments/darwinSources.pdf>
<http://www.amazon.com/What-Darwin-Saw-Journey-Changed/dp/1426303963?ie=UTF8>
<http://kidsblogs.nationalgeographic.com/2011/10/25/witches-the-absolutely-true-tale-of-disaster-in-sa/>
http://www.amazon.com/George-vs-American-Revolution-Sides/dp/1426300425/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&sr=&qid=

This project offers opportunities for research via satisfying, self-directed effort, and the results are joyously tangible. Alphabet books such as the ones in this project can be appropriate for grades 4-12. They can also help prepare older students for United States History exit exams and can be included in high school/college portfolios.

1- Project Overview

A class of students will plan, research, write, produce, and publish its own Alphabet Book. The Alphabet Book genre functions beautifully to support deep Literacy learning as students analyze the material and work together to produce a book of their own. The form is also a powerful tool for learning content in Social Studies and other subject areas, including literacy and language, providing multiple opportunities to satisfy Common Core requirements.

To complete the project based upon the material in one of Schanzer's books, students work in small teams, each of which is assigned a segment of the alphabet (3 – 4 letters). These teams research and design an artistic graphic to stand for each of their assigned letters and write an explanatory definition (e.g. "**B** is for **B**onhomme Richard" or "**O** is for **O**yer and Terminer" or "**N** is for **N**atural Selection") to accompany their illustrations in the finished book. To assure that they produce authentic, well-rounded content, they will also add ancillary materials such as trivia segments, cartoons, and quizzes, as well as appendices in the back of the book that add interesting material to the subject on their letter page.

To organizing these letter pages, they can model their product on commercially published alphabet books. They will publish their own book, either in 8 ½ X 11 inch, common office copier sized, and hard copy or scan the various pages and join them together to produce an e-Book. Additionally, they may produce a collection of eye catching posters based on these, so that their work may be shown gallery style to audiences to whom they present it.

At project's end, the class will distribute the finished book and the students will make oral presentations to an audience. Audiences may include adults at local libraries, students from other schools, teachers at professional meetings, residents of senior centers, and graduate education students at a university. In addition, the book can be shared online, either through an existing school website or on one of the easy to create, teacher-friendly blogs and websites that are explained in detail elsewhere in this paper. Online sharing of these books is a particularly dynamic aspect of the project as it provides a platform for peer comments, including comments from peers who may be at a considerable geographic distance from the book's author. This provides valuable, authentic feedback, an important element for students as they learn the essential skills of Writing. Through many facets of its design, this project strongly fosters a lifelong appreciation of learning.

2- What your students will learn while doing this project

Students will become lexicographers and alphabet book designers with expertise in literary or multi-content academic and special domain vocabulary. This literacy project engages its participants in college and career preparation for publishing, journalism, graphic design, technology, and marketing coursework and careers.

This project features substantive student research that's easy, fun and aligned with the Common Core standards. The very name "Research Paper" can conjure up visions of tedious reading, note taking, and informational report preparation. However, the accessible and highly adaptable Alphabet Book project can transform a massive, in-depth research task into an achievable goal and a delightful activity!

3- Implementing the Project

This project centers on the creation of a *student learning product*, the planning and preparation behind it, and sharing it and learning from the feedback it generates after completion. Select a topic from the curriculum that takes at least a month or two to complete, tie it directly to the material in one of Schanzer's books, and embed the Alphabet Book as a focus and as a culminating project.

Description of a Class-Produced Alphabet Book

Class Alphabet Books will be at least 30+ pages in length, 26+ pages of "A is for Airplane" type definition, each devoted to a single letter, as well as other content items from the list below:

1. Cover design by students
2. List of contributors and role in creation of the book
3. Table of Contents
4. Foreword by students
5. Letter Pages - each will include a definition and an illustration for a letter. Students can also add trivia items, quotes, and quiz sidebars. All of these elements will be organized and designed to make a colorful, attractive book page and will be affixed to 8 ½ X 11 inch pages using conventional scissors and glue (or put together digitally) in collage fashion to be published as a hard copy or e-book.
6. Appendices - based on student interests and discoveries
7. Webliography /Bibliography - Check and model after the styles in Schanzer's works.
8. Afterword by students – reflections on what they learned from the research and other topics that might be interesting.
9. Comments by student peers or teachers or other adults
10. Back Cover

A typical implementation of an Alphabet Book Class Publishing Project

Before beginning the project, the teacher will divide the class into teams of 3 – 4 students. Each team will work on 3 – 4 letters of the alphabet that are assigned by the teacher. It will be fine for some teams to have duplicates of other teams' letters as there is ample opportunity at project's end for the class to select the best examples or to ensure that each team has a more or less equal number of letters selected for the final version of the book.

For each of its assigned letters, the team will write and illustrate a definition that uses the members' own words to explain its meaning. These definitions will reflect the interests, taste, talents, and creativity of the team members. Additionally, teams can be assigned to produce a trivia item, quotes, and a quiz sidebar for each page.

The teacher should set standards and parameters for these definitions before beginning the project so that the students will have a clear set of expectations about what to do and produce. A rubric or a set of expectations should be shared and discussed with the students at the onset.

In some classes the teacher may prefer to assign everything that goes into each of the letter pages to the teams. In others, the teacher may see an advantage in creating a few teams of student specialists, such as student artists and student research experts, who may spend their time assisting the principal teams with these parts of the work. Those students identified as artists or researchers will be honing their career and college talents as part of this project. Schanzer is an author, illustrator, and photographer whose works handsomely showcase and exemplify both arts/illustration and author/historian/researcher careers.

Project Steps

1. Divide the class into small groups and have the students select letters to work on (the teacher should monitor progress, record the letters selected by each group, and support the class in dividing the alphabet among the groups).
2. Essential Questions - have the students generate open questions with many possible answers that students will address in their Alphabet Book investigations. At the conclusion of their projects, they will discuss how their research, writing and art identified potential answers. The book *WHAT DARWIN SAW: THE JOURNEY THAT CHANGED THE WORLD* is filled with his questions, clues and evidence. Chapter 9 in the book *WITCHES! THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE TALE OF DISASTER IN SALEM* is an excellent source for questions. *GEORGE VS. GEORGE: THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AS SEEN FROM BOTH SIDES* inherently poses questions about the opposition and commonalities between the two historic figures throughout the work.
3. Students do research to find information about their chosen letter's subject on which they can base their definitions, illustrations, and ancillary items.
4. DRAFT Definitions and Illustrations: Students make an initial attempt at writing their definitions and illustrating their letter. For added interest you may want to assign the definitions as poetry, dialog, or other particular focus use of language.
5. Review: sharing of the definitions and editing with the whole class. This can be nicely accomplished by having a whole class discussion in which each letter definition is reviewed. Student constructive criticism and suggestions are brainstormed with the letter team responsible for recording so that it may use feedback later as it refines its work on each letter. Similarly, the team will present their illustration for feedback and suggestions.
6. The teams will maintain records of the research they do to inform their definitions and ancillary content items and will develop a list of websites and print sources from which they draw, producing a 'webliography' / bibliography.

7. As they did with the definition of their assigned letters, teams will generate at least 1 of each of the following ancillary content items for each of their assigned letters: a trivia items, a quotes, and a quiz sidebar.
8. Ancillary content item review: as was done in step 4 above, the ancillary items can be reviewed in a whole group setting so that the class collaboratively provides feedback and suggestions that the teams can use to revise these items.
9. Working from a Letter Page Template (provided by the teacher at the beginning of the project) the teams organize the various elements of each of their letter pages into completed pages to be considered by the group for inclusion in the finished book.
10. The teacher has the option of involving the students in creating the book's Front Matter (i.e. introduction, forward, table of contents, list of contributing authors, artists, researchers, and editors) as well as the Back Matter (i.e. index, appendices, etc.) or doing it on her own, depending on grade and achievement level of the students as well as time considerations. In whole group lesson mode, the teachers and the class make decisions about the final look, body of content, and format of the book. All the pages are put in order in a final session and displayed for class review and for display at school or at neighborhood venues.
11. Presentation of the finished work at the home school to other classes or by visiting to neighborhood peers or younger peers (at neighboring schools) or senior citizens at a local senior center or other neighborhood gathering place. A student speaker will introduce the project to the audience and self nominated students representing research teams or artists will explain how the book was developed. Quiz questions from the Schanzer inspired Witches, Revolutionary or Darwin evolution Alphabet book products are shared with the audience. The history day or community or library audience is given a sample activity or investigation from the book. This makes all components of ELA/SS/History in Literacy Speaking and Listening come alive in a real way with a real purpose for the students.
12. (Optional) Student-designed feedback and reflection: Students write reflectively about what they learned in terms of content and process of collaboration from the project and compare and contrast this project to typical text learning/mastery of a delivered content. They discuss how their research, writing, and art identified "answers" for the project's essential questions about American witch hunts, revolution and evolution theory or suggested new questions about potential contemporary witch hunts, ongoing taxation, and evolution teaching issues. They explore the fun elements of the project. They also write about new areas of interest and talents they identified through developing the alphabet book. Students can also share how the model of research in both art /illustration authenticity and period detail that Schanzer provides within her books and on her site inspires them as arts, history, and period researchers. This writing becomes part of the book as Schanzer discusses her research on her website and in videos such as this brief one about Witches <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FD3siOLgKSM> and this longer one that includes fascinating information telling how many of her nonfiction books are written and researched <http://www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/schanzer/>.

Creating and Using Letter Page Templates

As the finished the Schanzer information-based Alphabet Book will include the ideas of many individuals, a unifying device will be required to keep the results acceptably consistent for its audience, while still supporting the individuality of the contributions. Creating a template for the letter pages is a good solution. This process really consists of deciding on the elements of each letter page and their organization (relative size, location, style, etc.)

Develop this template with students or have them contribute to modifying one identified or created beforehand. The template / format for the book should be student-friendly and informed by formats of commercially published anchor alphabet books. Students within the class who have already shown a talent for graphic design might work individually or as a group. In addition, one page should be a thumbnail- 26 letter overview page. This can serve as the table of contents or be used as a back cover for the book . If the alphabet book is modeled on Schanzer's *Witches*, students can with an art teacher try to have the letters designed using Ampersand Scratchboard covered with a layer of extremely white clay and then covered with black India ink. They should consult some of the same print and web resources Schanzer used for *George vs. George* to get an authentic look for the graphics and letters of that alphabet book. Students may want to go with Schanzer's graphic novel layout format and diagonals for the Darwin alphabet book and can import public domain images from the Internet of the species and places cited in that book for use in their alphabet book.

Implementation Tips

Time: 3 or more weeks

(Recommended as a culminating project for scheduled topic studies at any point during the school year or at the end of the year after standardized tests administration.)

Period alphabet books related to **Witches**, **George vs. George**, and **What Darwin Saw** can define the words or names the students identify for each letter by writing a sentence or a paragraph of information gleaned from these Schanzer books or by writing a poem about each word or name or as part of a rap.

Have the students in class for no fewer than 3-4 periods working in their small groups at their various research, editing, writing, designing, and bibliographic tasks. The teacher should circulate and "kid watch"/confer with the groups to review progress, offer tips and help them work toward their small group goals. The groups should mini-present what they are doing to the teacher and ask for support or for feedback.

Because the Alphabet Book, by definition, is divided into 26 components - one for each letter in the alphabet, this student publishing project lends itself to a convenient and pedagogically sound division of

classroom labor with the letters assigned either to individual students or preferably, small groups that handle 3 – 4 letters each. Thus, the task becomes a jigsaw puzzle style investigation, with student peers presenting their respective pieces of the puzzle at the end of the project. Under the guidance of an ELA, Social Studies, or other middle school content area teacher, students set off on a vocabulary-driven research of a key curricula theme.

Addressing the CCSS Standards

This Project strongly addresses the following Common Core Literacy Standards
Reading Informational Text
<p><u>Key Ideas and Details</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says and when drawing inferences 2. Determine main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text. 3. Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.
<p><u>Craft and Structure</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text 5. .Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.
<p><u>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently. 9. Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.
CC Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies / Grades 6 - 8
<u>Reading Standards</u>
<p><u>Key Ideas and Details</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources. 2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
<p><u>Craft and Structure</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
9. Analyze the relationship between a primary and a secondary source on the same topic.

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies

Text Types and Purposes

- 2 Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.
- 2a. Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories as appropriate to achieving purpose; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

Production and Distribution of Writing

4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
5. With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach
6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas clearly and efficiently.

Research to Build and to Present Knowledge

7. Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.
8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, use search terms effectively access the credibility and accuracy of each source.
9. Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Range of Writing

10. Write routinely over extended time frames for a range of discipline specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Speaking and Listening Standards / Grades 6-12

Comprehension and collaboration

1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- 1c. Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed.
- 1d. Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modifies their own views.
- 2.** Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually,

quantitatively, and orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

4. Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

5. Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings

7. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Language Learning Standards

Vocabulary Acquisition

4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple meaning words and phrases.

Acquire and use grade-appropriate, general academic and domain specific words and phrases.

VI) Resource List: Books to Illustrate and Inspire Students in the Alphabet Book Genre

Cheney, Lynne. (2003). A is for Abigail. New York: Simon and Schuster Press.

Gorey, Edward. (1998). The Utter Zoo Alphabet. San Francisco, CA: Pomegranate.

Hershenhorn, Esther. (2009). S is for Story. Chelsea, Michigan: Sleeping Bear Press.

Melimans, David. (2006). Gone Wild. Walker and Company.

Schwartz, David. (1998). G is for Googol. California: Tricycle press.

Schwartz, David. (2001). Q is for Quark. California: Tricycle Press.

Sleeping Bear press books specialize in multi-content alphabet books with complex texts ranging from simple to detailed.