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"We Were There": Anatomy of a Successful Series of Historical Novels for Young People

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"We Were There": Anatomy of a Successful Series
of Historical Novels for Young People

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of Historical Novels for Young People

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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“Abstract”

“We Were There”: Anatomy of a Successful Series
of Historical Novels for Young People

The study of history has always been an important part of learning. Young people might ask, “Why do I need to learn about something I cannot change?” When asked “Why Study History?” William H. McNeill states in Historical Literacy: The Case For History in American Education that the “value of historical knowledge obviously justifies teaching and learning about what happened in recent times, for the way things are descends from the way they were yesterday and the day before that” (104). Between the years 1955 to 1963 Grossett and Dunlap Publishers introduce a concept that brings personal involvement into historical events by integrating young boys and girls into the action. The “We Were There” books seem to be developed as lessons in story form to teach young readers how to become the responsible, productive adults.

This series is diverse in historical events, such as a cattle drive on the Chisholm Trail and Darwin’s discoveries of nature. The authors tend to follow Margaret Mallett’s thoughts, in Making Facts Matter, concerning non-fiction in that it “helps satisfy the young child’s great curiosity about the world of people, plants, animals, inanimate objects and events and feelings about all these things. But knowledge is not just a matter of acquiring facts, it includes coming to understand the significance of the facts” (68). The goal of the “We Were There” book series is to enhance the learning experience by incorporating influential teachers, such as parent figures, employers, neighbors, friends, and famous historical leaders, and by including lessons on foreign

language, science, religion, ethical conduct, social and political issues, and family relationships.

The “We Were There” series concept and popularity are validated by Scholastic’s recently published “Dear America Series” for girls and the “My Name is America Series” for boys, in which similar historical events are written in diary and journal form for young readers. Each “We Were There” book contains a lesson that takes the reader one step closer to understanding what is required when entering into the final stages of adulthood, such as absorbing events, analyzing those events as to how they influence their lives, then taking what they perceive as the appropriate action. Once a young person has traveled with the “We Were There” characters through the series, in its entirety, an evolution will have taken place, within the reader, that encompasses an enhanced understanding of the universe he or she shares with diverse people and events that form life lessons.

List of Books in Order of Publication by Year

Publishers: Grosset & Dunlap, New York

(Title Author Illustrator Consultant Date)

We Were There:

1. On The Oregon Trail – William O. Steele – Jo Polseno – Ray W. Irwin, 1955
2. At The Battle of Gettysburg - Alida Sims Malkus – Leonard Vosburgh – Earl Schenck Miers, 1955
3. At The Boston Tea Party – Robert Webb – E. F. Ward – Professor Louis Snyder, 1956
4. With Byrd At The South Pole – Charles S. Strong – Graham Kaye – Colonel Bernt Balchen, 1956
5. At the Normandy Invasion - Clayton Knight – Author – Major General Ralph Royce, 1956
6. In The Klondike Gold Rush – Benjamin Appel – Irv Docktor – Colonel Henry W. Clark, 1956.
7. With The Mayflower Pilgrims – Robert N. Webb – Charles Andres – George Willison, 1956
8. With The Pony Express – William O. Steele – Frank Vaughn – Sylvester Vigilante, 1956
9. With The California Forty-Niners – Stephen Holt – Raymond Lufkin – Oscar Lewis, 1956
10. With Ethan Allen And The Green Mountain Boys – Robert N. Webb – Robert Pious – Chilton Williamson, 1956

11. With Jean Lafitte At New Orleans – Iris Vinton – Robert Glaubke – Robert Tallant, 1957
12. At The Oklahoma Land Run – Jim Kjelgaard – Chris A. Kenyon, Jr. – Savoie Lottinville, 1957
13. At The Battle For Bataan – Benjamin Appel – Irv Docktor – Major General Courtney Whitney, U.S.A., Retired, 1957
14. On The Chisholm Trail – Ross McLaury Taylor – Charles Banks Wilson – Stanley Vestal, 1957
15. At Pearl Harbor – Felix Sutton – Frank Vaughn – Vice Admiral Willard A. Kitts, 3rd, U.S.N., Retired, 1957
16. With Richard The Lionhearted In The Crusades – Robert N. Webb – Leonard Vosburgh – Andre A. Beaumont, 1957
17. When Washington Won at Yorktown – Earl Schenck Miers – Herman B. Vestal – Hugh F. Rankin, 1958
18. At The Battle Of The Alamo – Margaret Cousins – Nicholas Eggenhofer – Professor Walter Prescott Webb, 1958
19. At The Opening Of The Erie Canal – Enid LaMonte Meadowcraft – Nicholas Eggenhofer – Professor Walter Prescott, 1958
20. At The Battle of Lexington And Concord – Flex Sutton – H. B. Vestal – Earl Schenck Miers, 1958
21. With Florence Nightingale In The Crimea – Robert N. Webb – Evelyn Copelman Professor Louis L. Snyder, 1958.

22. With Lewis and Clark – James Munves – Robert Glaubke – A. B. Guthrie, Jr., 1959.
23. When Grant Met Lee At Appomattox – Earl S. Miers – Leonard Vosburgh – Bruce Catton, 1960
24. At The Battle of Britain – Clayton and K. S. Knight – Clayton Knight – Duke of Hamlton, 1959.
25. With Cortes and Montezuma – Benjamin Appel – Reynold C. Pollar – Walter Prescott Webb, 1959
26. With The California Rancheros – Stephen Holt – William Reusswig – Oscar Lewis, 1960.
27. With Caesar's Legions – Robert N. Webb – Fabian Zaccone – Major General Courtney Whitney, U.S.A., Retired, 1960
28. At The First Airplane Flight – Felix Sutton – Laszlo Matulay – Grover Loening, 1960.
29. On The Santa Fe Trail – Ross M. Taylor – Albert Orbaan – Walter Prescott Webb, 1960.
30. With Charles Darwin On H.M.S. *Beagle* – Philip Eisenberg – H. B. Vestal – Professor Clayde K. Kluckhohn, 1960.
31. At The Driving Of The Golden Spike – David Shepherd – William K. Plummer – Josef Berger, 1960
32. At The Opening Of The Atomic Era – James Munves – Charles Brey – Dean John R. Dunning, 1960.

33. With The Lafayette Escadrille – Clayton and K. S. Knight – Clayton Knight – Colonel Charles H. Dola II, U.S.A.F., Retired, 1961
34. At The Battle Of The Bulge – David Shepherd – George Kraynak – General Anthony C. McAuliffe, U.S.A., Retired, 1961.
35. On The Nautilus – Robert N. Webb – Frank Vaughn – Captain William R. Anderson, U.S.N., 1961.
36. With Lincoln In The White House – Earl Schenck Miers – Charles H. Geer – Allan Nevins, 1963

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Introduction

“Books are the best type of the influence of the past” (55).

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The American Scholar*

The study of history has always been an important part of learning. Young people might ask, “Why do I need to learn about something I cannot change?” Through history one learns to feel pride in accomplishments, expand on discoveries, accept compromise, and learn not to repeat mistakes. When asked “Why Study History?” William H. McNeill states in Historical Literacy: The Case For History in American Education that the “value of historical knowledge obviously justifies teaching and learning about what happened in recent times, for the way things are descends from the way they were yesterday and the day before that” (104). In other words, a historical review creates a growth experience. During the fifties and sixties when the “We Were There” series is written, the United States is involved in the Cold War with Russia, the Korean War has recently ended, and the Vietnam Conflict starts in 1959 but the public is unaware of its inception. This allows for a relatively peaceful time in the United States when families feel secure and businesses prosper. Technological advancements are encouraged; thus the United States moves forward into the computer age at a rapid pace.

On the other hand, the computer capable of producing and storing documents at faster speeds eliminates many people skills, thus allowing students more time to question the policies of the United States Government headed by five star General and President Dwight D. Eisenhower. In fact, his farewell speech to the nation outlines the same American values incorporated in the “We Were There” series. It is essential to note that this series is conceived, written and published while Eisenhower is president, for his

administration tries to instill a feeling of national security in which its citizens are safe from all harm. There is a trend toward promoting the family unit, supporting the government ideal of sacrifice for one's country, and pushing toward new discoveries in science and technology. In 1961 President Eisenhower advises Americans in his farewell address to the nation to consider what history will record of this generation:

“A factor in maintaining balance involves the element of time. As we peer into society's future, we—you and I, and our government—must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering for our own ease and convenience, the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow”
(3).

The “We Were There” books seem to be developed as lessons in story form to teach the young reader how to become the responsible, productive adults President Eisenhower mentions in his speech. Following that trend of thought, the publishers of the “We Were There” series chose particular historical events that would reflect these standards.

Historical events, such as the involvement of Jean Lafitte at the battle of New Orleans, the expedition which took the nuclear submarine, *USS Nautilus*, under the polar ice cap from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean by way of the North Pole, or Charles Darwin's theory on evolution are recorded history. In some instances an author

such as Stephen Holt uses a historical event to introduce a future milestone. For instance, Holt's We Were There With the California Forty-Niners depicts the method of surface gold mining but he concludes the story by describing the mining method of the industrial age when "dredges ...eat up the river like monsters...as they sort the gold from the sand in huge quantities" (166).

How history is interpreted and then recorded is influenced by the opinion of the person keeping those records. The facts can be manipulated to suit the intended message to be conveyed to the readers. McNeill furthermore states in Historical Literacy that "historians are always at work reinterpreting the past, asking new questions, searching new sources and finding new meanings in old documents in order to bring the perspective of new knowledge and experience to bear on the task of understanding the past"(105). The "We Were There" series is diverse in historical events, for the young boys and girls travel with Caesar's Legions when Rome ruled the world, ride alongside the cowboys during a cattle drive on the Chisholm Trail, help fight the German army at the Normandy Invasion, and share Darwin's discoveries of nature. While these historical adventures are a few examples of the stories covered, they do not begin to introduce all the different types of events selected, written about and published in the "We Were There" series.

As a historical series the authors tend to follow Margaret Mallett's thoughts, in Making Facts Matter, concerning non-fiction in that it "helps satisfy the young child's great curiosity about the world of people, plants, animals, inanimate objects and events and feelings about all these things. But knowledge is not just a matter of acquiring facts, it includes coming to understand the significance of the facts" (68). This concept

becomes the focus of each “We Were There” lesson so that each reader will gain the important knowledge needed to grow in maturity. Through the recording of historical events an author may take those known facts and make history come alive in the mind of the audience. When creating a book geared toward a particular age group, the author has to consider what attracts the interest of this group and what underlying message should be conveyed, especially when the ages are during the formative years toward adulthood: ten to seventeen. In order to direct the subject of history toward a youthful audience there needs to be an element developed that will create audience involvement. In other words, the reader should be able to see the possibility of him or herself as one of the main characters. Grossett and Dunlap Publishers introduce a concept that brings personal involvement into historical events by integrating young boys and girls into the action.

Of the thirty-six books published, no one author wrote more than seven books. Likewise neither the illustrator nor historical consultant participates in more than three books. Writers, artists, and consultants are hired for their expertise on the subject to be written, for the purpose of the series is to educate and to show that history can be an enthralling lesson. Between the years 1955 to 1963 this series titled the “We Were There” books is written in the form of effective classroom lessons. They include characters in the role of pupils and teachers. Choices are presented and consequences explored. Reading carefully is linked to acting wisely, and completion of the series means arriving at adulthood.

Chapter 1: Educational Emphasis

“Schools will follow on the heels of the settlers” (37).

Jim Kjelgaard, At the Oklahoma Land Run

The language in this series is geared to a youthful audience and conveys a message concerning the value of a good education by incorporating a lesson into each historical adventure. Ricardo “had good schooling in Spain” (13). Francisco, Ricardo’s brother, “boasted of [his brother’s] learning” to Cortes in Benjamin Appel’s We Were There With Cortes and Montezuma book; thus Ricardo becomes valuable to the expedition. Cortes needs “school men to learn the languages of the Indian dogs” (13)! This scene sets up the introduction of the Spaniard, Jeronimo de Aguilar, an Indian slave, who forms lessons to teach Ricardo the Indian language he learned during his eight-year captivity. A short time later Ricardo uses that knowledge to “study the Aztec picture writing. There is no alphabet. But a picture of an animal or an object can be combined with other pictures to give a new meaning. The picture of a flag, *pantli*, with the picture of a hill, *tepee*, will give the name of the town of *Pantepee*” (Appel, Cortes 131). Obviously the importance of learning another culture’s language is the focal point of this lesson. It also indicates that an imagined picture often becomes set in the mind of the reader to be recalled at a later date for analysis. Each book in the series emphasizes the importance of education, but in doing so it also strives to show a variety of ways education can be of value and fun.

For instance, Tom on the Lewis and Clark expedition keeps a record of the supplies and Captain Lewis records their journey to the Pacific Ocean. To confirm the importance of recording the historical facts, James Munves in his book We Were There

With Lewis and Clark has Captain Lewis state, “Remember, boys, the most important thing is the records, of the expedition. If it happens that even one of us can get away, he must take my paper with him” (155). Captain Lewis is referring to getting away from the Blackfeet Indians who are tracking them with the purpose of annihilating the entire party of explorers. His paper is a recording of a trade route that will connect the East to the West by way of rivers. Clearly an education provides the ability for these two characters to compile information so that future generations can study and learn from their experiences. Like Columbus they are searching for a trade route that will benefit their countries. This lesson covers the importance of keeping accurate records, of opening communication with other cultures to form safe trade routes, and it emphasizes the need to support expansion of one’s nation to benefit all its inhabitants.

The Nautilus experience, written by Robert N. Webb in the “We Were There” series, expands on the furthering of education beyond the high school level when Tim discovers, through testing, that he has the ability to attend college and, upon graduating, qualifies for higher paying employment, as a Naval officer. Both his dreams and abilities are realized with the help of an expanded education. There are many ways to use education to fulfill a dream, and the series explores several while focusing on other lessons concerning national security, expansion of scientific and geographic exploration, as well as duty to one’s country.

An education is also described at the end of the Chisholm Trail cattle drive when Lance Calhoun gets permission from his father to travel on to St. Louis with his cousin,

Lou Ann, because he “wants to go to school—and learn something--” (172). The importance of his decision is understood when he tells his friends, Mitch and Harden, “I asked if I could go to St. Louis to school. I’m going to school. I really am” (171). In this We Were There On the Chisholm Trail book by Ross McLaury Taylor demonstrates how the hands-on real life lesson Lance received while traveling on the cattle drive will be integrated with lessons learned from books to help him better evaluate life situations in his future. This connection between the form of the book and the nature of classroom education is underscored.

Orville and Wilbur Wright are the instruments by which Felix Sutton in We Were There at the First Airplane Flight points out that having an interest in aviation and understanding some of the scientific elements needed to create a flying machine are not enough to advance future aviation technology. This “We Were There” book contains a valid argument for learning lessons well in order to continue one’s education. In fact, Sutton’s use of Wilbur Wright to present the facts adds a sense of validity for the cause of continued education. Wilbur explains to Jimmy why he should finish high school and continue on to college for his degree:

The one big handicap that Orv and I have had to overcome has been our lack of technical education. We’ve always had to figure things out the hard way. But if flying machines are ever going to amount to anything, they’re going to need trained engineers to build them (161).

In actuality the “Wright brothers did hire Mr. Grover Loening to be the first Chief Engineer of the Wright Company in 1912. Preceding this employment, in 1910 Mr.

Loening receives from Columbia University the first Degree in Aeronautics in America” (180). Emphasis is placed by Sutton on the importance of continued education when his fictional character Jimmy, upon completion of his college graduation, is hired as “Chief Engineer of the Wright Flying Machine Company” (179). The lessons Jimmy learns while helping Orville and Wilbur test their glider increases his understanding of the education he receives from his college professors. For Sutton the higher education level indicates the maturity of a young person, thus paving way to enter the world of professional adults.

Chapter 2: Language Lesson

“Dickon and Patience had learned the new language quickly,
as children will” (11).

Robert N. Webb, With the Mayflower Pilgrims

This series demonstrates that lessons, whether they be hands-on lessons, classroom lessons, or reading lessons, are of value, that one complements the other, so that it is unimportant whether the protagonist lives during 1518, 1868, 1910 or 1957, education is the common denominator. Each book in the series is shaped toward applying various lessons to each story so that the book not only entertains but also promotes the learning process.

Language, the ability to communicate in an understandable manner, is vitally important when dealing with people. The diversity of language can be seen throughout this series of books; French, Spanish, Norwegian, German, Polish, different Indian dialects, and Portuguese are a few of the languages spoken. After all, explorers and military troops are expected to encounter people with various language skills when encountering lands not of their origin. By incorporating language, other than English, within the text, the use of that word or meaning becomes interwoven with the action; thus a language lesson begins. This lesson enables the reader to comprehend how the author uses foreign words enhance the storyline and expand the readers word base in the process.. In this book series, once a word is introduced into the text it is often reused to refresh the memory of the reader; thus a new word is learned and remembered.

Clayton Knight introduces two languages to his readers in We Were There at the Normandy Invasion, both German and French. At times the ability to comprehend

another language can mean the difference between life and death, as Frenchman Victor illustrates when he zigzags around areas with posted signs “marked in German: “*Achtung—Minen!*” “Beware—Mines!” (73). Knight could not create a better scenario to support the need for language lessons for in this instance Victor is able to avoid the mines by his ability to read the signs. Furthermore, the ability to interpret another language can help create friendships. André “translated Slim’s ‘American’ as well as he could for his father and mother” so that they can learn more of one soldier who is fighting for their freedom.

As mentioned previously some words can be understood by the way they are inserted into the sentence. For instance, when the doctor says, “I expect no more difficulties for her,” it can be assumed Pierre’s reply “*Merci*, doctor,” is the French word for *thank you*. This same word appears earlier as André closes his conversation with M. Valjean verifying the meaning of this word to be *thank you*. Repetition of a word, as a learning tool, is a method found to be successful if the meaning of that word can be interpreted by its use. In this series Clayton Knight successfully exercises this method to teach his readers a French lesson just as a classroom teacher will repeat a key word in many sessions.

The word “foreign” does not necessarily refer to another country’s language, but can indicate the word used is not one that is familiar to the reader. In other words, an English speaking person might not be familiar with a particular English word, so the author will introduce the definition of such a word into the story line. Knight provides an

example of this when André's father, Pierre, said, "He accused me of being a collaborator of the Nazis" (16)! Knight provides the definition of collaborator by weaving it into the context of the event. His narrator inserts this thought, "there it was—the black word, *collaborator*, he who helps the enemy!" At this historical time and place "it meant someone hated by all Frenchmen, more, perhaps, than the enemy" (16). This is only one method an author can use to provide the definition of unfamiliar words.

For instance Benjamin Appel in his book, We Were There With Cortes and Montezuma, uses a Spanish word then immediately follows up with the English version of that word. The lesson begins with this illustration; "Aguilar sighed and said to Cortes, "Senor, the *caciques*, the chiefs, in that canoe threaten to kill us if we advance beyond the palm trees" (28)! A short time later this method is repeated when describing how "The riverbanks, so empty a minute ago, came alive with Indians waving lances and *macanas*, two-handed swords" (29-30). Even though Appel and Knight have different methods for defining foreign words, Appel like Knight reuses these words throughout his historical account so that the reader might retain the meaning and use of the unfamiliar word. For instance, once Appel establishes that *caciques* means chiefs, he no longer interprets the meaning of this word, but expects the reader to remember its meaning when reused several chapters later. For example, when first introduced the *caciques* are defined as chiefs, intent on killing the Spanish invaders, but "when Cortes showed the *caciques* an image of Our Lady and Her Son, they bowed in reverence" (39). The later use of *caciques* is not defined; its meaning is understood from the earlier introduction and by the context in which it is used in the sentence. By example Appel shows the reader how

accurate interpretation of any language is essential to avoid misunderstandings and to cement friendships with other cultures, such as the Astec.

An illustration of this concept is found in Charles S. Strong's We Were There With Byrd at the South Pole as young Victor Redmond makes friends among the Norwegian crew of the *Larsen*. While Victor is away from his family, the ship's crew will become his substitute family. Strong takes this opportunity to illustrate how learning can draw new friends closer together. And as a friend, radioman "Hansen asked, "How would you like to learn Norwegian, Victor" (18). With Victor's reply a friendship is formed: "I'd like to very much... Will you teach me?" (18). Again another lesson transpires with the protagonist as the student and the adult friend becomes the teacher. As in the account of the Normandy Invasion, the word *thank you* is featured in the Norwegian language among the Byrd crewmembers. Not only do these author's form lessons in language; they also include lessons on polite ways to communicate in any language with the universal word *thank you*. Strong sets the scene for Victor to use this word in such a way that the reader does not need the interpretation to understand what Victor is saying when he is presented with a "fur suit": "He accepted the fur suit eagerly, then turned to old Martin and said gratefully, "*Tusen, tusen takk!*" (26). As previously indicated, language can be learned using many methods, but the constant use of a word reinforces the learning skill. Strong gives an illustration of this when "Victor's Norwegian lessons...reached the point where he recognizes the call...from the crow's nest: '*Hvalblast! Hvalblast! Hvalblast!*' It was the Norwegian word for the familiar 'Thar she blow!' of the New England whaler" (38).

Global communication was expanding with technology in the fifties and sixties; therefore it is understandable this series of books would encourage students to learn languages other than their mother tongue. The additional lesson, which includes polite communication skills, is important when forming friendships or future business deals with other countries. There is a message conveyed, within the books, that language does not need to present a barrier when communication is the goal. Clearly, Victor when greeted by his Norwegian friends understands “Merry Christmas or Gledelig Jul!”

In the same way that French, Spanish or Norwegian is translated for the reader in We Were There at the Normandy Invasion, We Were There with Cortes and Montezuma, or We Were There With Byrd at the South Pole, Americans settling the Western Territory develop a language that requires an author to interpret the meaning of newly developed words or new meanings to old words. Writing of the period in which the American West was settled by so many diverse cultures becomes a challenge, for Western language is a combination of many languages and dialects. Old words and new words are a combination of Old Spanish, French, many Indian dialects, various European languages, and the dominant English mixed to form a new blend of all these languages which created a new form of communication. “We Were There” books, which take the reader on the Chisholm Trail, with the California Forty-Niners, the Pony Express, with the California Rancheros, on the Santa Fe Trail, with the Lewis and Clark Expedition and the Santa Fe Trail, give evidence to the new growth in the Wild West and the changes resulting due to the influx of so many people. These changes make it necessary for a new set of lessons to be developed for the young reader.

Words such as *pirogue* or *prairie schooner* are associated with particular trades or modes of travel. For instance, James Munves explains in his We Were There With Lewis and Clark, a *pirogue* is a “wide little boat, the shape of an iron” (4). Usually fur trappers travel the rivers in these little boats as described in the Lewis and Clark series. A *prairie schooner*, described as “a sort of houseboat on wheels,” is the vehicle built to convey settlers across the open land along the Santa Fe Trail to their destination in the western territory. Ross McLaury Taylor produces a lesson that follows along the Santa Fe Trail with protagonist, Mitch. One hands-on lesson takes the reader with Mitch as he learns first hand of a “wind devil, a powerful thing tearing the grass out of the ground, twisting the trees, lifting the dust and dirt from the ground, bringing a kind of blackness with it” (57). This lesson not only introduces new words, but also includes a lesson in the unpredictability of weather science.

To make a story lesson sound authentic it is important to use words that relate to the subject. This is evident in the books, such as We Were There on the Nautilus, We Were There with Jean Lafitte at New Orleans, and We Were There at the Opening of the Erie Canal when military and nautical terms become part of the lesson. The military terms, such as *powder monkey*, *periscope*, *ballast*, *sonar*, *sub's sail*, *nuclear propulsion*, *radar*, *gangway*, *cooper*, *galley*, *belaying-pin*, *forecastle*, *stern* or *rigging* are used by the authors in such a way as to help the reader interpret their meaning when used in their proper context as events unfold.

It is apparent that authors such as Enid Lamonte Meadowcroft need to set the scene for the events that carry the historical lesson. Thus certain new words and facts

need to be introduced at the beginning of the story. For instance in order for Meadowcroft's We Were There at the Opening of the Erie Canal to help the student understand and envision what boats will be used on the Erie Canal he takes the time to describe the "three kinds of boats on this canal. *Freighters* that carry just freight. And *line boats* that carry freight and a couple of passengers if they tote their own food. And *packet boats*, they carry just passengers" (37). Now the reader is ready to travel with the protagonist on several of these boats to learn more about this way of life just as he travels through the book chapter to chapter.

Iris Vinton found plenty of opportunity to introduce nautical terms when creating the lessons in We Were There With Jean Lafitte at New Orleans for most of the events take place on board sailing vessels. Words like *rigging* and *ratlines* are introduced when the young man Barnaby "leaped for the *ratlines* and begin to climb" up into the "*rigging* of the *Carolina* [as they] whipped back and forth like branches in a gale" (20). These two words are synonymous with the ropes used to haul up the sail on the ship. It is common for wharf rats to walk along ropes that held a ship the to pier; thus the word *ratlines* is created.

With the invention of more advanced modes of transportation it is understandable why new words are created to describe or name a particular piece of equipment, such as a *periscope* which allows the skipper to see the water surface while the submarine remains submerged under water or *radar* which enables the submarine to maneuver under the polar icecap. Robert N. Webb's We Were There on the Nautilus enables young readers to enter into the advanced technological world inside the first atomic submarine, the

Nautilus. These “We Were There” lessons illustrate how easily a student can adapt to new information and the new methods used to introduce that information by reading the books in this series. Language is constantly changing and so must the reader learn to change with that language.

Chapter 3: History Lesson

“Jeff...and all the others who traveled the Oregon Trail...helped to make the United States a continental nation—a land of democracy...” (177).

William O. Steele, On the Oregon Trail

The main characters, like their reading audience, are young people who represent what is considered to be, at the time, the social average. They are intelligent and goal oriented, have family support, are clean-cut in appearance and polite, show initiative, and are willing to take part in history-making events. These events present the authors the opportunity to incorporate lessons that will assist the reader toward life goals.

Each boy or girl is integrated into a historical event, by way of a designated job or assignment. Besides becoming involved in a historical event most of the protagonists have other reasons for involvement in the adventure. In fact thirteen-year-old Tom Hendon through a short acquaintance, in St. Louis, Missouri, with Colonel Daniel Boone is allowed to join the Lewis and Clark expedition to map the Territory of Louisiana because he is searching for his father, Jim Hendon, a trapper who has not been heard from for some time. According to James Munves, author of We Were There With Lewis and Clark, Tom’s story begins on a Saturday, March 12, 1804 just a few days before Captain William Clark intends to leave St. Louis to meet with Captain Meriwether Lewis on “the north bank of the Missouri at St. Charles” (37). No one travels for free, so Tom is assigned to keep a ledger of all the “Indian presents bought in case of an emergency” (33). His lessons begin with the organizational skills required for bookkeeping.

Unlike Tom, twelve-year-old André and his sister, fifteen-year-old Marie, become involved in the spring 1944 Normandy Invasion by way of the French underground

activities their father, Pierre Gagnon, supports. Clayton Knight's We Were There at the Normandy Invasion features André and Marie in a family that joins together to hide "airmen who are shot down over France...till the Maquis can find a way to get [them] over the border into Spain" (6).

Both of these situations are based on family ties that form stability in a young person's life when he or she is searching for answers in a grown up world. Most of the assignments prove to be dangerous for the protagonist, but the authors seek to teach a lesson on how to overcome difficult circumstances by analyzing a situation and acting on that analogy.

The main characters are old enough to assume responsibility; this can be interpreted by the assignments they are willing to undertake. As a matter of fact, fourteen-year-old Victor Redmond takes on a difficult task when he assists the radioman aboard a supply ship headed to the Antarctic with Commander Byrd's expedition; the ability to communicate with the outside world during a snowstorm and high seas becomes a matter of life or death. Victor is shown to have the discipline to sit for hours listening through a headset for any call for help from the main party of explorers. Charles S. Strong, in writing We Were There With Byrd at the South Pole, uses Victor as an example of what can be expected in this particular job related field and illustrates the pride felt when a job is done well.

The act of accepting responsibility takes on various forms within this series; Victor Redmond is one example. Benjamin Appel's We Were There With Cortes and Montezuma, which takes place in 1518, creates a different concept of responsibility when

Ricardo Ayelon becomes the “sole hope of [his] family to better [their] poor fortune” (12). Ricardo at age fourteen travels with his brother, Francisco, and his father to Cuba in the new world to seek their fortunes in gold. Francisco and his father accompanied the first expedition into Mexico’s interior, which met with disaster for them. The father “died of a fever,” while Francisco lost an arm in the fight with the Indians (12). With a mother and two sisters waiting in Spain for their return with gold to support them, Ricardo, being the remaining healthy male in the family, must step in to take the place of his father and brother. Although Ricardo is expected to take on this responsibility, this situation shows that he does so willingly.

Willingness to take on family responsibilities adds a heavy burden to a young boy’s life. When this happens, he, as the eldest male, has to grow up fast for the remaining family members are counting on him to care for their survival. An illustration of this lesson is experienced in 1859 by two young protagonists, created by Stephen Holt in We Were There With The California Rancheros. Fifteen-year-old Romero Sanchez inherits the “rancho that his father had begun years ago” when “the horses, urged by shouting Mojave Indians, had swept out and over his father, trampling him to death” (7). Equally important is the role Jim Peters assumes when his father succumbs to “a cough that wouldn’t get better” and is eventually buried in Arizona along the trail west (52). Holt creates similarities in the boys that extend to both having mothers and siblings counting on them to support and maintain the family as a unit. On the other hand, Holt builds on the contrasting differences between Romero as a rancher and Jim as a farmer to show how each can help the other in times of stressful trouble.

Where Victor Redmond has a choice of whether or not to go on the Byrd expedition to the South Pole, these boys are not given that option when they receive their job assignments. Romero has been trying to save his family ranch for some time and shows the fear of losing it to squatters, such as Jim. Although the present day challenge may be of a different nature, the "We Were There" series tries to incorporate different types of scenarios that young people might face so that they can relate with the characters on a more personal basis. This lesson focuses on the ability of two young men to reach a compromise in which they combine their talents to benefit both families and discover in doing so they can live in harmony working side-by-side toward a common goal. Although their contributions to history may not be recorded, historical events of importance do not transpire without the untiring courage of unacknowledged heroes such as these.

Chapter 4: Science Lesson

“The most important thing is to observe—question—and search for the causes of things. And, of course, read and study” (21).

Philip Eisenberg, With Charles Darwin on H.M.S. Beagle

Universal wars and the settling of American are not the only historical topics that take the reader on a “We Were There” adventure; scientific research creates a history of its own. Because the fifties and sixties are not fretted with war, inventors and scientists are encouraged by the federal government to expand on many new concepts. It is a time for discovery. As a matter of fact, the authors of the “We Were There” series encourage this trend in the structure of their tales.

For instance, Pam Clayton as an apprentice to Florence Nightingale learns the importance of cleanliness; it inhibits the spread of disease. While nursing before, during, and after the Crimea War, Miss Nightingale insists a well-scrubbed ward is necessary to insure the soldier’s recovery from disease or injury. Miss Nightingale also introduces the concept that fresh air is good for the patient’s recovery; all the windows are opened to the night air. The medical community of male doctors do not readily accept all Miss Nightingale’s methods, but “by January of 1855, Florence and her nurses have been accepted by the doctors. They admit that Florence Nightingale has prevented the total collapse of the British army hospital system” (141). Robert N. Webb, author of We Were There With Florence Nightingale in the Crimea, takes the readers along with thirteen-year-old Pam to the actual events, which change the methods for treating the sick and dying. The pattern for revealing scientific discoveries in understandable terms is

found in the creation of all the lessons pertaining to the historical science books in the “We Were There” series.

In fact, Felix Sutton’s We Were There at the First Airplane Flight takes on the complexities of aerodynamics with the help of his protagonist, fifteen-year-old Jimmy Blair and his sister, fourteen-year-old Clara Blair. On a windy day in 1902 both young people are at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, when brothers, Orville and Wilbur Wright are testing their glider. Sutton starts the lesson when Jimmy receives a job offer from the brothers to run errands while they work. What better way to learn a lesson and recall the details than to have an opportunity to eavesdrop on their conversation concerning “how to control [the glider] in the air”(20)? To accomplish this they must “lick the problem balance” (20). Sutton creates a lesson that will take the student reader step by step with Jimmy to demonstrate how to resolve problems that block the ultimate goal.

The engineering design and the men that implemented the design of the Erie Canal represent another means for “helping...the country grow” (56). Enid Lamonte Meadowcroft’s We Were There at the Opening of The Erie Canal provides an excellent example of people willing to expose their lives to disease, hardships, and death in order to “make it easier for folks to settle on new lands farther west”(56). More than one lesson can be learned in each of the “We Were There” books. Evidently Meadowcroft intends for the reader to understand that the Erie Canal project not only serves to increase the speed of transportation between Albany and Buffalo, New York, but it also provides jobs for the great influx of immigrants arriving in the United States. The Irish

are particularly hired to work along the stretch through Montezuma Marshes because they are acclimated to the bogs in Ireland.

For a student to learn how to look at both sides of an issue Meadowcroft leads the protagonist, thirteen-year-old Christopher Martin, to a meeting with wagoner, Hank Gower. Through Gower, Chris learns that not everyone will benefit from the building and completion of the canal. Hank Gower, like many hardworking people, has developed a dislike toward the canal for, as he says,

“Ain’t you heard it’s that gol-danged Erie Canal that making it so tough for us wagoners, we can’t even eat right, let alone feed our horses? Cause we can’t get no more big loads to haul, like we use to...Who’s going to send stuff to some place by wagon when one of those dinged canal boats can get it there in half the time for less than half the money? Nobody! Us wagoners are going to be clear out of business in a year” (88-89).

Through this conversation the reader learns that it is necessary to weigh the advantages for such a project against the disadvantages to conclude whether to build it or not. In this case, the Erie Canal reaches completion in 1825 when the waters of Lake Erie enter the cut at the Buffalo end of the canal. An engineering project of this magnitude is a result of groups of people working together toward a common goal. Some, such as New York Governor Clinton, work to get political approval for the necessary funds, while others toil in adverse conditions on site to dig the waterway, build the locks, and cut through mountains and marshes to reach the end. Mr. Tobin, a boat owner, encourages the reader to marvel at such an achievement when he says,

“Think of all the planning and work that have gone into it; three hundred and sixty-three miles of a man-made river that’s forty feet!” (120). This can give the young reader the feeling that he also might contribute to some grand technological accomplishment in the future.

While the Wright Brothers use engineering science to build a flying machine, the Manhattan Project’s scientific experiments developed control of nuclear energies during the Atomic Era, and the Nautilus proved the benefit of nuclear power under the North Pole, the scientific community does not limit itself to technical engineering forms of science; natural environmental studies are included in the “We Were There” series. By presenting lessons that highlighted the diversity of scientific fields the “We Were There” books are able to stimulate the imagination of a broader audience.

Certainly Florence Nightingale’s implementation of new methods for fighting infection through cleaner conditions and fresh air indicates that improvements could be developed throughout the medical field, but Philip Eisenberg’s We Were There with Charles Darwin on H.M.S. Beagle opens a young person’s imagination to a scientific field with no limitation to the research possibilities. With each discovery, Eisenberg develops a question to stimulate the reader’s desire to learn more of the environment and the creatures that dwell within each new location. Actually, two lessons are taught by Darwin, one being the subject of science and the other language. Although Latin was not spoken as a daily language in 1832 it remains the technical language for the scientific world.

Thirteen-year-old Dick Covington, as cabin boy on the H.M.S. Beagle, finds his classroom experience begins the day he serves broth to twenty-three-year-old Charles Darwin. Dick's first lesson starts with the question, "Why do you need the pickaxes, sir?" (12). Darwin takes on the role of teacher with his reply, "We use the pickaxe in digging the ground or the sides of cliffs—loosening rocks and soil to get at the fossils" (12). This teacher/student relationship draws the reader into the naturalist classroom to interact with the question and answer lessons as Darwin and Dick make new discoveries. The comfortable dialogue Eisenberg develops between Darwin and Dick demonstrates how teachers should communicate to students in a learning environment.

For Dick natural science and Latin merge as one when he learns how to record, label, and store information and specimens for Darwin. In addition Dick finds "learning the names is the most difficult part. The beetle family is called the *Coleoptera*, the butterflies are the *Lepidoptera*, the spiders are the *Arachnida*, and on and on it went" (38). Eisenberg uses Dick as a means to communicate to the student readers that the difficulty encountered in learning information does not apply to only them and that it is essential they do not give up trying to achieve their goals. The encouragement and praise lavished on a student from the teacher can make the difference of whether the student enjoys the lesson or not. Darwin provides such an example when he speaks thus to Dick: "These specimens represent only the merest fraction of all the insect species in the world. And it's no easy task learning all the Latin names. But I must say you've made excellent progress" (38).

As the expedition moves from the jungles of Brazil, along the Santa Cruz River and arrives at the Galapagos, the expansion of Dick's knowledge cannot prepare him as "they marched into a barren land of black lava humped into hills, broken into crags, and crisscrossed with huge crevices. Ragged outlines of volcanic craters scarred the landscape. A weird vegetation of odd-shaped cactus plants, brown withered bushes, and few stunted acacia trees grew out of the lava" (148). This is an excellent lead into the discovery of the mysterious creatures, such as "three-foot long giant black lizards" and "giant tortoise," living among the lava rock (144-152). As with most discoveries, the more one learns, the more new questions arise to be answered. This is evident when Darwin learns from the local fisherman that each island is the habitat for distinctively different species of tortoise, recognized by their shells. With this information Darwin presents the problem to be solved "Most of these islands are in sight of each other—the same climate and physical conditions exist on all of them. Why should each island have a different species of tortoise?" (156). Darwin theorizes, "Could this mean that various forms of life in the past were not created independently but descended from one another—and gradually changed over a long period of time?" (158). In this instance the author Eisenberg is presenting a situation that draws the reader into thinking about the answer to this question. Whether the readers realize they are learning from traveling along with Darwin and Dick is not important, for subconsciously their interest in natural science has increased. Eisenberg, like the other "We Were There" authors, strives to teach lessons through historical adventure.

Just as Darwin's explorations take him to various places on the global map in search for scientific answers, Commander Byrd's expedition to the South Pole in search of "geological" specimens and answers to questions about the little known continent takes them to another area of the globe. Clearly this party of explorers encounter entirely different types of problems than the Darwin group, for instance, "collecting specimens of rock in a country almost completely covered by snow," as encountered by the Byrd expedition is, "going to take time" (143).

History includes a diverse record of such achievements; perhaps the most significant involves the harnessing of the atom. In the same fashion that the Erie Canal is completed through a group effort, many scientists combined their knowledge, under the name of the Manhattan Project, to develop atomic energy. As James Munves explains in We Were There at the Opening of The Atomic Era, not all discoveries are viewed by their inventors as contributing a positive influence on future generations. Thus, this achievement leads future generations to challenge the right or wrong use of this energy.

Whether the story takes the reader with Florence Nightingale to the Crimea, on the Wright Brothers' first flight, with people along the Erie Canal, at the opening of the Atomic Era, or on an adventure with Charles Darwin, this series of lessons encourage young readers to view their world as a scientific wonder to be explored.

Chapter 5: Ethical Lesson

*“Fourscore and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth
on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated
to the proposition that all men are created equal”* Abraham Lincoln (176).

Alida Sims Malkus, At the Battle of Gettysburg

Ethical conduct is an issue raised quite often during the fifties and sixties, no more so than when the subject pertained to the use of nuclear energy. James Munves handles the questions pertaining to ethics through his protagonist, fifteen-year-old Tony Brenner. His book, We Were There at the Opening of the Atomic Era, takes place in 1942 and is based on firsthand facts as recorded by Dr. John R. Dunning when he is a participant in the secret Manhattan Project to harness nuclear energy. As Dr. Dunning explains, James Munves

has done an extraordinarily good job of showing the essential spirit of the great enterprise in which we were engaged in the early 1940’s—a spirit, you will notice, that was more concerned with penetrating the secrets of nature and building a new life for man than with destroying and fighting.
(viii).

Nevertheless this book demonstrates there is a race, against time and against their counterparts the German researchers, to create an atomic bomb. Whether to harness nuclear energy for the betterment of mankind or to use it to curtail the German advancement in Europe, the project presents an ethical dilemma that shows the compassionate side of the scientist involved in this project. Tony becomes an observer of

the Manhattan Project, for like his father, who works on the project, he is very knowledgeable in the field of neutron and proton research at his high school

Tony's expanded knowledge, in this field, makes it possible for him to explain in layman's terms the many elements of danger encountered by the scientist and to point out that, "if producing [plutonium] isn't cooled, it will not just melt and burn up. It will also poison a lot of people and things" (74). Those people are residing in the city of Chicago where the first experiment is initiated. The scientists know the results when mixing certain elements; their goal is to find a way to control those elements. They consider the risk, evaluate the precautions for safety, and believe if their experiment succeeds, the benefit to mankind will outweigh the dangers involved should an accident occur. Their work will advance the United States far ahead of all other countries with this new technology, but with it goes the responsibility of its use by future generations.

In that context, Tony reports, "three weeks after [the test in the desert], on August 6, 1945, one Bomb destroys Hiroshima. On August 9, 1945, another bomb destroys Nagasaki. On August 14, 1945, Japan surrenders. World War II comes to an end" (174). Munves ends his book of the "We Were There" series with a serious ethical message that is reviewed by each new generation. Basically are we our brother's keeper, for "it is not a nice thing to think...that you helped make something that killed or hurt at least 230,000 people" (174)? The method of destruction is not important: "what does matter is that people wish to kill or hurt other people" (175). The scientists who harness the atom do so hoping to enhance the life of mankind, but this unlimited power in the wrong hands can destroy all of civilization. The ethical issues are simply put by Munves: "The atom

is neither good nor evil. Only people are” (175). Young readers are asked, then, to consider the consequences of their own actions.

People can justify their actions to fit the situation, as is shown when Earl Schenck Miers’ series book We Were There When Grant met Lee at Appomattox takes on the cause of the American Civil War, which pits brother against brother, father against son, and friend against friend. Protagonist, Rob Custis, age thirteen years, and his sister one year his junior, Buzzard, given name Sari Lou, both of Southern ancestry, are captured by Blue-bellies, Union soldiers, and presented to General Grant, “real name’s Hiram” (19), as spies. Actions are not always what they seem, for Miers uses Buzzard to state facts as seen through her eyes when General Grant’s soldiers preparing to ignite a fuse to blow up the Southern, Rebel soldiers camped over a nearby mine tunnel. “Buzzard spoke sassily: “If I could have reached General Lee, you’d have seen how much ‘playing spy’ I was doing! You and your old soldiers have ruined Virginia!” (18).

Rob’s thoughts, focused “up on that ridge [where] neighbors like the Parker boys...were fighting the plagued blue-bellied invaders,” allow a clearer explanation for Buzzard’s outburst (20). The ethical issue Rob faces is apparent when he questions, “what right has [he], as a Rebel from the day of his birth, to feel friendly toward this rascal” Grant (19). Grant’s friendly introduction and concern for their safety leads to this confusion, for Rob has always heard that “Grant was the toughest, meanest enemy the South had” (19). The question of whether people should follow the conscience and heart, based on individual experience, or seek to follow ideas expressed by inexperienced individuals, is a major ethical issue that tore at the heart of the American people during

this war. Clearly Rob felt, as many did, why should men like the Parker boys “be blown into eternity for only wanting to defend their homes” or life style (20)?

Granted the war makes enemies of those involved, but Rob’s father, Mr. Custis, presents the human side to both General Grant and General Lee, when he confirms “General Lee is a wonderful man and a wonderful general,” but “Grant’s a good general with more of everything on his side—men, guns, food, money” (31). For Buzzard, it sounds as if her father “thinks old Grant is as good as General Lee” (31). Her father’s perception of Grant, “as a good father to his children, as a man who would like to see an end to the suffering and killing that this war means,” lends one to believe that Grant and Lee are only men caught in a war not of their choosing. By the close of the Civil War Rob has joined up with General Lee’s troops and Buzzard becomes a nurse at the Union hospital. Both youngsters have clear pictures of their options and have made decisions based on their experiences, thus encouraging readers to prepare to do the same in their lives.

One final test is presented to Rob when he decides to attend a secret meeting of soldiers intent on continuing the war efforts following General Lee’s surrender; after all it is “only a piece of paper” (167). When one man gives his solemn word for a group of followers, is it right that those followers should break that contract? General Lee puts that issue to the test when he attends the secret meeting to voice his opinion,

“I expect by this time tomorrow I may be General Grant’s prisoner. It is a course I shall hate to take, but once I take it I shall live by the honor of my word. I cannot, therefore, be any part of the movement, which I am

told brings you here...Don't you feel [your country] has been sufficiently demoralized by four years of war...Gentlemen, forgive me—this is no life I can share or want.” (170)

At war's end when the facts are interpreted, and when the difference between right and wrong becomes the opinion of each individual, does any one side truly win? This war initiates the rebirth of a nation and the ethical battles are carried on verbally among the politicians and the industrialists. Young readers too had to see themselves as their generation's leaders faced with critical questions.

Even though the differences between right and wrong often applied to the laws of a nation, as demonstrated by one “We Were There” book and the scientific community must cope with special concerns with each new discovery, James Munves introduces in We Were There With Lewis and Clark another ethical issue. In a like manner abuse of another human being is not to be tolerated by those in a community who care for each other. Tom Hendon finds himself having to work for fur trader, M. Santime, in St. Louis, in order to obtain shelter and food. Daniel Boone intervenes on behalf of Tom when it becomes apparent Santime seldom feeds Tom and treats him as a slave. Through Boone Tom is introduced to the Captain Clark whose confrontation with Santime frees Tom and makes it possible for the reader's lessons to continue on with the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Ethical lessons pertain to issues concerning right or wrong decisions. As a matter of fact the struggle, between good and evil, provides the pivotal point of an ethical problem. When individuals as a society cannot govern their actions in an appropriate

manner toward their fellowman than a law is initiated to enforce ethical correctness.

These books guide the reader toward the appropriate way to form those decisions without the necessity of a written law. In other words the author implies to the reader that they should treat other people, as they want to be treated, in doing so they learn to make ethical decisions with compassion.

Chapter 6: Religious Lessons

“We journey afar to seek God’s truths with our own conscience” (10).

Robert N. Webb, With the Mayflower Pilgrims

Religious freedom and diverse beliefs are introduced as a way of life, but the creation of a lesson that will show compassion for all faiths is a difficult challenge, which is met with success by the “We Were There” authors. The Catholic religion is emphasized when Cortes invades Mexico. His discovery that the Aztec’s worship gods with human sacrifices leads to “Cortes insisting that the idols be removed from the temple and an image of the Mother of God and a cross be put in their place” (127). Furthermore “the Spanish conqueror explains the Catholic faith” to Montezuma so that he will “stop the sacrifice of human beings to the Aztec gods” (127). As a result war breaks out between the Spanish and the Aztec over the freedom to worship as they choose. While this “We Were There” series does not condone the ill treatment of any human, such as the Aztec sacrifice of humans, it does illustrate how religion is used as justification for war or persecution of those who chose to worship in a manner other than the ruling majority.

For instance, the pilgrims are forced out of England, due to religious persecution. Robert N. Webb describes the hardships suffered by the Pilgrims once they land in the new world. His We Were There With the Mayflower Pilgrims story delves into the price one should be willing to pay to gain religious freedom. This group of people must rely on helping each other as Webb illustrates; when this does not occur, mistrust and anger take over to create the helplessness felt when all suffer at the hands of others.

Equally important is the suffering inflicted on the Jewish race by Hitler during World War II in the concentration camps in Germany. This religious persecution is introduced by James Munves in his book We Were There at the Opening of the Atomic Era. Furthermore Munves uses his protagonist, Tony Brenner, to explain through his diary the celebration of “Pesach...Passover” (80). He writes the following, using simple understandable wording: “Passover is a Jewish holiday. It commemorates our escape from slavery more than four thousand years ago. At the Seder, a feast on the first evening of Passover, we thank God for our freedom. As we remind ourselves that we once were slaves, we know how precious it is to be free” (80). In addition, Munves provides the parallel comparison with the Jews of Israel to the Jews of Germany, for Tony’s family group “left Europe as [their] ancestors left Egypt” (81). As Munves points out, “the [Biblical] story of Exodus could have happened to” the Jews during World War II; their experiences connect with similar circumstances (81).

As with the Aztecs and Pilgrims, the Jews suffered for their religious beliefs. The “We Were There” series conveys a moral lesson pertaining to this worldwide practice of religious persecution and establishes the necessity for all people to be granted the freedom to express their religious preferences in a peaceful environment. Although Cortes tries to force the Aztec to convert to the Catholic beliefs in an earlier period of history, the overall focus of this series emphasizes that religious freedom is honored under the constitution of the United States. Furthermore those seeking this freedom are welcome to settle in this country without fear of reprisal for their religious preference, as Tony’s Jewish family discovered. The actions of Cortes in 1518 and Hitler during the

late nineteen thirties and early forties reveal the extreme horrors perpetrated by particular leaders to force their religious or ideological beliefs on another race of people. These same actions are not limited to the examples shown in this book series but are the publisher's method of showing young Americans the results of such conflicts.

Chapter 7: Family Lesson

“The last chest of tea had been dumped...father...son
...mother and...daughter, all together, tired but happy,
left the wharf and trudged slowly home” (165).

Robert H. Webb, At the Boston Tea Party

Family support is important to character development, and this series includes a lesson in each book that pertains to the family unit. During the fifties families are seen as a unit, consisting of a father as head of the house, a mother, who works in the home nurturing the family, and two or three children, preferably one boy and one girl. Divorce is not felt to be socially acceptable so families tend to stay together as a support unit through the rough times. When a parent dies, the remaining parent is expected to remarry to reestablish that support unit. Children grow to expect that their parents will be there to encourage and teach them as they grow to adulthood. This support is an important ingredient needed to instill confidence in the young person. Family is usually portrayed as a blood related unit, but there are many other ways to create a family as seen between Barnaby Winn and Mr. Darrah at New Orleans with Jean Lafitte.

Iris Vinton, author of the book We Were There With Jean Lafitte at New Orleans, illustrates how a father image can be developed when an old sailor, Mr. Darrah, takes under his wing a young boy, Barnaby Winn, who serves as a powder monkey aboard the “United States naval schooner *Carolina*” (3). Mister is a term used to instill respect for a man who has traveled the seas and is wise in the ways of the world. Equally important is the term “powder monkey,” for it is the name given to young orphan boys put on ships to carry the gunpowder from the ship’s hole to the cannon. Because they are orphans they

are considered expendable: no one will miss them. The powder monkey becomes the prime target in battle for if he is wounded or killed the gunpowder will not reach the cannon. Mr. Darrah decides that Barnaby needs someone to look after him and to teach him how to take care of himself in a fight; thus the story changes the original concept that Barnaby will not be missed if killed.

Furthermore Barnaby meets Suzanne, the daughter of plantation owner Monsieur Picot, and finds that her family embraces him when he is wounded during a sea battle. Barnaby appreciates the kindness extended to him by Suzanne's family, but he "must get back to [his] ship," *Carolina*, and Mr. Darrah (72). Vinton indicates a strong father/son type bond has formed between Mr. Darrah and Barnaby when stating, "Mr. Darrah had been too thankful to see Barnaby safely aboard again to press him for the details of his escape" from the ship's battle scene (83). This bond is woven tighter when Mr. Darrah becomes very sick with a high fever, so high, that Barnaby enlists the aid of Jean Lafitte to get Mr. Darrah off the ship into a doctor's care in New Orleans. Clearly Barnaby and Mr. Darrah have formed a family unit, in that they care about each other and put one another first when the need arises.

In the fifties and sixties family farms and ranches are still worked by whole families, so it is not unusual for a son such as Lance Calhoun to be portrayed as a cowboy working on a cattle drive with his father on the Chisholm Trail, which stretched from Brownsville, Texas to Abilene, Kansas. It is expected that the kids will grow up to help take care of the farm; thus, hands-on experience is a good teacher. Farms and ranches tended to be isolated from highly populated areas so that the family unit was forced to

rely on each member to carry out tasks that provided for their survival. This situation provided the venue in which family members can gain a sense of self-worth.

Family support comes in many forms, as is exhibited by Victor Redmond's family when he fails to be picked as "the Boy Scout to go with Commander Byrd's expedition" (Strong 5). His father is supplying the dog food for the dog teams on the expedition, so he arranges for Victor to meet Captain Nilsen, who will transport equipment and the teams to the South Pole base camp. Charles Strong, the author, introduces the family support by acknowledging, "his [Victor's] mother and father had known of his hopes and had encouraged him" to try for the Boy Scout position. It is important to note that Strong inserts, "now they shared his disappointment" (5). Sharing brings an important message to the reader on how families should react to each other's disappointments.

As a matter of fact, seventeen-year-old friends Steve and Tim in Robert N. Webb's We Were There On The Nautilus share both elation and disappointment at the conclusion of their sea voyage as crewmembers on the Nautilus. While they are elated to be among the crew that completes the first underwater trip from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean by way of the North Pole, family needs and career changes create stress for their friendship. Not until both boys share their news with each other do they come to an understanding that sharing will strengthen their future relationship. During the cruise his sister notifies Steve that his father suffers a heart attack and will not be able to return to work at Electric Boat, where submarines, such as the Nautilus, are built. Because the family needs him, Steve intends to ask for a hardship discharge so he can work at Electric Boat to support his family. Webb illustrates how the family remains stable as a unit;

when one member needs help, another member steps in as support, even when it means giving up a dream, such as being a crewmember on the Nautilus.

In the meantime, Tim takes a test, passes it, and is offered the chance to attend Officer's Candidate School, which is what he wants but not what he and Steve planned to do together. When Tim communicates to Steve his intentions to accept the offer, he is surprised to find he has not lost a friend but has a supportive friend, who says, "I'm *proud* of you" (175). Webb's conclusion shows that a positive attitude can turn any bad situation into one that will bring pleasure and happiness to all those concerned.

Often men take leadership roles more than women, roles that guide the family and support advancement in a career to support that family. This ideology is not dependent on a time or place, but is repeatedly implied throughout the "We Were There" series, which has a time span that includes traveling with Caesar's Legions and the birth of the Atomic Age. This series tends to focus more on the accomplishment of men than the equal abilities of women. For example, Lance has a lesson in leadership from his father as he organizes a cattle trail drive, which travels the Chisholm Trail to Abilene, Kansas, to sell his cattle. Lance learns the necessity of long family separations when he travels with the drovers on this cattle drive. Sacrifice often becomes the lesson, then, for many of the books written convey how people find the strength to endure all the hardships incurred during the Western expansion of the United States.

This is the case in William Steele's We Were There With the Pony Express, for following the death of a mother, Mark and Rose, his sister, live with their Aunt Matilly and Uncle Hubbard until their father is established at his new job working for the Pony

Express Company running a way-station. It is pointed out that not all attempts to earn money are successful, for Mark's father has previously "prospected for gold out in Nevada with a friend of his. But they didn't find any gold or anything" that would provide a living for his family (13). The rush to discover gold with the forty-niners in California had ended, leaving a lesson that there are no quick ways to get rich. By 1860, when the Pony Express is started to "get mail from Missouri to California," Mark's father set the example for earning a living with honest hard work (4). Steady employment meant a man must maintain an honest code of work ethics that instill confidence between the employee and the employer, as Mark's father experiences when a letter is accidentally misplaced, for even an honest man can be put on probation by his employer until he can regain the important trust that is first established when hired.

Mark's work ethic helps to reestablish this link when he works hard to make sure the mail is delivered on time within 10 days. Mark goes beyond the call of duty, for when a rider becomes ill he continues to deliver mail through a blizzard to the next station. In this instance, he feels honor bound to risk his life and that of his horse to keep the code of the Pony Express Company.

While honor and hard work are valued by an employer at any time, it does not guarantee that a particular job will remain open as happens when after 18 months the Pony Express Company is disbanded due to lack of profits and the completion of the telegraph "line from coast to coast" (174). With the East preparing for Civil War many men will be asked to join the armies and many will choose like Mark's father to become

a farmer to feed a nation. Men will lead their families west searching for the promised land, a land filled with opportunities that will bring them security through wealth.

Steele teaches a lesson, through a series of events that include a man's need to recover from disaster and his ability to take on new ways of enhancing his and his family's way of life. Furthermore Steele stresses change is inevitable; how one adapts to change is the key to success and self-satisfaction. Men often take chances to improve their way of life, and many lose their lives in those attempts. Such is the case depicted in Stephen Holt's We Were There With the California Rancheros, when two different fathers lose their lives following their dream of settling land in California. As is expected, their sons take on the male responsibilities following their fathers' deaths.

War is a divider of families when opposite views come in to play. David Shepherd in his book, We Were There at the Battle of the Bulge, tells how a mother and father go separate ways because of political beliefs. This situational lesson supports the belief that men represent security as heads of the family when a young girl must decide which parent can provide her the most secure environment during World War II and chooses to find her father, Dr. Wigny. Lisa learns that fathers are teachers as well as protectors when through the eyes of a family "photograph album" (105) he helps Lisa recall 1937, a time when their family is not disrupted by war. Shepherd also shows another image of a father, one that is vulnerable to hurt when he tells Lisa, "mother is a dreamer, Lisa. She dreamed of health and strength and all that, and she was willing to destroy everything to make her dream come true. You see, our family is destroyed. Europe is destroyed" (106). During this scene her father tells Lisa, "you must choose

between Belgium and Germany, Lisa” (107), thus illustrating that parents can make demands that cause conflict within the young person and force quick evaluations that will affect the lives of those closest to them. For Lisa the decision becomes a choice as to who will live and who will die, when she shares valuable information that will help the American troops. Lisa’s actions fulfill a lesson concerning the importance of a woman’s role in society, particularly at times of war when her judgment can affect the lives of so many people, such as when she reports, to the American officer, that a German tank is hidden in a haystack near her house. Thus, young female readers are sometimes given special roles by these books to demonstrate how they might encounter a situation in which they will need to act for the benefit of not only themselves but for others as well.

The supportive roles of women to the men, children, and community during the fifties and sixties are evident in the historical events that transpired during previous generations. Authors of the “We Were There” series acknowledge, through their texts, that women are intelligent. But it takes a while for some men to recognize the value of a woman’s abilities, for this would weaken a man’s control over a woman. This lesson enables young readers to understand that everyone has value and can contribute equally to make the society in which they live more acceptable for all its inhabitants.

An illustration of this is evident when Florence Nightingale attempts to change the method of caring for patients. Doctors feel threatened when her practices of cleanliness and fresh air increase a patient’s chance for survival, thus forcing the male medical community to credit Miss Nightingale with saving the British Army Hospital system. Of the books in this series Robert N. Webb’s presents the most significant

argument of equal rights for women. While students read of Florence Nightingale and her nurses in the Crimea, they discover that it is possible to change long established practices through patience and perseverance, for not only does Miss Nightingale influence the medical practice, she also changes prejudices held by upper class society in 1854 toward the nursing career. Her intervention allowed for changes to occur for women in other fields.

As far back as 1781 during the Revolutionary War with England some women earned admiration from their male family members. Author Earl Schenck Miers' We Were There when Washington Won at Yorktown immediately develops the lesson to show an admirable tone toward women who are strong and intelligent. For example, fifteen-year-old protagonist Jed shares this thought: "What Jed liked about Fran [his sister] was the good sense under her curly blond hair" (3). British Redcoat Cornwallis does not intimidate Jed's mother, Mrs. Barnes, when she says to him, "Upon my word, I'm living for the day when General Washington catches up with you and boxes those fat ears" (20)! Women's rights in the fifties tend to influence some of Miers' 1781 women when their outspoken manner demonstrates they have a mind of their own. Why Jed even asked, "Ma, why don't you join Washington's staff?" "If I were a man, I would," is his mother's reply (40). Like Jed's mother many women can and do fill the roles thought to be only for men, but they are not recognized for their accomplishments. This book illustrates how a new generation of young boys can see the value in women and upon reaching maturity these same young men can publicly acknowledge and encourage female accomplishments. Also with this lesson the reader can compare the difference

between a woman's rights in 1781 and what she is allowed to do in 1958. The birth of an idea and the achievement of that idea are lessons that apply to winning rights for a nation or the rights for women.

On the other hand, fifteen-year-old Joe's interpretation of freedom for women concerns education. Benjamin Appel's We Were There in the Klondike Gold Rush becomes a lesson in a family's willingness to suffer hardships to gain a better life that includes an emphasis on the children having the funds to attend college. After spending a year panning for Klondike gold Joe and his father earn enough to send "Joe and his sister Annie...to college" (168). As Joe explains, "if I go, Annie'll go" (168). This attitude supports another form of equality for women in 1897, and boys reading this series are given instructions on how to view their female contemporaries.

Meanwhile, the "We Were There" series teaches that most women enjoy providing a comfortable home for their families and might occasionally step out of that mold to support a patriotic cause or some other important event in history. Women are destined to fill the roles of supportive shadow to males during the fifties and sixties, but they also become part of the new generation seeking to improve their role in society. This series of books introduces ideals that will prove to promote equal rights for women. The "We Were There" books also promote the family life style in a way that makes it seem inviting for future generations, by showing the family as a supportative unit.

CONCLUSION

“History, by apprizing them of the past, will
enable them to judge of the future” (vi).

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, 1784

Paul Gagnon, ed, Historical Literacy

The path young people travel toward adulthood is guided by various experiences that can be viewed as evolutionary lessons of life. The influential participants in these lessons are often parent figures, teachers, employers, neighbors, friends, and famous historical leaders. The goal of the “We Were There” book series is to enhance the learning experience by drawing a young reader into the actual series of events that follow historical lessons and to incorporate influential teachers within each story. Not only do these books teach of historical events, but also they successfully include lessons on foreign language, science, religion, ethical conduct, social and political issues, and family relationships. Their influence enhances the lessons taught at the middle school level and prepares the students for their future roles in society.

In 1918, Henry Suzzallo, editor of History in the Elementary School, wrote that it “is necessary to choose that which is the more significant in the interpretation of the historic currents which have swept us into our present and will sweep us on to our future” (vi). This thought holds true in the fifties and sixties for in a like manner, the publishers of the “The We Were There” series have elected to feature historical events that dictate significant change for future generations, such as the settling of the West, invention of the airplane, or harnessing the atom. A historical consultant reviews the validity of each historical account, but the author presents the information. In creating this “We Were

There” series the editors also seem to be promoting Suzzallo’s more recent theory that, “the history lesson teaches the child early in life to weigh evidence before he accepts a statement” (Suzzallo 44). When one writes a nonfiction book, the historical lesson must be accurate. Not only is the input from a historical consultant important, but also the writer, according to Tracey E. Dils, “needs to make sure to include all the facts a reader needs to understand the topic” (46). An illustration of this can be found in We Were There at Pearl Harbor when author, Felix Sutton, places fourteen-year-old Mike Morrison sailing in Pearl Harbor with his brother the Sunday morning when the Japanese attack, thus giving Mike the opportunity to name and describe each battleship, the “*Nevada*, the *West Virginia*, the *Oklahoma*, the *Arizona*, the *Tennessee*, the *Maryland*, [and] the *California*,” before, during, and after the attack (13). This history lesson creates an emotional attachment for the reader toward the many military personnel who are killed or injured at Pearl Harbor. A lesson in compassion is important for a young person to grow into a responsible adult.

In fact, the success of the “We Were There” series is centered on the use of participating young people giving their perspective of the featured historical events as they unfold. The age of these participants is important for the reader to relate to the thought process of each character. Tracey E. Dils’s research published in You Can Write Children’s Books finds that “kids like to read about characters who are just a little bit older than they are, especially when they reach the middle grade years—fourth grade and up” (7). Dils also notes “adults often play an important role in the plot, but it is the child character who needs to solve the story’s problem” (16).

In the “We Were There” series there is a satisfying balance of older adults and younger siblings, all surrounding the protagonist, who is depicted as being between ten to seventeen years of age, thus incorporating the concept from editors, Joan B. Elliott and Mary M. Dupuis’ book Young Adult Literature in the Classroom, that “young adults are interested in books with main characters they can relate to—people of similar ages, facing similar problems.” In addition, “they are interested in both fiction and nonfiction. They are intrigued by how people solve problems, often problems they have not caused but feel they must resolve” (3). Clearly, the authors of the “We Were There” books follow a lesson plan that presents each protagonist a problem to solve and skillfully leads the reader along with the character on a fascinating journey to reach a satisfactory conclusion, such as being the first passenger on the Wright Brothers’ plane and becoming their first engineer. Certainly, the appropriate wording of a story lends the feeling of reader participation, but the use of illustrations confirms what the imagination has interpreted.

Illustrations are interspersed at key intervals to entice the reader to continue to the conclusion of the story. In this particular series, it is noted that the author will give a word description of an event, but in most instances the page must be turned to view a follow-up illustration of that event. This lesson allows the reader to purposely use perceptive powers before being helped by the illustration to understand a scene. Elliott and Dupuis refer to Crockett and Wiedhaas when they state, “the pictures don’t just visualize what the words are saying, instead they go beyond the words giving clues to the depths of meaning in words” (188). Although illustrations are important, the “We Were

There” books do not include an abundance of pictures; so that the reader does not rely on the illustrations to tell the story, which would interfere with the intellectual exercise of word interpretation.

The “We Were There” series concept and popularity is validated by Scholastic’s recently published “Dear America Series” for girls and the “My Name is America Series” for boys, in which similar historical events are written in diary and journal form for young readers. Contrary to creating separate series for boys and girls such as in the “American Series,” the “We Were There” series combines the two and leans more toward the boy’s point of view with girls in a supporting role. Moreover, both series are created by a variety of authors who strive to authenticate historical facts and have extensive experience in writing literature for young people. Although the “America Series” are for readers “around the ages eleven to fourteen,” according to A Basic Curriculum Web site [Tammy’s Home Schooling Book Review](#), and the “We Were There” series spans the ages between ten and seventeen, they both are focused on changing the perception of history as dry facts to enjoyable reading for young readers.

While the “We Were There” series does not follow the usual characteristics of a book series as defined by Adrian Room in “Literary Linkage: The Naming of Serial Novels,” in which there is “a single author, [and] the main character plays an important role in the successive books” (123), on the whole, the series contains a commonality that includes one or two young people telling the historical story in their own words as they experienced the historical events. These historical events serve as the repetitive device in this series. Furthermore the series develops a satisfactory balance between words and

illustrations to convey the important lessons necessary to enhance the intellectual growth toward a sense of self-worth and maturity in the young adult reader. Each book contains a lesson that takes the reader one step closer to understanding what is required when entering into the final stages of adulthood, such as absorbing events, and analyzing those events as to how they influence their lives, then taking what they perceive as the appropriate action. Once a young person has traveled with the “We Were There” characters through the series, in its entirety, an evolution will have taken place, within the reader, that encompasses an enhanced understanding of the universe they share with diverse people and events that form life lessons.

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