

MEET ME IN ST. LOUIS
By Robert Jackson

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Curricular Connections

Writing Activity: Peeking at the Pike

The Pike was the name of the popular and rowdy amusement strip that stretched for a mile through the fairgrounds. It featured an array of unique and bizarre entertainments, and cool “virtual reality” rides like the “Scenic Railway” and “Under and Over the Sea”. Visitors could even watch a talking horse named Jim Key, or ride camels and turtles from Hagenbeck’s Zoological Paradise and Animal Circus! Create an advertisement enticing fairgoers to visit the wild and wonderful Pike.

Writing Activity: Meet Me in St. Louis

Pretend that you are one of the twenty million visitors to the St. Louis World’s Fair. Write a letter to a family member back home describing the sights you have seen and the people you have met. Try to convince him/her to join you at the fair. Use descriptive language to convey the experience — look at archived photos in *Meet Me in St. Louis* to guide your writing.

History Activity: Not Fair!

Before Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote her popular *Little House* books, she was a newspaper reporter. One of her assignments was to report on the cruel exploitation of Pygmies at the St. Louis World’s Fair. Research this topic on the Internet, then pretend that you are a reporter for your local paper and write an article expressing your opinion.

History Activity: Remains of the Day

The Ferris Wheel was blasted with dynamite after the St. Louis World’s Fair, but other artifacts—such as the Palace of Fine Arts and the Maine state building—still stand today. Do remnants from any world’s fair still stand in your state? Research the different locations of world fairs throughout history, beginning with the most significant world fair sites listed in *Meet Me in St. Louis* (p. 137). Are there any sites or fairgrounds nearby that you could visit?

History Activity: Save a Souvenir

Many people still collect memorabilia from world’s fairs. Do any students happen to own a world’s fair souvenir? Research the various fair collector sites on the Internet. What kind of popular items did people save back then? What kind of souvenirs do people treasure today?

Art Activity: Making a Statement

Research how your state was represented at the St. Louis World's Fair—as well as in other fairs around the country. Thinking about Minnesota's butter sculptures, Missouri's corn palace and Alabama's iron Vulcan, design a symbol to represent your state today. After sketching a draft, use cut-out shapes of construction paper to add color to your design.

Social Studies Activity: A Centennial Exposition

For people living in 1904, the world's fair represented a glimpse into the technology of the future, but also a celebration of the past. The fair in St. Louis was a celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase. Research what life was like in 1804 America. What forms of transport did people have? What kind of clothing did they wear? Make a chart comparing life in 1804, 1904 and 2004. Think ahead to 2104, and brainstorm about what life might be like at the next turn of the century.

Social Studies Activity: Fair Necessity

The first world's fair took place in London in 1851, and they continued to be popular until World War I. Some countries still continue to host world's fairs, although they aren't as widely attended as they once were. For example, Paris had scheduled a world's fair for 2004, but has already been cancelled. Why do you think it was necessary to have fairs in decades past? Why is it not as essential today? How do we currently find out about the cultures around the world and the latest developments in technology?

Social Studies Activity: They're Coming to America!

Dozens and dozens of countries exhibited at the St. Louis World's Fair. Several of them are mentioned in this book, but there are many others that attended as well. What other countries were showcased? How accurate do you think their representations were? For comparison, research how America was represented at fairs in other countries. Were these accurate portrayals of America?

Thematic Connections

World's Fair 2004

Although world's fairs aren't common today, why not organize a fair of your own? Divide the students into ten groups, with each group responsible for creating and organizing a specific palace. Have students bring in examples of products or organize demonstrations that would be in their palace. What would you include in the Palace of Transportation? What about the Palace of Fine Arts? Are there some palaces that wouldn't be needed today? What new palaces would replace them? (Alternatively, students could also create state or foreign buildings instead of palaces.) Another group of students could plan the special events. Would you have a parade? Who would perform? Would you have any pageants? What historical events would you reenact? Set up booths in your school auditorium and invite other classes to experience the World's Fair 2004. For refreshments, you could serve new, popular food and drinks of the early twenty-first century.

Fair Fare: A Taste of 1904

Have students sample fare that became popular at the St. Louis World's Fair: ice cream cones, cotton candy, hot dogs, Dr. Pepper, etc. After reading the story about the "accidental invention" of the ice cream cone (pp. 86-87), research what other kinds of foods were created by mistake. (The "invention" of chocolate chip cookies is another excellent story!) What kinds of "new foods" were introduced at other world's fairs? Choose a recipe and provide ingredients for students make and sample different fair fares!

About the Author

A native of St. Louis, Robert Jackson received his Ph.D. in American Literature and Culture from New York University. He is currently an Assistant Professor of English at Stillman College in Alabama. This is his first book.

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