

MEET THE RESEARCHER

Why do people research and write stories?

Level: Middle School (grades 6-8)



Background

We all tell stories. We repeat stories we have heard, we make up stories for fun, and we piece together facts and opinions from many sources to make stories more interesting. India M. Spartz, who was born and raised in Juneau, researched and wrote *Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag* because she was interested in the true story of Alaska's Flag.

Summary

Students discuss what goes into researching a story and then use the catalog *Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag* and an interview with India Spartz to analyze the effectiveness of an author. Students research other authors and why they write books or articles.

Estimated Time

60 minutes + additional time to research other authors

In this activity students will focus on the following:

Alaska Performance Standards at

Benchmark 3

Reading

1. Apply knowledge of words, determine meanings of new words to comprehend text
- 8b. Analyze an author's purpose and offer a critical opinion of the effectiveness of the text in meeting that purpose

Assessments

After the students have discussed whether or not the catalog supports the author's purpose, have them write a letter to India Spartz explaining their conclusions. Students may send their letters via email to India Spartz at: alaskaflag@yahoo.com

Activities

Step One: Introductions, vocabulary and predictions

Before students watch the India Spartz video, have them do two activities:

1. Investigate the meaning of words that will be used in the interview. Think of a synonym for the following words. Students may need to use a thesaurus. Encourage them to use just one word, not a phrase or definition. (See Vocabulary.)

archive	collaboration	conservator
curator	document (<i>verb</i>)	independence
misconstrued	official	researcher
significant	struggle	symbol

2. Use a prediction guide (a three-column graphic organizer) to help the students focus on the important ideas they will hear and read. Put the suggested questions, and any others you may want to add, in the center column. Have the students predict answers in column one, on the left, before the reading. (See Prediction Guide for Meet the Researcher.)

Step Two: Watch, read and discuss

- Watch the video of India Spartz on your CD or download it using RealPlayer from the Alaska State Museum website. Read page 3, Introduction, from *Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag*.
- Ask the students to fill in as many of the answers as they can in column three on the Prediction Guide. Which answers were not found? How could one find the answers? Possible suggestions would be email, write, or call the author, or find another book written by the author.
- Ask the students to write a one or two sentence summary of the author's purpose for researching and writing

about Alaska's flag. Answers will vary. (Possible answer: India Spartz wanted to tell the important story about how Benny's flag design helped Alaska become a state.)

- Have the students brainstorm a list of things they might find in the exhibit catalog that could be called 'evidence' that the author accomplished her purpose. (These might include statements or photographs that Benny was considered important by important people, statements people made about what the flag meant to them, people saying they consider the flag important, etc.)
- Ask the students to read the catalog and locate evidence. Make a list together of the evidence found to support the author's purpose. Was she effective in meeting her purpose? Is there enough evidence? What else would the students want to see to convince them?

Step Three: Investigate author's purpose

- Ask the students to work in pairs or small groups to investigate other authors of non-fiction, including biography. Use the Internet, books in the classroom or library, or librarians to learn about why authors select the topics they write about. Prepare a class display about the discoveries they make about authors. Discuss with the class the importance of being motivated and having a clear purpose. (Many books have a statement from the author on the cover, in an introduction or preface, or at the end of the book. This is an excellent opportunity for students to explore parts of books that are frequently overlooked or just skimmed.)

Materials

- Exhibit catalog: Spartz, India. *Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag*. Juneau: Alaska State Museum, 2001. Flag contest and rules: page 8, Other flag contest entries: pages 20-21
- Handout 1: Prediction Guide for Meet the Researcher
- Handout 2: Does the Text Match the Author's Purpose?

Resources

- CD-ROM: *Eight Stars of Gold*—India Spartz Interview
- Many publishers' websites have information about their authors. See: Scholastic, www2.scholastic.com/ or website for author Gary Paulson, www.randomhouse.com/features/garypaulsen/
- Email address to write to author India Spartz: alaskaflag@yahoo.com

Vocabulary

Write a synonym (similar) for the following words. Students may need to use a thesaurus. Encourage them to use one word, not a phrase or definition.

Possible Answers:

independence = self-government

struggle = fight

archive = library or collection

conservator = preservation specialist

curator = expert or care taker

symbol = emblem

document (as a verb) = record

misconstrued = misinterpreted or misunderstood

official = formal

collaboration = partnership

researcher = investigator

significant = important

HANDOUT 1: Prediction Guide for Meet the Researcher

Your ideas before the reading	Guiding questions	Your ideas & facts after reading the catalog and watching the video
	What is a researcher?	
	What skills does a good researcher need?	
	Why did India Spartz research the story of Alaska's Flag?	
	Where did she go to get support for the project?	
	Who hired her to do the research and write the catalog?	
	How important are pictures in telling this story?	
	How do you choose between what to put into a story and what to leave out?	
	How long did it take her to research and write this story?	

HANDOUT 2: Does the Text Match the Author's Purpose?

DIRECTIONS: Write a 1-2 sentence summary of what the author was trying to accomplish with this text. Think about what types of evidence you would need to conclude that the purpose was accomplished. (Examples: photographs, quotations from famous or credible people, etc.) Look for and document evidence in the text that helps convince you that the author achieved her purpose.

Summary: (What was the author's purpose for writing this book/article?)

Examples that support the summary.

Where I found it in the text (page number)