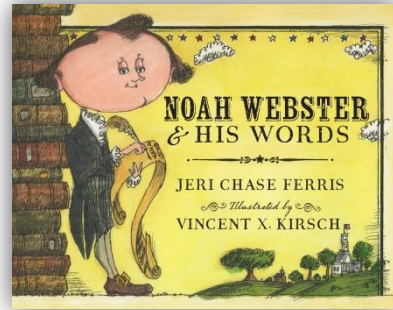


Title: Noah Webster and His Words

Author: Jeri Chase Ferris

Grade Level: 4th Grade



SUMMARY

What do you do when you need to know the meaning of a word? If you consult a dictionary, then you need to thank Noah Webster. Just how much do you know about this man who is so integral to our everyday and academic lives? *Noah Webster & His Words* is an engaging introduction to this important man, who authored the second-most popular book ever printed in English. Through the creative structure of the text and the cartoon illustrations, your entire family will enjoy sharing this story. Reading this book is a real PLEASURE [noun: activity done for enjoyment].

QUESTIONS TO TALK ABOUT WHILE READING

VOCABULARY

It's important to make sure that your child has an understanding of key words in the book. Talking about words while reading is a great way for your child to learn new words.

In this book, you might talk about these words:

- confidence (pg. 1)
- scholar (pg. 4)
- independent (pg. 8)
- soared (pg. 11)
- grammar (pg. 12)
- lectures (pg. 15)
- tomahawk (pg. 19)
- ecstatic (pg. 23)

Since this is the biography of Noah Webster, author of Webster's Dictionary, the author plays upon that by including dictionary definitions within the text structure. Use this opportunity to enjoy the playful inclusion of definitions by discussing how to use these words beyond the text.

You might use a question like:

In this book, what does the word scholar mean? How do you think you might use it yourself?

KEY IDEAS and THEMES

In addition to words, it's important to talk about key ideas and themes and how they develop over the course of the book. Here are some examples to get you started:

1. Talk about the structure of the text and how it would be read fluently with definitions showing up in parentheses after words. Why would the author choose to write this way? Support your claim with evidence from the text.

2. Just as Jeri Chase Ferris, the author, created a structure to reflect the biography of Webster, what “trick” did the illustrator, Vincent X. Kirsch, use? How do the illustrations emphasize Webster’s character? What do you think about this technique? Can you show me some evidence from the text to help support what you’re thinking?
3. Page 19 states, “Two small dictionaries had been printed in America before this, but with English spellings. Noah’s dictionary would be 100 percent American—the first American dictionary!” Compare English and American spelling and use of words. For example, Americans write “honor,” but the British write “honour.” Americans say “truck,” while the British say, “lorry.” There are many more examples online. This may be a new idea to your child, so it might be fun to look up these crazy differences.
4. At the end of the book, Ferris states, “Noah Webster’s words *did* unite America.” Have a conversation about what this quote means. Questions to consider: Why did America need uniting? How did words unit a country? Is this still true today—do words continue to unite or do they divide us?
5. At the end of the book, Ferris includes a timeline with the title, “Noah Webster and the New United States of America.” What are some reasons she might have included this? Compare the format to the rest of the book. What are the benefits of this format for a timeline? If Ferris asked your opinion if she should have included this postscript of sorts, what would you say? Support your opinion with evidence from the text.

EXTRA ACTIVITY:

Borrow the biography format used by Ferris in this book, and as a family write the biography in the same way. For example, for your grandmother’s birthday make a book about her life. Like Ferris, include definitions of key words on some of the pages. What a great gift! (And a great writing exercise—shh! Don’t tell.)